



**FRONT LINE
DEFENDERS AWARD
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS AT RISK**

2026 GLOBAL LAUREATES

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About **FRONT LINE DEFENDERS**

Front Line Defenders is an international human rights organisation founded in Dublin in 2001, with the specific aim of protecting human rights defenders at risk (HRDs).

Front Line Defenders works to improve the security and protection of human rights defenders and organisations around the world at risk for their peaceful and legitimate human rights work. As identified by human rights defenders themselves, the organisation responds to protection and security needs by providing support through grants, capacity building, visibility, networking, and advocacy, at the international, regional and local levels. Front Line Defenders has been awarded the 2018 United Nations Human Rights Prize.

Front Line Defenders maintains its headquarters in Dublin, an EU Office in Brussels, and regionally-based field staff in the Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe & Central Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa.

About **The Front Line Defenders Award**

The annual Front Line Defenders Award was established in 2005 to honour the work of human rights defenders who are courageously making outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of the human rights of others, often at great personal risk to themselves.

The Award focuses international attention on the work and struggles of HRDs. This provides them with a greater national and international platform to speak about and advocate for the human rights issues they are defending, while also contributing to their personal security.

Up until 2018, Front Line Defenders named one Global Laureate each year. Since 2018, Front Line Defenders began honouring five Regional Award Winners, with the Irish jury selecting one among them as the Global Laureate.

In 2021, Front Line Defenders began recognising all regional winners as Laureates.



Laurinda Manuel Gouveia

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Laurinda Manuel Gouveia is an Angolan woman human rights defender who has been actively promoting women's rights, fundamental freedoms, participatory democracy and social justice for over a decade, in her community and beyond.

A co-founder of several feminist and civic initiatives, Laurinda was born in the province of Kwanza Sul, in the municipality of Gabela, around 400km south of the capital Luanda, where she was raised by her mother, who faced great difficulties in raising and providing for her seven children. Later, when her parents separated, Laurinda moved in with extended family in Luanda. Sadly, her early years were shaped by hardship, and marked by difficulties and unequal treatment within the household, in part due to her skin colour. Rather than harden into resignation, that experience became a conviction she still

leads with today: that no child should be treated as less worthy, less important or less deserving of opportunity because of their background, social status or skin colour. Once she recognised the same injustice repeating across the country — people unaware of their rights, afraid to speak, unable to claim what their own Constitution guaranteed them — it was a short step to turn that personal insight into a public one.

When Laurinda started her human rights work, she faced a climate of generalised fear felt by citizens throughout the country. Angola has been governed by the same party, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), since its independence in 1975.

Over the decades since, civic space has narrowed steadily: citizens are victims of police violence during demonstrations, activists are detained and persecuted, and lawyers and human rights defenders face intimidation, as

increasing regulations and mechanisms hinder citizens' mobilisation and participation.

Nonetheless, Laurinda believes Angola can change — and she has spent more than a decade working for it. This has often entailed finding creative solutions to sustain her human rights work - her home in Luanda doubles as a space to meet with victims of human rights violations, and she runs a cake shop to sustain her family. She has contributed to turning hundreds of young Angolans into people who know their rights and are willing to claim them: activists who have gone on to found their own movements; women who have moved from silence to political participation; communities that now organise and take action themselves. It is this multiplying effect — watching people she has trained go on to train others — that Laurinda calls the greatest reward of her work. It is what keeps her going even when the cost to her own life has been high — like having to spend 73 hours in a cell with her seven-month-old baby due to her human rights work.

A VISION FOR A PARTICIPATORY ANGOLA

Laurinda's activism began in 2011, at the age of 19, during a period marked by major popular uprisings in different parts of the world. Inspired by the “Arab Spring,” young people across

Angola led a wave of protests demanding greater participation in public life. For Laurinda, this awakened a need to better understand people's rights, freedoms and power to transform their own societies. She got involved in protests and demonstrations, and started speaking out against human rights violations. From 2013, she began developing more structured projects, and in 2021, together with others, she co-founded two initiatives born of a shared vision: a truly participatory and democratic Angola, where citizens can demand respect for their human rights without fear.

For Laurinda, democracy is not limited to the right to vote or take part in demonstrations. It means being able to demand decent living conditions: water, electricity, healthcare, education, decent housing and access to justice. It means defending public institutions that are independent, transparent and at the service of everyone, without discrimination. It was against this backdrop that the Balumukenu Association was founded in 2021, initially as a project focused on training, documenting human rights violations and strengthening young people's participation in their communities. She worked on project management, and currently focuses on advocacy — developing campaigns around human rights violations and working to transform individual cases of injustice into processes of mobilisation and accountability.





