

2015 ANNUAL REPORT



**HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS
IN THE
BALANCE**

**f FRONT LINE
DEFENDERS**

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HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE BALANCE

THIS REPORT HIGHLIGHTS SOME OF THE MAIN GLOBAL AND REGIONAL TRENDS WHICH EMERGED FROM FRONT LINE DEFENDERS WORK IN 2014.

IN 2014, FRONT LINE DEFENDERS ISSUED 265 URGENT APPEALS ON OVER 400 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK; IT PROVIDED 418 SECURITY GRANTS AND TRAINED 568 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS. OVERALL, MORE THAN 1,900 HRDS IN 91 COUNTRIES BENEFITED FROM FRONT LINE DEFENDERS PROTECTION SUPPORT IN 2014.

EVERY YEAR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS PAY THE ULTIMATE PRICE FOR THEIR COURAGE.

THESE ARE THE NAMES OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS WHO WERE IN KILLED IN 2014, AS REPORTED TO FRONT LINE DEFENDERS*

WE REMEMBER THEM AND TO THEM WE DEDICATE OUR WORK:

Americas

Columbia

Jhon Braulio Saigama
Berlain Saigama Gutierrez
Gerson Martinez
Ever Luis Marín Rolong
Giovany Leiton
Alberto De Jesús Díaz Mercado
Heriberto Mora Muñetón
Miguel Segundo Díaz Soto
Duvis Antonio Galvis
Carlos Enrique Ruíz Escarraga
Luis Alberto Restrepo Vallejo
Alcides Correa
Jorge Eliecer Hernández Blanco
Juan Alberto Causado Priolo
Epifanio Latin Ñuscue
Evelio Obando Campo
Miguel Ángel Parra
Faustino Acevedo Gaitán
Jesús Adán Quinto
Douglas Zuluaga
Luis Albeiro Guetio
Olmedo Jiménez Guamanga
Luis Javier Campo Méndez
Ernesto Castañeda
Patricio Fernando Mejía Urzola
Édgar Bravo González
Tomás Rodríguez Cantillo
Wilson Hernando Guanga Nastacuas
Pablo Emilio Aponte
José Arlex Avendaño Arango
Pablo de Jesús Cano
Pablo Garcia Llano
Eduardo Alarcón Díaz
Carmelo Gutiérrez Padilla
Diego García
Edith Santos
Joaquín Gómez Muñoz
Flor Nibe Rodríguez
Emelio Pacheco Tunay
Miguel Becheche Zarco
Miguel Ángel Rodríguez
Ancizar Ruíz Ceballos
Wilber Chamarrá Carpio
Nair Edilia Tay Torres
Pedro Augusto Arisala
Nelson Medina Ortega
Juan De Leòn Tuyuc Velasquez

Guatemala

Efraín García García
Victor Juc Maaz
Marilyn Topacio Reynoso
José Antonio Menéndez Sandoval
Joaquín Chiro y Chiroy

Patricia Eluvia Samayoa Méndez
Gabriel Enrique Ciramagua Ruiz
Víctor Hugo Monterroso Girón
Oscar Chen Quej
Sebastián Rax
Luciano Can Jucub
Juan Francisco Almira
Manuel Ical Xi
Juan Jose Pajoj Chajaj
Justo Raxon Chacon

Honduras

Luis Alonso Fúnez Duarte
Jesús Del Cid Quintero
Carlos Alberto Carrasco
Rufino Zavala
Herlyn Espinal
Margarita Murillo
Francisca Arabella Briceño
Óscar Anthony Torres
Orlando Orellana
Nery Francisco Soto
Justo Osorto
Pedro Perez
William Jacobo Rodríguez
Rigoberto López Hernández
Carlos Hilario Mejía Orellana
Hernán Cruz Barnica
Juan Ángel López Miralda

Brazil

Luís Carlos Silva
Raimundo Rodrigues da Silva, "Brechtó"
Artêmio Gusmão, "Alaor"
Paulo Sérgio Santos
María José Amorim Lima
Félix Leite dos Santos
José Enedina
Maria Lúcia do Nascimento
Ireni da Silva Castro
Josias Paulino de Castro
Cleomar Rodrigues
Marinalva Manoel

Peru

Francisco Pinedo
Leoncio Quinticima Meléndez
Jorge Ríos Pérez
Edwin Chota Valera

Haiti

Daniel Dorsinvil

Mexico

Atilano Roman Tirano
Sandra Luz Hernandez
Adrian Rxxxxxxx
Wilson Cxxxxx
María Del Rosario Fuentes Rubio

Europe and Central Asia

Turkey Seyed Jamal Hosseini

Uzbekistan Abdurasul Khudoynazarov

Middle East and North Africa

Iraq Sameera Salih Ali Al-Nuaimy
Mohammed Bedaiwi

Libya Salwa Bugaighis
Tawfik Bensaud
Sami ElKawafi

Syria Maen Al-Ghoneimi
Al-Moutaz Bellah Ibrahim

Asia Pacific

Philippines Arman Padino
Julito Lauron
Sixto Bagasala, Jr.
Menelao Barcia
Armando Campos
Fausto Orasan
Timuay Lencio Arig
Marcelo Monterona
William Bugatti
Romeo Capalla

Indonesia Marthinus Yohame

India Zakir Siddique
Mangat Tyagi
Sanjay Tyagi
Vinod Kumar
Thanikachalam

Burma Sai San Tun
Aung Kyaw Naing

Pakistan Rashid Rehman

China Cao Shunli

Africa

DRC Mutebwa Kaboko

Nigeria Horrace Egbon Dafiogho
Sam Ekwajor

Somalia Yusuf Ahmed Abukar Keynan
Abdirisak Ali Abdi
Mohamed Omar Mohamed

(*) As of November 2014

OVERVIEW

Authoritarian governments across the globe continued to invest huge efforts and resources to close down, silence, restrict and discredit independent civil society and human rights defenders (HRDs), especially those critical of government policies. There has been a sustained effort by repressive governments to target HRDs within their borders through legal and extra-legal means, as well as internationally, through travel restrictions, reprisals and attacks on civil society space in international fora.