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A CAMPAIGN FOR INÁCIO'S LIFE

This approach is most visible today in Laurinda's current campaign for Inácio Pessela, a 15-year-old boy shot during a police operation in 2025. He was shot when he was 14 years old by the national police while playing with other children at his front gate. That bullet left him paralysed. He has been hospitalised for a year now with no chance of ever walking again. He is one of more than 45 people shot by the police in 2025 during the taxi drivers' strike, in which they demanded that fuel prices not be raised.

The campaign is pushing for justice and accountability, and, more urgently, working to get Inácio access to the specialist medical treatment he needs — including medical evacuation to South Africa for proper assessment and care. For Laurinda, his case is a test of the principle her work is built on: that no life should be

considered less important, and that a state has a duty to protect its citizens, especially its children. Inácio's case is not isolated; it is an example of how violence and lack of accountability can affect children and citizens. Working for Inácio's case is working for a participatory and democratic Angola, where citizens should be able to demand better from the state without the fear of criminalisation or violence.

TURNING REPRESSION INTO NEW FORMS OF RESISTANCE

When Laurinda realised that her own presence at a protest could end in arrest, she found a different, more durable form of resistance: training people who could stand up for their own and their communities' rights. That thinking led to the School of Human Rights and Community Leadership, which has trained young Angolans in human rights, leadership and civic participation

— several of whom have since founded their own organisations and community projects. Another key organisation has been the Women's Association for Civil and Political Rights, where Laurinda has focused on strengthening women's participation in public and political life, and connecting vulnerable women with information on their rights and protection mechanisms — to date, more than 200 women have been empowered through it.

Despite financial and material constraints, Laurinda and her teammates have managed to achieve significant results. A spoken word project drew over 200 young people into a competition run largely online, giving them a relatively safer space to express themselves through performance. Training on human rights and community leadership has seeded at least four new youth movements, and more than 300 young people are estimated to have deepened

their understanding of their human rights. Among the organisation's proudest moments for Laurinda were its role in helping secure the release of four activists imprisoned for exercising their freedoms and civic participation, and cases in which victims of human rights violations ultimately won some form of redress. In 2024, she received a national recognition in democracy and human rights from Friends of Angola — an achievement Laurinda values precisely because it came without the infrastructure or funding many organisations rely on. They learned to rely on their people, persistence and trust within the community.

CHALLENGES

None of Laurinda's success has come easily. With the same party in power for decades, civic space in Angola has narrowed year after year. Fear is often used deliberately to discourage people

from exercising their rights. Laurinda has faced that reality head-on. As a result of her peaceful defence of human rights, she has been arrested and mistreated on several occasions, including during a demonstration in 2014 and in connection with the Processo 15+2 in 2015, which took place against a backdrop of repression targeting young people exercising their right to political participation and freedom of expression. She was detained for organising campaigns to free political prisoners and subjected to persecution, assaults, threats and intimidation on various occasions. The experience that marked her most was being held for around 73 hours with her seven-month-old son in a police cell. She was later detained again with her baby, this time alongside her husband, during a rally linked to May Day and a demonstration in support of those in prison, arrested for protesting and for their activism. In 2019, they were both arrested and later fined after filming a police operation against women and young people in Gabela. In 2025, her husband was assaulted by police during demonstrations held over rising fuel and food prices. Laurinda is now pursuing legal action over the harassment she herself has endured.

The impact has reached into nearly every part of her life — family and community relationships have been strained by fear of reprisal by association. Furthermore, her history of arrest and persecution has made it difficult for her to find work. The lack of formal

employment pushed her, at different points, to sell barbecued meat and later to bake and sell cakes to support her family. True to form, she turned that experience outward too, helping other women in her neighbourhood build their own small businesses and financial independence. Balumukenu itself still operates without permanent premises or steady funding, relying heavily on Laurinda's own resources and her home as a de facto office. Despite this, it has never ceased to work towards the possibility of transformative change.

CONCLUSION

What keeps Laurinda going is a belief that Angola can still change, and that every generation bears responsibility for its own moment — as she says, hers cannot accept that fear should decide the country's future. She places particular faith in young people:

“When young people know their rights, organise themselves and get involved, they cease to be mere spectators to reality and become agents of change.”

For her, the clearest measure of success is not any single case won, but what continues after she is

no longer in the room — “It is knowing that what we have started can be replicated, expanded and transformed by others.”

Her activism began on the street, in marches and demonstrations. Today, it continues in training rooms, in living rooms turned into meeting spaces, and in the people she has taught to speak for themselves. It is a conviction she returns to again and again: that when a person knows their rights, they can transform their own life — and when a community knows its rights, it can begin to transform a country. Through her mission to empower others, Laurinda is the true definition of planting a seed that has grown into a garden.



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Photo of the organizers of the march against sexual abuse of women and girls



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LAURINDA MANUEL GOUVEIA

Angola, África

CONTEXTO E ANTECEDENTES

Laurinda Manuel Gouveia é uma defensora angolana dos direitos humanos que tem promovido activamente os direitos das mulheres, as liberdades fundamentais, a democracia participativa e a justiça social há mais de uma década, na sua comunidade e para além dela.

Co-fundadora de várias iniciativas feministas e cívicas, Laurinda nasceu na província do Cuanza Sul, no município da Gabela, cerca de 400 km a sul da capital, Luanda, onde foi criada pela mãe, que enfrentou grandes dificuldades para criar e sustentar os seus sete filhos. Mais tarde, quando os pais se separaram, Laurinda foi viver com a família alargada em Luanda. Infelizmente, os seus primeiros anos foram marcados por dificuldades e por problemas e tratamento desigual dentro de casa, em parte devido à cor da sua pele. Em vez de se transformar em resignação, essa experiência tornou-se uma convicção que ainda hoje a guia: nenhuma criança deve ser tratada como menos digna, menos importante ou menos merecedora de oportunidades por causa da sua origem, condição social ou cor da pele. Quando viu a mesma injustiça a repetir-se por todo o país — pessoas sem conhecimento dos seus direitos, com medo de falar, incapazes de reivindicar o que a própria Constituição lhes garantia — rapidamente transformou essa percepção pessoal numa percepção pública.

Quando Laurinda começou o seu trabalho em direitos humanos, enfrentou um clima de medo generalizado sentido pelos cidadãos em todo o país. Angola é governada pelo mesmo partido, o Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA), desde a independência em 1975.

Ao longo das décadas, o espaço cívico foi-se estreitando de forma constante: cidadãos são vítimas de violência policial durante manifestações, activistas são detidos e perseguidos, e advogados e defensores de direitos humanos enfrentam intimidação, enquanto regulamentos e mecanismos cada vez mais numerosos dificultam a mobilização e participação dos cidadãos.

Apesar disso, Laurinda acredita que Angola pode mudar - e há mais de uma década que tem trabalhado para isso. Isto tem frequentemente implicado encontrar soluções criativas para sustentar o seu trabalho em direitos humanos: - a sua casa em Luanda serve também como um espaço para se reunir com vítimas de violações de direitos humanos, e ela gere uma pastelaria para sustentar a família. Ela contribuiu para transformar centenas de jovens angolanos em pessoas que conhecem os seus direitos e estão dispostas a reivindicá-los: activistas que acabaram por fundar os seus próprios movimentos; mulheres que passaram do silêncio à participação política; comunidades que agora se organizam e agem por si próprias. É este efeito multiplicador — ver pessoas que ela formou irem formar outras — que Laurinda considera a maior recompensa do seu trabalho. É isso que a motiva a continuar, mesmo com grande custo para a sua própria vida — como ter de passar

73 horas numa cela com o seu bebé de sete meses devido ao seu trabalho em direitos humanos.

UMA VISÃO PARA UMA ANGOLA PARTICIPATIVA

O activismo de Laurinda começou em 2011, aos 19 anos, num período marcado por grandes protestos populares em diferentes partes do mundo. Inspirados pela “Primavera Árabe”, jovens em todo o país lideraram uma vaga de protestos a exigir maior participação na vida pública. Para Laurinda, isto despertou a necessidade de compreender melhor os direitos, as liberdades e o poder das pessoas para transformar as suas próprias sociedades. Envolveu-se em protestos e manifestações, e começou a denunciar violações de direitos humanos. A partir de 2013, começou a desenvolver projectos mais estruturados e, em 2021, juntamente com outras pessoas, fundou duas iniciativas nascidas de uma visão partilhada: uma Angola verdadeiramente participativa e democrática, onde os cidadãos possam exigir o respeito pelos seus direitos humanos sem medo.

Para Laurinda, a democracia não se limita ao direito de votar ou de participar em manifestações. Significa poder exigir condições de vida dignas: água, electricidade, saúde, educação, habitação condigna e acesso à justiça. Significa defender instituições públicas independentes, transparentes e ao serviço de todos, sem discriminação. Foi neste contexto que a Associação Balumukenu foi fundada em 2021, sendo inicialmente um projecto focado na formação, na documentação de violações de direitos humanos e no reforço da participação dos jovens nas suas comunidades. Ela trabalhou na gestão de projectos e actualmente concentra-se na consciencialização

— desenvolvendo campanhas em torno de violações de direitos humanos e trabalhando para transformar casos individuais de injustiça em processos de mobilização e responsabilização.