Front Line Defenders estimates that over **130 HRDs were killed** or died in detention in the first ten months of 2014 in Brazil, Burma, China, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Libya, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Somalia, Syria, Turkey and Uzbekistan. While most notable in the Americas, extreme violence affected HRDs in all world regions, while perpetrators everywhere enjoyed impunity.

Globally, **deprivation of liberty** and the use of **court proceedings** remained the **two most widely used strategies** to silence and intimidate HRDs. This was particularly true in Asia, Eurasia and Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where they accounted for over two thirds of the cases documented by Front Line Defenders. Threats of physical harm also featured prominently and were among the top three tactics used against HRDs. In 2014 we also recorded an increase the number of raids or break-ins, travel bans and HRDs being called in for questioning.

Crackdowns against HRDs and civil society took place in Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Egypt, the Russian Federation, Sudan, Thailand and Ukraine – sometimes as part of a wider political crisis as in the last two. In Cambodia, protesters were arrested *en masse* in January during labour rights protests in the garment industry. Police used excessive force that left four civilians dead and 21 injured, demonstrations were banned, and HRDs supporting the workers were arrested and charged. Egypt betrayed the aspirations of the January 25 Revolution and started a determined campaign against HRDs on a scale unseen even under the Mubarak regime.

Repressive laws continued to spread across the world. Kyrgyzstan is currently considering a ‘Foreign Agents’ law and a ‘Propaganda of Homosexuality’ law, both nearly identical to those adopted in the Russian Federation in 2012 and 2013 respectively. Legislation restricting funding was adopted or is pending in Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, China (Guangdong province), Egypt, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Pakistan and Tajikistan, and was introduced and then withdrawn in Ukraine at the beginning of the year. In addition, Cambodia, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Peru, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Spain, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Uganda considered or passed legislation on issues such as freedom of assembly, terrorism, the Internet, police powers or LGBTI activism; it seems clear that these new laws will be used against HRDs or social movements, as Front Line Defenders has documented in previous years in other countries.

HRDs are exposed to **digital attacks**, with varying degrees of sophistication, virtually everywhere. Digital targeting of HRDs has included interception of emails, voice or other types of communication; hacking of websites, blogs, email or social network accounts; the installation of malware or spyware; and the banning of websites. In the UAE, human rights defenders had their Twitter accounts hacked. In Serbia, independent online media and human rights groups had their websites targeted through DDoS attacks. In Somaliland, the authorities ordered internet service providers to block access to the websites of two independent media outlets which reported critically on the regional administration. Less sophisticated tactics were equally effective: in Vietnam, where the state-controlled media environment made Facebook an essential tool for debate and access to information, the profiles of HRDs and human rights groups were the subject of a number of complaints by pro-government individuals, which led to their suspension by Facebook.

Against this backdrop, international human rights institutions as well as governments traditionally supportive of human rights defenders appear to be incapable of **forcefully and effectively opposing** the closing down of civil society space. There is a crucial need for a more consistent and credible political response, which must give the same priority and resources to creating a safe space for HRDs as authoritarian governments give to closing it down. There can be no human rights progress if those at the forefront of human rights work are not allowed to operate.

Front Line Defenders also observed increased **resistance** to international pressure by oppressive governments. It took appeals by the United States (US), the European Union (EU), France, the United Kingdom and Belgium, an EU Parliament resolution and a public call by US President Obama, before Burundi eventually granted provisional release to Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, the doyen of the human rights movement in the country, who had been arrested in May.

Governments showed **disregard** for their human rights obligations even when holding important international positions. A case in point is that of Azerbaijan, which started a crackdown on human rights groups and proceeded to arrest a number of prominent HRDs while holding the chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, an organisation devoted to the promotion of democracy and human rights in the continent.

Regressive steps have been documented in countries of the **European Union**, which upholds human rights as one of its main pillars. After cracking down on independent media in 2011 and on human rights NGOs in July this year, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán made public his aspiration for Hungary to become an “illiberal democracy”. It is time for the new EU Commission to take firm steps to defend HRDs, civil society and democracy within its borders and make use of the tools at its disposal, as it did recently with the Czech Republic, which faces an infringement procedure for discriminating against Roma school children.

Positive news came from Côte d'Ivoire and from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In the former, in June, parliament adopted a law on the protection of human rights defenders, which effectively incorporates provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders into the domestic legal system. Also in June, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) launched the newly adopted *Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders*, providing guidance to member states on their OSCE obligations in this regard. After years of limited concrete action, the Guidelines are a very welcome step. Importantly, they re-affirm the principle that the situation of HRDs is not only a matter of internal affairs but a legitimate foreign policy concern. However, they must be followed by an adequate implementation mechanism, including an implementation strategy by OSCE field presences, reports by member states on how they have given effect to the Guidelines, and ultimately a stronger institutional mechanism, such as an OSCE Representative on Human Rights Defenders.

AFRICA

Across the continent, the most common risks faced by HRDs throughout the year were arbitrary detention and court proceedings, as state agencies unjustifiably equated human rights work with subversion. There were instances where peaceful and legitimate initiatives were qualified as acts of terrorism, as in Ethiopia where human rights bloggers faced terrorism charges. Death threats, which at times were followed by physical attacks, continued. In most cases, threats and attacks were carried out by state actors, particularly security services, though non-state actors were also involved in a number of countries. Crises of governance and, in some countries, the escalation of armed conflicts were factors exacerbating the vulnerability of most African HRDs.