UMA CAMPANHA PELA VIDA DE INÁCIO

Esta abordagem é hoje mais visível na actual campanha de Laurinda por Inácio Pessela, um rapaz de 15 anos baleado durante uma operação policial em 2025. Ele foi baleado pela polícia nacional quando tinha 14 anos, enquanto brincava com outras crianças à porta de casa. Essa bala deixou-o paralisado. Ele está hospitalizado há um ano, sem qualquer hipótese de voltar a andar. É um de mais de 45 feridos a tiro pela polícia em 2025 durante a greve dos taxistas, em que estes exigiam que os preços dos combustíveis não fossem aumentados.

A campanha luta por justiça e responsabilização e, com maior urgência, trabalha para garantir que Inácio tenha acesso ao tratamento médico especializado de que precisa — incluindo evacuação médica para a África do Sul para uma avaliação e cuidados adequados. Para Laurinda, o caso dele é um teste ao princípio em que o seu trabalho se baseia: nenhuma vida deve ser considerada menos importante, e o Estado tem o dever de proteger os seus cidadãos, especialmente as crianças. O caso do Inácio não é isolado; é um exemplo de como a violência e a falta de responsabilização podem afectar crianças e cidadãos. Trabalhar no caso do Inácio é trabalhar por uma Angola participativa e democrática, onde os cidadãos devem poder exigir mais do Estado sem medo de criminalização ou violência.

TRANSFORMAR A REPRESSÃO EM NOVAS FORMAS DE RESISTÊNCIA

Quando Laurinda percebeu que a sua própria presença numa manifestação podia terminar em detenção, encontrou uma forma diferente e mais duradoura de resistência: formar pessoas que pudessem defender os seus próprios direitos e os das suas comunidades. Esse pensamento levou à criação da Escola de Direitos Humanos e Liderança Comunitária, que tem formado jovens angolanos em direitos humanos, liderança e participação cívica — vários dos quais acabaram por fundar as suas próprias organizações e projectos comunitários. Outra organização fundamental tem sido a Associação da Mulher para os Direitos Cívicos e Políticos, onde Laurinda se concentrou em reforçar a participação das mulheres na vida pública e política, e em ligar mulheres vulneráveis a informação sobre os seus direitos e mecanismos de protecção — até à data, mais de 200 mulheres foram capacitadas através dela.

Apesar das limitações financeiras e materiais, Laurinda e a sua equipa conseguiram alcançar resultados significativos. Um projecto de spoken word atraiu mais de 200 jovens para um concurso realizado em grande parte online, oferecendo-lhes um espaço relativamente mais seguro para se expressarem através da arte. A formação em direitos humanos e liderança comunitária deu origem a pelo menos quatro novos movimentos juvenis, e estima-se que mais de 300 jovens tenham aprofundado a sua compreensão dos seus direitos humanos. Para Laurinda, entre os momentos de maior orgulho da organização está o seu papel em ajudar a garantir a libertação de quatro activistas presos por exercerem as suas liberdades

e participação cívica, e casos em que vítimas de violações de direitos acabaram por obter algum tipo de reparação. Em 2024, ela recebeu um reconhecimento nacional em democracia e direitos humanos da Friends of Angola — uma conquista que Laurinda valoriza precisamente porque foi alcançada sem a infraestrutura ou o financiamento de que muitas organizações dependem. Aprenderam a depender do seu povo, da persistência e da confiança dentro da comunidade.

DESAFIOS

O sucesso de Laurinda não foi alcançado facilmente. Com o mesmo partido no poder há décadas, o espaço cívico em Angola tem-se estreitado ano após ano. O medo é muitas vezes usado deliberadamente para desencorajar as pessoas de exercerem os seus direitos. Laurinda enfrentou essa realidade de frente. Como resultado da sua defesa pacífica dos direitos humanos, foi detida e maltratada em várias ocasiões, incluindo durante uma manifestação em 2014, no âmbito do Processo 15+2 em 2015, que teve lugar num contexto de repressão dirigida a jovens que exerciam o seu direito à participação política e à liberdade de expressão. Ela foi detida por organizar campanhas pela libertação de prisioneiros políticos e foi alvo de perseguição, agressões, ameaças e intimidação em várias ocasiões. A experiência que mais a marcou foi ter sido mantida cerca de 73 horas com o seu filho de sete meses numa cela policial. Mais tarde, foi novamente detida com o bebé, desta vez juntamente com o marido, durante uma manifestação relacionada com o dia 1 de Maio e um protesto em apoio dos que estavam presos,

detidos por protestarem e pelo seu activismo. Em 2019, ambos foram detidos e mais tarde multados depois de filmarem uma operação policial contra mulheres e jovens na Gabela. Em 2025, o marido foi agredido pela polícia durante manifestações realizadas contra o aumento dos preços dos combustíveis e dos alimentos. Laurinda está agora a avançar com acções judiciais devido ao assédio de que tem sido alvo.