Criminalisation was used to target some of the **most prominent voices** in African civil society. Such was the case in Burundi with the arrest in May of Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, whose work has been recognised by his receipt of several human rights awards. His arrest was triggered by a radio debate during which Mbonimpa confirmed having evidence of the existence of training camps for young Burundians in eastern DRC. He was charged with ‘threatening the security of the state’ and was only granted provisional release on grounds of ill-health after four months of pre-trial detention. In Swaziland, human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko and Bhekithemba Makhubu, editor-in-chief of the country’s sole independent newspaper, were sentenced in July to two years imprisonment for contempt of court in connection with articles raising concerns about the independence of the judiciary. In November, Mauritanian anti-slavery campaigner Biram Dah Abeid, winner of the 2013 Front Line Defenders Award and the UN Human Rights Prize, was arrested with several of his colleagues and charged with illegal gathering, encouraging rebellion and refusal to comply with police orders.

Front Line Defenders documented cases of **illegal detention and charges** against HRDs in Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, DRC, Kenya, Mauritania, Niger, Rwanda, Sudan, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. In Sudan, dozens of HRDs, members of opposition parties, journalists and others were detained by the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) in Khartoum, Khartoum Bahri, and Omdurman in September. The arrests took place in connection with events to commemorate the suppression of the protests of September 2013.

Death threats and attacks also remained rife and unpunished. They were reported in several countries including Côte d’Ivoire, DRC, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Threats were made by police, government officials, politicians, militias and businesses, against HRDs, their colleagues and their families. In January, Nkosilathi Emmanuel Moyo, leader of a youth organisation in Zimbabwe received threats following the publication of an open letter to President Mugabe. Fearing for his safety, the HRD was forced to flee his home. In September, human rights lawyer Wendy Wanja Mutegei was confronted by a group of men who threatened to harm her if she did not halt her work on behalf of an indigenous community in eastern Kenya, fighting against illegal logging. In March, armed assailants believed to belong to a local militia in the DRC, raided the offices of an organisation advocating for the demobilisation and welfare of child soldiers and tortured two HRDs that they found there. In September, a woman HRD working on women’s rights in northwestern Tanzania was attacked at night in her home after receiving several death threats, including through graffiti painted on her house, and was forced to temporarily close the office of her organisation.

Vulnerability to physical attacks was highest in areas torn apart by **armed conflict**. **Women HRDs** in eastern DRC were particularly exposed to physical and sexual violence, and they were the recipients of over half of the emergency assistance Front Line Defenders provided in the country. At least 11 HRDs, including six women, were abducted by rebel groups in the area, and some of them were tortured or sexually assaulted. In one case, the abducted HRD was killed: in September, the body of Mutebwa Kaboko was found in a forest eight days after his abduction by rebel group *Mayi Mayi Yakutumba*. In January, in South Sudan, more than 30 armed men raided the home of Biel Boutros of the South Sudan Human Rights Society for Advocacy, while firing shots in the air. In the same country, in August, anti-corruption advocate Deng Athuai Mawir was injured by an unidentified gunman. Several HRDs from South Sudan and the Central African Republic, two of Africa’s worst hotspots for armed conflict in 2014, were forced into exile due to targeted attacks and the ongoing violence.

HRDs advocating for **social and economic rights**, particularly those working on accountability, raising environmental concerns or transparency in the extractive industries, were targeted in Angola, Burundi, DRC, Kenya, Niger, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, and Uganda. In the Albertine Graben region of western Uganda, HRDs reported

a steadily shrinking space for dialogue with local leaders on the human rights implications of oil exploration, including the use of unlawful arrest and the disruption or banning of peaceful events. In Kenya, the conviction of Joel Ogada, a HRD and farmer who has resisted numerous evictions orchestrated by a salt company that sought to expand its activities, brought international attention to land-grabbing and the issue of corporate responsibility in the country. Ogada was handed a seven-year jail sentence in May over fabricated charges of arson. In Angola, the trial of journalist Rafael Marques de Morais started in December; he faced charges of criminal libel for writing about human rights abuses in the diamond sector.

HRDs working on discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (**LGBTI**) people continued to face challenges throughout the year, particularly with the signing into law of harsh anti-homosexuality bills in Nigeria (January) and Uganda (February). Both bills provided for severe penalties for members of the LGBTI community and criminalised advocacy work done by LGBTI rights defenders. Many HRDs reported facing mob violence as well as the risk of homelessness as a result of being evicted or being rejected by their family or community. This was the case in Uganda, where one popular tabloid stepped up a campaign to “expose” the country’s “top gay people”. Although the Constitutional Court eventually overturned the law on procedural grounds, there are persistent fears that the bill might be re-tabled in Parliament. Front Line Defenders documented instances of harassment of LGBTI rights defenders in other African countries, including a coordinated mob attack on the offices of a LGBTI group in Côte d’Ivoire; the arrest of a leader of a LGBTI group in Cameroon; and a prosecution for running an unregistered group in Zimbabwe. One positive step was the adoption of a landmark resolution by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) condemning human rights violations, including systematic attacks by state and non-state actors, against persons on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity and against HRDs working on such issues.

Finally, on a positive note, in June Côte d’Ivoire enacted **legislation on the protection of HRDs**, becoming the first African country to take such a step, in sharp contrast to the many governments that have adopted laws restricting civil society space. Law 2014-388 incorporates provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, thus making them applicable in domestic courts; provides guarantees against the arbitrary arrest or prosecution of HRDs on the basis of their work; and offers protection of their homes and offices.

Country in Focus: Ethiopia

The arrest in April of a group of bloggers and journalists on fabricated charges of treason sent shock waves through the human rights community in the East and Horn of Africa, and thrust Ethiopia into the spotlight for its obsessive attempts to monitor and control information.

Zone 9, as the bloggers had dubbed their initiative, was virtually the only independent voice that still had the audacity to publicly raise human rights issues in the country. Among the evidence presented by the prosecution was that the defendants used Security-in-a-Box, the digital security resource publicly available on the Internet developed by Front Line Defenders and Tactical Technology Collective. The authorities claimed, among other baseless accusations, that the defendants worked with foreign human rights groups and used social networking tools to incite violence.