O impacto atingiu quase todas as áreas da sua vida — as relações familiares e comunitárias ficaram tensas devido ao medo de represálias por associação. Além disso, o seu histórico de detenções e perseguição tornou difícil para ela encontrar trabalho. A falta de emprego formal levou-a, em diferentes momentos, a vender carne assada e mais tarde a fazer e vender bolos para sustentar a família. Fiel a si mesma, ela também transportou essa experiência para fora, ajudando outras mulheres do seu bairro a construírem os seus próprios pequenos negócios e a sua independência financeira. A própria Balumukenu continua a funcionar sem instalações permanentes ou financiamento estável, dependendo fortemente dos recursos de Laurinda e da sua casa como um escritório improvisado. Apesar disso, nunca deixou de trabalhar pela possibilidade de uma mudança transformadora.

CONCLUSÃO

O que motiva a Laurinda a continuar é a crença de que Angola ainda pode mudar e de que cada geração é responsável pelo seu próprio momento — como ela diz, a sua geração não pode aceitar

que o medo decida o futuro do país. Ela deposita uma fé particular nos jovens: **“Quando os jovens conhecem os seus direitos, se organizam e se envolvem, deixam de ser meros espectadores da realidade e tornam-se agentes de mudança.”** Para ela, a medida mais clara de sucesso não é qualquer caso individual ganho, mas aquilo que continua depois de ela já não estar presente — **“É saber que o que começámos pode ser replicado, ampliado e transformado por outras pessoas.”**

O seu activismo começou na rua, em marchas e manifestações. Hoje, continua em salas de formação, em salas de estar transformadas em espaços de reunião e nas pessoas a quem ela ensinou a falar por si próprias. É uma convicção à qual ela volta repetidamente: quando uma pessoa conhece os seus direitos, pode transformar a sua própria vida — e quando uma comunidade conhece os seus direitos, pode começar a transformar um país. Através da sua missão de capacitar outras pessoas, Laurinda é a verdadeira definição de plantar uma semente que cresceu e se tornou um jardim.



Adda Vyctoria Caetano

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Adda Vyctoria Caetano believes that no one should have to hide who they are in order to belong. It is a conviction she has built an entire life's work around as a trans quilombola¹ woman, artist, cultural producer and leader of her community, the Quilombo Conceição dos Caetanos, in the rural municipality of Tururu, in the northeastern Brazilian state of Ceará. Today, Adda is the National Coordinator of CONAQ's (National Coordination Committee for the Organisation of Rural Black Quilombola Communities) LGBTQIAPN+ Collective, is a member of CONAQ's

National Collective of Quilombola Women, and chairs the Municipal Council for the Promotion of Racial Equality in Tururu — Ceará (COMPIR), her hometown. For Adda, simply holding these positions as a trans Black quilombola woman is itself a symbol of success and change: proof that such spaces belong to women like her too. By holding these positions she believes that she can pave the way for others.

Adda Vyctoria Caetano was born on 20 March 1988 and spent part of her childhood in the Jardim Iracema and Vila Velha neighbourhoods of Fortaleza, in Ceará, where she was exposed from a young age to social inequality and what it meant to fight for dignity and access. Through her own lived experience, she understood how people's intersectional identities influence their opportunities in life. She later moved to the Quilombo Conceição dos Caetanos in Tururu,

¹ The term 'quilombola' is specific to Brazil and refers to communities of Black ancestry linked to the resistance against the historical oppression of slavery in the country (slavery remained in force until 1888). Nowadays they are recognised as an ancestral community in Brazil. Brazil's Quilombola population has reached 1,330,186 people, according to the updated figures from the [2022 Census](#) recorded by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). The word 'quilombo' originates from the African language Quimbunco, meaning: a society formed by young warriors who belonged to ethnic groups uprooted from their communities (source: CONAQ).



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“ My very existence is resistance, but my greatest purpose is to transform resistance into rights, territory, dignity and a future for those who come after me. ”

a place that became, in her own words, a fundamental reference point for her identity, her ancestry and her political activism. She continued recognising different forms of exclusion, but also began recognising the strength of collective organising, culture and Black resistance. As a trans woman from a quilombo community, she has also lived with racism, transphobia and invisibility throughout her life, experiences that steadily sharpened her mission of defending human rights.