This setback came barely five years after the enactment of the Charities and Societies Proclamation, which effectively silenced human rights NGOs. As they walked into prison, the activists joined several other journalists, most of whom have been convicted under controversial anti-terrorism legislation. The circumstances that sent them to prison are undoubtedly the same as those that forced several dozen human rights defenders and journalists into exile. In the lead-up to the 2015 general elections scheduled in the country, there is concern at the possibility of a further crackdown.

Ethiopia is the recipient of huge levels of so called ‘development assistance’ in spite of the assault on civil society, and continues to be treated as a valued ally by many democratic governments.

AMERICAS

Extrême violence continued to characterise attacks against those who speak out for human rights in Latin America and the Caribbean. While death threats and physical attacks were the most frequently reported violations, intimidation, harassment, surveillance, defamation, stigmatisation and killings were commonplace, and there continued to be widespread impunity for these attacks. Front Line Defenders recorded an increase in the use of arbitrary detention and surveillance in the region. HRDs were targeted by both state and non-state actors: state institutions including security forces, paramilitaries, criminal groups, private security companies or hired assassins from national and transnational companies.

Environmental and land rights defenders challenging the economic and political interests of government and private companies were particularly at risk in Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras and Peru. They were threatened, put under surveillance, attacked and killed. The use of fabricated charges was particularly noticeable. In September, in Guatemala, two members of the *Coordinadora Central Campesina Ch'orti* "Nuevo Día" were arrested for allegedly 'inciting public disorder' following peaceful protests demanding the repeal of two decrees, which were seen by indigenous communities as criminalising their opposition to mining activities and violating the right to prior consultation. The HRDs were released three days later when a judge ruled that the charges were unfounded.

Women HRDs continued to face multiple layers of discrimination and targeting. In October, Bárbara Díaz Surín, a community leader opposing the construction of a cement plant in Guatemala, was detained by a group of 40 police officers, only one of whom was female. The following day, during a preliminary hearing – during which she was not provided with interpretation into her indigenous language – the judge remanded her in custody for the duration of the investigation, despite the defence's plea for her to be kept under house arrest so she could look after her seven children. The next hearing will not take place until early 2015.

Despite progress in some countries, homophobia and inequality based on **sexual orientation and gender identity** remained widespread and affected LGBTI rights defenders. In Brazil, in June, the President of the *Conselho Municipal LGBT de Teresina* received a text message from a group calling itself *Irmandade Homofóbica* (Homophobic Brotherhood) threatening to eliminate members of the organisation. In March, a member of the LGBTI organisation *Grupo Matizes* was threatened after she made a statement to the press linking *Irmandade Homofóbica* to a homophobic attack the previous year. Front Line Defenders reported attacks on LGBTI rights defenders in Brazil, Ecuador and Honduras.

Death threats were the single most common violation recorded by Front Line Defenders against HRDs in the region. Reports were documented in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela. In January, the *Instituto de Terapia e Investigación sobre las Secuelas de la Tortura y la Violencia Estatal* (ITEI) in Bolivia publicly denounced frequent instances of intimidation and death threats against its director and staff in relation to its anti-torture work. In Colombia, Yomaira Mendoza and Enrique Cabezas, who work on land rights with Curbaradó communities in the Uraba region, received multiple death threats. By the time they were forced to leave the country, they had counted more than 80 threats, including assassination attempts against them and their family members. In Mexico, indigenous peoples' rights defender Silvia Perez Yescas had just returned to her hometown after a long absence, when she was informed that there was a bounty of 100.000 pesos on her head.

Detention and judicial harassment were reported in Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela. Civil and criminal lawsuits or other court proceedings were initiated against HRDs by private national or international companies, their staff in their individual capacities, or by government institutions. In September, Mario Luna Romero and Fernando Jiménez Gutiérrez, both spokespersons for the Yaqui Tribe in Sonora state, Mexico, were arrested and faced fabricated charges of 'illegal deprivation of liberty' and 'theft of a motor vehicle'. The Yaqui tribe has been working to prevent the diversion of water from the Yaqui river, over which the tribe has 50% ownership, to the Independence Aqueduct.

The **World Cup** in Brazil was accompanied by police repression of social protests. In July, human rights lawyer Eloisa Samy was arrested in Rio de Janeiro during raids carried out by the civil police force, during which 19 protesters were arrested and police invaded the homes of HRDs and protesters.

Killings were reported in Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico and Peru. As of 1 November, 47 HRDs were killed in Colombia, 16 in Guatemala and Honduras, 12 in Brazil, five in Mexico and four in Peru. The majority of these cases related to HRDs working to defend their rights to land and territories, and indicate a pattern of systematic targeting of campesino, Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples' rights defenders.

Physical attacks, including in detention, continued to be reported. In January in Ciego de Ávila, Cuba, seven HRDs were tied up and dragged along by a patrol car belonging to the National Revolutionary Police while police agents beat them. During their transfer to the police station, one of them, Juan Carlos González Leiva, had his hands tied behind his back and received repeated blows to the face and head. Upon exiting the car, he was strangled until he lost consciousness. Front Line Defenders reported on physical attacks in Brazil, Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Venezuela.

Campaigns of **stigmatisation** targeted HRDs in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Venezuela, in the form of statements by high level public officials or media smear campaigns. In Venezuela, the Minister for Justice and the Interior accused Humberto Prado Sifontes, who works on prison conditions, of being part of a conspiracy to 'destabilise the penitentiary system'. In El Salvador, women HRDs campaigning for the pardon of 17 women imprisoned on charges relating to abortion, faced a violent smear campaign in conservative media: a leading media group published an article quoting false information relating to the funding of the *Campaña Libertad para las 17*. Over the following days, other media sources published articles and editorials, leading to a number of the HRDs receiving threats.