Adda's work sits at the intersection of several long-standing struggles in Brazil. Quilombola communities, descended from Afro-Brazilians who resisted slavery, continue to fight for legal title to the land their communities have occupied for generations, and for public policies that recognise their culture and history. Their main struggle is to secure territorial rights, particularly land tenure for quilombo territories, as well as o advocate for public policies, education, women's rights, youth issues, culture, racial

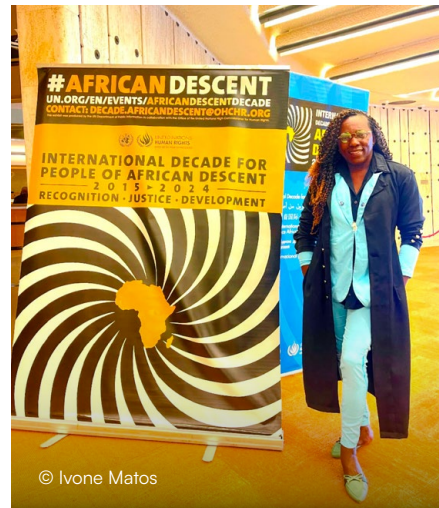
justice and dignity. LGBTQIAPN+² people within those same territories often face an additional, compounding invisibility, and thus, Adda's work has an intersectional dimension: defending the rights of Black quilombola communities to their land and identity, protecting women's rights, and insisting that LGBTQIAPN+ quilombola people are recognised as having always been part of that story too.

FROM HISTORICAL INVISIBILITY TO A NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Being trans, Black, quilombola and a woman are inseparable parts of Adda's story. Her very existence and identity are linked to an experience of discrimination. Throughout her life, she has been treated differently, disrespected or had her credibility questioned simply for being who she is. Discrimination can be blatant, but it is often more subtle: in the way people look at her; in the words they use; in attempts to diminish her capabilities; in questioning her legitimacy; or in failing to recognise a trans, Black, and quilombola woman as a leader.

Adda's path into human rights work did not begin as a deliberate choice so much as a response to her lived experience. She started by organising

² Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual/Agender, Pansexual, and Non-binary individuals, along with all other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities represented by the plus sign.



within her own community, using communication and political mobilisation to amplify local demands and promote the value of quilombola identity. Over time she came to realise that the exclusion she had experienced was shared by thousands of Black people, quilombolas, women and LGBTQIAPN+ people across Brazil, and her work grew to match that scale.

Through her work, she was connected with CONAQ, the National Coordination of Rural Black Quilombola Communities, whose roots trace back to the 1995 Zumbi dos Palmares March, when quilombola communities from across the country began organising nationally to challenge decades of invisibility and demand recognition of their rights. CONAQ was formally founded the following year, built on a simple but urgent premise: that no quilombo territory should have to fight alone. Within that movement,

Adda now serves as National Coordinator of CONAQ's LGBTQIAPN+ Collective, working to strengthen the political organisation and visibility of LGBTQIAPN+ people within the quilombola movement, alongside her role in CONAQ's National Collective of Quilombola Women.

One of the initiatives close to her heart is the development of a national campaign to map the LGBTQIAPN+ quilombo population, which aims to gather information about this population in the quilombos and to strengthen specific public policies.

She leads the Community Association of Residents of the Quilombo Conceição dos Caetanos, and she is also the founder of the Coletivo África Nordestina (Northeastern Africa Collective), through which she uses art, advocacy, culture, workshops, mobilisation,

and communication initiatives to affirm Black, quilombola and north-eastern Brazilian identity.

BREAKING INVISIBILITY

Much of Adda's work is about turning invisible aspects of society into something that's impossible to ignore. In 2025, she organised the first Quilombo Vivo Seminar, in Conceição dos Caetanos, bringing quilombola and LGBTQIAPN+ concerns into a shared space built by and for the community itself. She counts her own presence in national, political and institutional spaces as an achievement in its own right, breaking from a history where people like her were invisible and lacked representation.

For Adda, the significance of that visibility goes beyond her own career. She has represented CONAQ at international forums, including the

third session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent in Geneva in 2024, bringing the demands of Brazilian quilombola communities — particularly around territorial rights and the protection of LGBTQIAPN+ quilombola people — onto the world stage.

But Adda's work does not take place solely in meetings or at events. It's comprised of building up networks, listening to communities, developing projects, institutional coordination, defending rights and creating spaces so that people who have historically been silenced can speak out and be recognised.

She measures success less by the rooms she enters and more by what happens after: if a young trans woman from a quilombo sees Adda's journey and believes she could occupy that



space too, Adda considers that a meaningful part of her work already done. For her, representation can change destinies.

TURNING THREATS INTO COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE

Adda's visibility has not come without a cost. As a trans, Black and quilombola woman in leadership, she has faced threats, intimidation, online attacks, symbolic violence and repeated attempts to discredit her, tied directly to her public role, her defence of quilombola rights and her advocacy for the LGBTQIAPN+ community. She describes these attacks as targeting not only what she does, but who she is.

For the last few years, her role as a leader has been called into question and her reputation has been attacked with the aim of undermining her credibility within the community and with other institutions. Facing threats and hostility has reinforced a reality Adda knows all too well: violence often begins by trying to silence voices. When a quilombola leader is intimidated for defending their territory, their community, and their basic human rights, the whole community feels the effects.

These experiences have hurt Adda but they do not define the path she has chosen. Her territory represents ancestry, memory and resistance, and rather than facing this alone, Adda has turned individual threats into collective processes of protection and resistance. She has worked to strengthen her support networks, build institutional partnerships, document incidents and seek guidance on protection mechanisms for human rights defenders. Rather than responding to difficulties alone, she sought to forge paths together with the community. As she puts it, resistance does not mean ignoring fear; it means recognising the risk, seeking protection, and continuing regardless, so that fear is never allowed to silence her or her community.

CHALLENGES

Adda works against structural barriers that run deep. Quilombola communities in Brazil continue to face racism, social inequality and restricted access to the public policies, resources and protection they are entitled to. Decades after CONAQ's founding, many quilombola communities still struggle to secure legal titles to their land. As a trans woman, Adda carries an additional weight within that struggle: questions about her legitimacy; prejudice from within and

outside her own community, including from homophobic people and from individuals or groups who instil fear and insecurity; and the burden of representing not only herself but the collective hopes of the people she leads. Limited resources compound all of it, with the scale of the historic problems often outstripping the structures in place to resolve them.

Adda described one of her greatest challenges as not giving into the urge to give up because of the exhaustion of constantly dealing with threats and people who resist change. Still, she does not describe herself as fearless in the face of such danger. She simply pushes past the fear to make sure that it never outweighs her belief in what is right.

CONCLUSION

Adda's inspiration comes from the quilombos themselves: the women who have sustained their communities, the leaders who have faced violence to defend their territories, the young people reinventing what resistance looks like, and the LGBTQIAPN+ people who continue to exist even when told they do not belong. But she

also finds motivation in people who have not yet arrived: the trans quilombo girls who are growing up now; the young people who are still looking for role models; the communities still fighting for land titles; and future generations.

“I come from a history of resistance,” she says. “I am a trans woman, I am a quilombola, I am Black and I am from the North-East [of Brazil]. I have learnt that defending human rights means defending the right to exist with dignity. I fight for ownership of our territories because territory is life, ancestry and the future. And I fight so that no one has to hide who they are in order to have the right to belong.”

That belief is what she hopes to leave behind: stronger organisations; better protected communities; better prepared young people; and a fairer society for the next generation. Adda's struggle began with her own story, but it now belongs to a collective — one she is still building, seminar by seminar, seat by seat, so that no one has to fight for the same things her generation had to face. Her hope is that, in future, this collective may find more open doors than she did.



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ADDA VYCTORIA CAETANO

Brasil, América do Sul

“Minha própria existência é resistência, mas meu maior propósito é transformar essa resistência em direitos, território, dignidade e um futuro para aqueles que virão depois de mim.”

CONTEXTO E HISTÓRIA

Adda Vyctoria Caetano acredita que ninguém deveria ter que esconder quem é para se sentir incluído. É uma convicção em torno da qual ela construiu toda a sua trajetória de vida como mulher trans quilombola¹, artista, produtora cultural e liderança de sua comunidade, o Quilombo Conceição dos Caetanos, no município rural de Tururu, no estado do Ceará, no nordeste do Brasil. Hoje, Adda é coordenadora nacional do Coletivo LGBTQIAPN+ da CONAQ, integra o Coletivo Nacional de Mulheres Quilombolas da CONAQ e preside o Conselho Municipal de Promoção da Igualdade Racial em Tururu — Ceará (COMPIR), sua cidade natal. Para Adda, o simples fato de ocupar esses cargos como mulher trans, negra e quilombola já é, por si só, um símbolo de sucesso e mudança: a prova de que esses espaços também pertencem a mulheres como ela. Ao ocupar esses cargos, ela acredita que pode abrir caminho para outras pessoas.

¹O termo “quilombolo” é específico do Brasil e se refere a comunidades de ascendência negra ligadas à resistência contra a opressão histórica da escravidão no país (a escravidão permaneceu em vigor até 1888). Atualmente, elas são reconhecidas como uma comunidade ancestral no Brasil. A população quilombola do Brasil atingiu 1.330.186 pessoas, de acordo com os dados atualizados do [Censo de 2022](#) registrados pelo Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE). A palavra “quilombo” tem origem na língua africana quimbunco e significa: uma sociedade formada por jovens guerreiros que pertenciam a grupos étnicos arrancados de suas comunidades (fonte: CONAQ).