Brazil celebrated the 10th anniversary of its **National Protection Programme** for Human Rights Defenders (PPDDH) in November. During the year, it provided protection to 342 HRDs at federal and state levels. In spite of these significant numbers, serious flaws remain with regard to the resources at the disposal of the Programme, its reach and the lack of a legislative framework. In Colombia, the National Protection Unit (UNP) has so far failed in its mission to provide effective protection; HRDs have found their measures to be ineffective, while the UNP is not designed to address the root causes of the insecurity and a serious corruption scandal further eroded its credibility. In Mexico, while some progress was made in implementing the National Protection Programme, long delays in assessing cases, inadequately trained staff, and limited financial resources seriously affected its operations.

Country in Focus: Peru

Opposition to the growing impact of extractive industries has resulted in intense social protests. A number of legislative measures have been passed, affecting the right to protest and encouraging impunity for police violence. In January, Law No. 3015 granted the armed forces and the national police exemption from criminal responsibility if they cause injury or death, including through the use of guns or other weapons, while on duty.

In this context, environmental HRDs have been the direct target of death threats, physical attacks, surveillance, stigmatisation and smear campaigns. Judicial harassment has been particularly significant: scores of community leaders and HRDs faced criminal charges such as rebellion, terrorism, violence, usurpation, trespassing, disobedience or resistance to an official order, obstructing public officials, abduction, outrage to national symbols, disturbance or other public offences. Despite having almost 50 court proceedings brought against him, Milton Sanchez Cubas, Secretary-General of the *Plataforma Interinstitucional Celendina*, has never been convicted of a crime.

Mainstream national media portray protesters and environmental HRDs as a small minority of violent extremists; public statements by the authorities have labelled HRDs and protesters as bandits, terrorists or as being involved in narco-trafficking.

Local journalists reporting on police abuses or in any way favourable to those opposed to mining projects have been subjected to threats, surveillance, detention, criminalisation, physical attacks as well as the confiscation or theft of equipment. In February, journalist César Estrada was assaulted by police officers while covering protests in Valle Laguna Azul, Cajamarca, and had to be hospitalised. His camera and laptop were taken away; on the same day, his Facebook account was hacked and a post appeared on his profile saying "I sold myself because I like money". He was later notified of charges for alleged theft and financial irregularities.

In June, Front Line Defenders released a report on environmental rights defenders in Peru:

<https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/peru-reportonhumanrightsdefenders>

ASIA PACIFIC

In Asia and the Pacific, HRDs have found their own rights violated because of their critical role in promoting human rights awareness and debate at national and international levels. The targeting of HRDs ranged from arbitrary arrests, harassment and legal actions, to threats, intimidation, disappearances, torture, extra-judicial executions and other forms of violence – the first three remaining the most commonly reported forms of targeting in 2014. Several states in the region have enacted legal and administrative provisions in order to silence HRDs. In several countries, the insecurity faced by HRDs was compounded by the lack of independence of the judiciary and by weak national human rights institutions.

Reprisals for accessing international human rights mechanisms continued. In Sri Lanka, those perceived to be cooperating with the OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka (OISL), mandated by the UN Human Rights Council, faced widespread threats and intimidation. In Malaysia, at the beginning of the year, the government declared COMANGO – a coalition of 54 NGOs – unlawful on the basis that several of its members were not registered and that it was promoting ‘sexual rights’. This happened after COMANGO played a critical role in coordinating civil society input into the country’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Also facing punishment for engaging with the UPR process were HRDs in China, most notably Cao Shunli, who was detained on her way to Geneva to participate in a training in advance of China’s UPR in 2013. She was denied adequate medical attention while in detention and tragically died in March 2014.

Arbitrary detention and **judicial harassment** were used in Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. In Burma, the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law and the Penal Code were used to target HRDs. In Sri Lanka, HRDs Ruki Fernando and Rev. Praveen Mahesan were detained for a few days in March and questioned by officers of the Terrorist Investigation Division. In Malaysia, the Sedition Act 1948 was used during the year against HRDs, academics, pro-democracy activists and opposition politicians; though the Prime Minister had previously announced that the Act would be abolished, in November it was made public that it will remain in place. In Cambodia, 23 HRDs were given suspended prison sentences for participating in labour rights protests, and in November ten women HRDs working on land rights issues were sentenced to one year’s imprisonment on charges of ‘obstructing traffic’ and ‘aggravated obstruction of public officials’. In Bangladesh, several HRDs were detained in August when they joined a peaceful hunger strike organised by garment workers. **Defamation** and **libel suits** have been used against HRDs in Malaysia, Singapore, and South Korea.

In China, dozens of HRDs protesting against corruption and calling for constitutional government were arrested, with some of the key actors in the movement being imprisoned or currently awaiting trial on charges such as ‘gathering crowds to disrupt public order’. In October and November, scores of HRDs around the country who had voiced their support online for the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong were detained and travel bans were enforced to ensure that Chinese HRDs could not join the protests.

Repressive legislation and administrative regulations were introduced to limit the work of HRDs through restrictions on funding, by making legal registration mandatory and complicated, or introducing project approval processes. In China, wide-scale investigations into NGOs across the country took place, with individual organisations reporting increased questioning and harassment, especially in relation to sources of funding from overseas. In the southeastern province of Guangdong, new regulations stipulated that NGOs in receipt of foreign funding must report to regulators 15 days in advance of accepting the funds. In Cambodia, several new laws including laws on associations and non-governmental organisations, cyber crime, telecommunications and trade unions were proposed, which are expected to restrict the work of HRDs. In Bangladesh, the government is in the process of adopting new legislation imposing funding restrictions as well as other limitations on the work of NGOs, including mandatory prior approval from multiple authorities for all activities as well as a duty to inform authorities when travelling abroad for human rights work.

The **failure** of governments **to protect HRDs from non-state actors** and pervasive impunity for the perpetrators remained a serious concern. In Pakistan, prominent human rights lawyer Rashid Rehman was killed in his office in May by unidentified gunmen. No progress has been made in the investigation. In Burma, Phyu Hnin Htwe, who worked to build awareness on the potential impact of the Letpadung mining project, was arrested in September

based on a lawsuit by the mining company, alleging that she was involved in the abduction of their employees. She was released a month later after the company withdrew the case. Cases of HRDs targeted by non-state actors, such as extremist religious groups, organised criminal groups, businesses or political party cadres, were reported in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burma, the Maldives, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

In Afghanistan, a culture of impunity and the absence of the rule of law continued to affect HRDs. Women HRDs remained particularly vulnerable, especially when working on issues of transitional justice and accountability or exposing violations by warlords, the Afghan Local Police (ALP) and the Taliban. Besides the potential return of the Taliban, women HRDs were affected by the growth of conservatism, which has already produced setbacks including limitations to the role of independent women's groups in the running of crisis shelters.

The Philippines remained the country with the highest number of **killings** of HRDs in the Asia region: ten HRDs were killed there as of mid-November. In India, five HRDs were killed and one took his own life due to continuous harassment.

Smear campaigns were widely used to discredit HRDs and their work. In India, a report by the national intelligence agency released in June named several NGOs, both foreign and national, and termed their work as 'anti-development' and 'anti-state', accusing them of being responsible for a lost 2-3% of GDP growth. In Bangladesh, China, the Maldives and Sri Lanka, government representatives and government influenced media were used to propagate smear campaigns against HRDs. On Chinese social media sites, a number of HRDs were subjected to false accusations and general attacks on their character, including questioning the motivation for their human rights work.

Country in Focus: Thailand

On 22 May, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), led by General Prayuth Chan-ocha, seized power. They abrogated the 2007 Constitution and established military law, which remains in force at the time of writing. Several HRDs and activists were summoned for questioning and had to sign a bond not to participate in any activity of a 'political nature'. A number of events including the launching of human rights situation reports were disrupted and public gatherings were banned.

Martial law allowed the army to detain and interrogate anyone for up to seven days without providing evidence of wrongdoing or bringing formal charges. Scores of protesters and HRDs were arrested and held at irregular places of detention, including permanent or temporary military bases.

NCPO orders No. 97 and 103 restricted press freedom and banned interviews with former government officials, judges or academics whose statements might cause 'public confusion'. Restrictions on freedom of expression through the use of the Computer Crime Act and the Lèse Majesté law – which have been repeatedly used to target political activists, HRDs and other independent voices – intensified after the coup. In July, NCPO presented an interim Constitution, which granted wide-ranging powers to the military authorities and provided weak human rights protections.

HRDs working at the community level and opposing the adverse human rights impact of mining or other development projects remained most at risk, particularly in light of emerging links between such businesses and the military. Community HRD Por Cha Lee Rakcharoen, known as "Billy", remains missing since April. He was last seen in the custody of public officials involved in a legal dispute with his community. A number of community HRDs have been sued for libel on the basis of their human rights work.

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

The crisis in Ukraine, the crackdown in Azerbaijan and the ongoing repression in the Russian Federation were the main events indicating the deterioration of the situation of HRDs in the region this year. The year also saw a consolidation of the trend to restrict or control access to foreign funding, which now affects groups in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Hungary, the Russian Federation, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. There was a marked increase in harassment and attacks on defenders of LGBTI rights, including in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, as well as in threats of physical harm and of HRDs being called in for questioning, especially in Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation. The use of economic charges such as tax evasion, embezzlement or financial irregularities was reported in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Hungary and the Russian Federation. Increased control over internet affected NGOs in Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan, where access to several websites was blocked.

The year was dramatic for HRDs working in Ukraine. Especially during January and February, those supporting the **Euromaidan protests** in Kiev and elsewhere suffered intimidation, smear campaigns and physical attacks. Civil society organisations were overwhelmed by the scale of human rights violations and struggled to continue their work documenting incidents and assisting victims. The massive solidarity effort that started in November 2013 continued throughout the year and in particular during the violent clashes between protesters and police in February. HRDs created a hot-line for victims, organised trial observations, started a database of violations and launched several initiatives to coordinate legal and medical aid. Targeting of HRDs also continued after the removal of former President Yanukovich, particularly in the south-eastern regions and Crimea.

In the **Russian Federation**, the Ukrainian Euromaidan movement was presented as a coup d'état orchestrated by the West, and those who contested this version of events or who publicly opposed the occupation of Crimea – including HRDs and independent journalists – were labelled as a ‘fifth column’ acting against national interests. They faced slander campaigns in state-owned media and physical attacks. Civil society continued to fight against the Foreign Agent law. Since its entry into force, a number of NGOs were disbanded, or ceased to operate due to the time and resources needed to oppose inspections, warnings and court proceedings. In July, the Supreme Court allowed the Ministry of Justice to add organisations to the foreign agent list without a court decision. By the end of the year, 16 human rights organisations, were listed as such. Harassment of HRDs continued in other forms, in particular through accusations of extremism. In June, the director of the Regional Press Institute, Anna Sharogradskaya, was detained at the airport and police confiscated her personal belongings, including her laptop, tablet and memory sticks, on the grounds that some of the documents supposedly contained extremist materials.

New **legislative restrictions** were considered in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan. In Kyrgyzstan, in October, parliament voted in first reading in favour of a bill banning LGBTI ‘propaganda’, and in November a proposed foreign agent bill, based on the Russian model, was tabled in the parliament, despite earlier declarations by the President opposing such a law. Also in November, Azerbaijan passed amendments requiring ministerial authorisation for the receipt of foreign funding. In Tajikistan, amendments to the Law on NGOs tightening control over foreign funding were considered by the government and are expected to be presented in parliament soon. In the Russian Federation, a new law was passed that required all bloggers with more than 3000 subscribers to register as a media outlet.

In **Belarus**, in July, the release on amnesty of Ales Bialiatski, who had been sentenced to four and a half years in jail in 2011, was welcome news. However, the targeting of HRDs continued; in November, human rights defender Elena Tonkacheva, a Russian national resident in Belarus for 18 years, faced deportation on the pretext of traffic offences, in reprisal for her human rights work.

In **Uzbekistan**, the long lasting repression has had a tragic impact on civil society: many HRDs have been forced into exile or decided to abandon human rights work, and many continued to serve long prison terms. International human rights organisations continued to be denied access to the country. On 26 June, International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, human rights defender Abdurasul Khudonazarov died, just one month after his release from prison on medical grounds. He had been repeatedly tortured and denied adequate medical attention during his nine years in detention.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, HRDs in the southern part of the country continued to face challenges connected to ethnic tensions between Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities. The director of the Advocacy Centre for Human Rights in Osh faced an investigation on charges of inciting ethnic violence, eventually dropped, for carrying out a survey on discrimination against ethnic minorities. In September, the Supreme Court rejected the appeal to re-open the case of Azimjan Askarov, who was sentenced to life imprisonment on fabricated murder charges following the 2010 ethnic violence. In December former Irish Foreign Minister Eamonn Gilmore visited Askarov in prison and called for his release on humanitarian grounds.

Within the European Union, the government's reaction to continued social protests in **Spain** was of concern. A new Law on the Protection of Citizen Security was passed by parliament in December; it introduced undue restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly and may result in the criminalisation of protests and protest organisers. Attacks on human rights NGOs in **Hungary** were also of serious concern. In June and September, a number of NGOs receiving funding from the Norwegian government had their premises raided and documents and equipment confiscated on spurious charges of embezzlement, financial irregularities, and 'backing opposition parties'. In the **United Kingdom**, five journalists and a TV presenter who exposed police and corporate misconduct sued police in November after discovering that they were under surveillance by the National Domestic Extremism and Disorder Intelligence Unit.

In **Serbia**, while LGBTI rights defenders marked a victory with the peaceful procession of the Pride march in September, HRDs continued to face intimidation by far-right groups. Between March and July, the NGO Women in Black reported an increase in threats against its members, which were followed by a physical attack during a commemoration of the Srebrenica massacre in July.

In **Turkey**, following the Supreme Court ruling limiting pre-trial detention for terrorism-related charges to five years, a number of HRDs in pre-trial detention were released. Their trials however remained pending. In a positive development, in June the Supreme Court overturned a life sentence issued in January against Pinar Selek, a sociologist and human rights defender who was the subject of an incredible 16-year-long persecution.

Country in Focus: Azerbaijan

In 2014 civil society in Azerbaijan experienced a severe crackdown. The attacks intensified after human rights groups released a list of political prisoners to coincide with the country's chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. HRDs and journalists were arrested on charges of treason, espionage or economic crimes, were subjected to travel bans and attacks, and many were forced to flee the country for fear of arrest. Human rights organisations and independent media had to suspend their activities as their bank accounts were frozen and their employees faced possible prosecution.

In May, Anar Mammadli of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre in Baku was sentenced to five and half years imprisonment for alleged economic crimes. His colleagues Bashir Suleymanli and Elnur Mammadov were sentenced to three and half years imprisonment. In July, Leyla Yunus, director of the Institute for Peace and Democracy, was arrested and charged with treason and economic crimes. While the courts repeatedly denied her bail, her state of health deteriorated and she denounced having been beaten and harassed by her cell mates and prison guards. A few days after her arrest, in August, her husband Arif Yunus was arrested on the same charges. Two other HRDs were arrested the same month, Rasul Jafarov, head of Human Rights Club, and Intigam Aliyev, head of the Legal Education Society; they were both accused of economic crimes.

Journalist Ilgar Nasibov was viciously beaten in August and faced criminal charges the following month, which were subsequently dropped. Emin Huseinov of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety remained at risk of arrest: his office was searched by police in August and the organisation's bank account was frozen. In September, Emil Mamedov, head of the regional NGO Promotion of Democracy, received a two-year suspended sentence on fabricated charges of extortion. In November, the mother of Gulnara Akhundova, a HRD based outside the country, was interrogated about her daughter's whereabouts and her house was searched. In December, journalist Khadija Ismailova, known for her investigative reporting on corruption, was arrested on fabricated charges of "causing a person to attempt suicide".

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Space for human rights activism in the Middle East and North Africa has been shrinking. With few exceptions, HRDs operate under policies that limit their right to freedom of association, assembly and expression. As in other regions, the use of arbitrary arrest and legal proceedings were the most common way of silencing HRDs. Ill treatment and torture against them were also reported. The influence of militant groups was increasingly evident and placed HRDs at further risk. The optimism around the political transitions which began in 2011 has all but evaporated: an oppressive regime established itself in Egypt and civil wars continued in Libya, Syria, and Yemen. Only in Tunisia was there progress – albeit slow and inconsistent – towards the goals of the revolution.

HRDs in countries affected by **armed conflicts** faced serious threats from all sides in the conflicts. Front Line Defenders documented grave violations including enforced disappearances, extra-judicial killings, arbitrary detentions, prosecutions, intimidation and death threats. The rapid expansion of **armed militias** and the weakness of authorities in Iraq, Libya and Yemen increased risks for HRDs. The Islamic state of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) gained effective control over territory in Iraq and Syria, and HRDs who spoke against abuses committed by ISIS were deemed apostates and killed. In Iraq, human rights lawyer Samira Saleh Al-Naimi was publicly executed by ISIS in Al Mosul for criticising its militias.

In **Syria**, HRDs who remained in the country found themselves in a critical situation. Human rights lawyer Gihan Amin, member of the Committee for the Defence of Prisoners of Conscience, was arrested in February. On the same day, the security services raided the home of Khalil Ma'touq of the Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research – who has been held in incommunicado detention since 2012 – and arrested his daughter. Terrorism charges were brought against Mazen Darwish, Hani Zaytani and Hussien Ghrer, after two years of arbitrary detention. The whereabouts of Razan Zeitouneh and other HRDs remains unknown since their abduction in 2013 by armed opposition groups.

In **Libya**, armed militant groups maintained a black-list with the names of HRDs, judges, religious clerks and others opposing their ideology and seen as legitimate targets. Human rights lawyer Salwa Bugaighis was assassinated in June, and two youth activists, Tawfik Bensaud and Sami Elkawafi, were killed in September. In **Yemen**, clashes between armed groups and the authorities or Houthis rebels and Al-Qaeda affected HRDs, who remain exposed to intimidation and travel bans. In March, Ali Al-Dailami of the Yemeni Organisation for the Defence of Rights and Democratic Freedoms was held for 12 hours in Sana'a airport and prevented from travelling to a meeting in Jordan; in August, his vehicle was shot at in front of his home.

In **Palestine**, HRDs suffered attacks by the Israeli military and arbitrary detention by Israeli occupation authorities. Further violations were committed by settlers as well as Civilian Security Coordinators, in charge of guarding illegal Israeli settlements. In February, the Israel army evicted the entire village of Ein-Hijleh and declared it a closed military zone, detaining 19 people including HRDs, journalists, representatives of local committees and youth movements, and assaulting several of them. In June, human rights defender Badia Dweik was beaten up and threatened with death in Hebron while trying to access a building to document attacks on local residents.

HRDs remained under strict scrutiny in states of the **Gulf Cooperation Council** (GCC). Since the adoption by its members (except Kuwait) of a security agreement in 2012, Gulf states have investigated and prosecuted HRDs within their borders for criticising other GCC states. In Oman there were reports of the arrest and incommunicado detention of HRDs and media activists. In Qatar, two British researchers investigating the living conditions of migrant labourers were detained for nine days and deported. Blasphemy laws were used in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, while the prosecution of social media activists continued in Bahrain. Disturbingly, on 9 December, Human Rights Defenders Day, the European Union presented a human rights prize to the government-controlled Bahraini National Institution for Human Rights and the Ombudsman of the Ministry of Interior, while HRDs continued to be imprisoned and those responsible for torture continued to enjoy impunity.

In **Saudi Arabia**, lengthy prison sentences were handed down, accompanied by bans on travel, on using social media or other media platforms, as well as corporal punishment. Human rights blogger Raif Badawi was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, 1,000 lashes, a fine of one million Saudi Riyals, a ban on using the internet, and a ten-year travel ban in May. Other HRDs, including Mikhliif Al-Shammari, Waleed Abu Al-Khair and Fadhel Al-Manasef,

received prison sentences ranging from 5 to 15 years. Women HRDs were detained for continuing the campaign to allow women to drive.

A new **cybercrime law**, adopted in Qatar in September, contained provisions that may be used to restrict freedom of expression and press freedom. Under the law, jail terms may be imposed on anyone who publishes content deemed to be harmful to the country's "social values" or "general order". The **anti-terrorism law** passed in the UAE in August contained a very vague definition of terrorism, which could potentially cover peaceful acts of dissent or expressing opposition to government policy.

HRDs who had to **relocate** to neighbouring countries due to serious security concerns remained at risk and faced challenges in the host countries. Syrian HRDs continued to face risks in Jordan and Lebanon, where there were reports of surveillance. A prominent Iranian HRD, Sayed Jamaal Hosseini was killed in Turkey on 4 August. There was a suspicion that his death was connected with his human rights work in Iran. Libyan HRDs in Tunisia struggled to continue their human rights work, in part due to regulations prohibiting them from working on 'political issues'.

In **Morocco**, the year witnessed increased restrictions on human rights groups, including bans on sit-ins and demonstrations, conferences and trainings. In May, human rights group Freedom Now was prevented from registering officially. In July, the Ministry of the Interior accused NGOs of having foreign agendas and damaging the reputation and security of the country. In the Moroccan-administered **Western Sahara**, restrictions on peaceful protests and the targeting of HRDs continued, and local organisations continued to operate as unregistered groups. In October, authorities banned a peaceful demonstration organised by the Al-Ayoun branch of the *Association Marocaine des Droits Humains*. In Algeria, HRDs continued to suffer harassment and international human rights groups were prevented access to the country.

Tunisia remains the only country in the post-uprising context offering hope of a successful transition to democracy. While concerns remain in relation to the reform of the security sector and the judicial system, a new constitution with strong human rights guarantees was adopted in January and a transitional justice law mandated an investigation into grave human rights violations committed between 1955 and 2013. However, there were reports of harassment of journalists and of repeated physical attacks by police and prosecution of HRDs. In August, the authorities suspended more than 157 NGOs for alleged links to terrorism, in violation of the procedure provided for in the law on associations.

Country in Focus: Egypt

2014 was marked by an assault on Egyptian civil society on a scale unseen even under the Mubarak regime. HRDs faced an extremely challenging situation in light of the restrictions imposed on civil society, the arrest and sentencing of HRDs, bloggers, journalists and protesters as well as an ongoing smear campaign against human rights groups.

Hundreds of HRDs, political activists and protesters were detained under Law 107/2013 on the Right to Public Meetings, Processions and Peaceful Demonstrations (the protest law), which restricted the right to peaceful assembly. In June, two HRDs and 23 protesters were sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment and fines of LE100,000 (€10,300 approximately) each for participating in a demonstration in front of the upper house of parliament the previous November. Ten days later, 24 HRDs and protesters were arrested during a march against the protest law.

In June, the Ministry of Social Solidarity presented a bill that, if adopted, will subordinate NGOs to security service and ministerial control. In July, the Ministry issued an order requiring all civil society organisations set up as law firms or civil companies to register under Law 84-2002 or face dissolution. Law 84-2002 allows for interference in the internal affairs of NGOs, imposes legal barriers to their establishment and limitations on freedom of assembly, international affiliation and funding. The order initially set a deadline for registration of 45 days, which was later extended to November. In response to domestic and international pressure, the Ministry eventually declared that no action would be taken against NGOs which did not register. In September, President El Sisi issued a decree imposing a life sentence for anyone receiving foreign funds with the aim of "pursuing acts harmful to national interests or destabilising the peace, unity or independence of the country".

Most international human rights groups closed their offices in Cairo due to concern about the safety of their staff, and representatives of international groups were denied entry to the country.

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