Adda Vyctoria Caetano nasceu em 20 de março de 1988 e passou parte de sua infância nos bairros Jardim Iracema e Vila Velha, em Fortaleza, no Ceará, onde, desde muito jovem, teve contato com a desigualdade social e com o que significava lutar por dignidade e acesso. Por meio de sua própria experiência de vida, ela compreendeu como as identidades interseccionais das pessoas influenciam suas oportunidades na vida. Mais tarde, mudou-se para o Quilombo Conceição dos Caetanos, em Tururu, um lugar que se tornou, em suas próprias palavras, um ponto de referência fundamental para sua identidade, sua ancestralidade e seu ativismo político. Ela continuou a reconhecer diferentes formas de exclusão, mas também passou a perceber a força da organização coletiva, da cultura e da resistência negra. Como mulher trans de uma comunidade quilombola, ela também conviveu com o racismo, a transfobia e a invisibilidade ao longo de sua vida, experiências que foram aprimorando cada vez mais sua missão de defender os direitos humanos.

O trabalho da Adda se relaciona com várias lutas de longa data no Brasil. As comunidades quilombolas, descendentes de afro-brasileiros que resistiram à escravidão, continuam lutando pelo reconhecimento legal da posse das terras que suas comunidades ocupam há gerações e por políticas públicas que reconheçam sua cultura e história. Sua principal luta é garantir direitos territoriais, particularmente a posse da terra nos territórios quilombolas, bem como políticas públicas, educação, direitos das mulheres, questões relacionadas à juventude, cultura, justiça racial e dignidade. Pessoas LGBTQIAPN+² nesses mesmos territórios frequentemente enfrentam uma invisibilidade adicional e agravante; por isso, o trabalho de Adda se dá em distintas frentes de luta:

²Pessoas lésbicas, gays, bissexuais, transgêneros, queer/em questionamento, intersexuais, assexuais/agêneros, pansexuais e não binárias, juntamente com todas as outras orientações sexuais e identidades de gênero diversas representadas pelo sinal de mais.

defender o direito das comunidades quilombolas negras à sua terra e identidade, proteger os direitos das mulheres e insistir para que as pessoas LGBTQIAPN+ quilombolas sejam reconhecidas como tendo sempre feito parte dessa história também.

DA INVISIBILIDADE HISTÓRICA A UM MOVIMENTO NACIONAL

Ser trans, negra, quilombola e mulher são partes inseparáveis da história de Adda. Sua própria existência e identidade estão ligadas a uma experiência de discriminação. Ao longo de sua vida, ela foi tratada de forma diferente, desrespeitada ou teve sua credibilidade questionada simplesmente por ser quem é. A discriminação pode ser flagrante, mas muitas vezes é mais sutil: na maneira como as pessoas olham para ela; nas palavras que usam; nas tentativas de diminuir suas capacidades; no questionamento de sua legitimidade; ou na recusa em reconhecer uma mulher trans, negra e quilombola como liderança.

A trajetória de Adda no trabalho pelos direitos humanos não começou tanto como uma escolha deliberada, mas sim como uma resposta à sua experiência de vida. Ela começou organizando-se dentro de sua própria comunidade, usando a comunicação e a mobilização política para amplificar as demandas locais e promover o valor da identidade quilombola. Com o tempo, ela percebeu que a exclusão que havia sofrido era compartilhada por milhares de pessoas negras, quilombolas, mulheres e pessoas LGBTQIAPN+ em todo o Brasil, e seu trabalho cresceu para acompanhar essa escala.

Por meio de seu trabalho, ela se conectou com a CONAQ, a Coordenação Nacional das Comunidades Rurais Negras Quilombolas, cujas raízes remontam à Marcha de Zumbi dos

Palmares de 1995, quando comunidades quilombolas de todo o país começaram a se organizar nacionalmente para desafiar décadas de invisibilidade e exigir o reconhecimento de seus direitos. A CONAQ foi formalmente fundada no ano seguinte, com base em uma premissa simples, mas urgente: que nenhum território de quilombo deva ter que lutar sozinho. Dentro desse movimento, Adda atua atualmente como Coordenadora Nacional do Coletivo LGBTQIAPN+ da CONAQ, trabalhando para fortalecer a organização política e a visibilidade das pessoas LGBTQIAPN+ no movimento quilombola, além de desempenhar seu papel no Coletivo Nacional de Mulheres Quilombolas da CONAQ.

Uma das iniciativas que mais lhe é cara é o desenvolvimento de uma campanha nacional para mapear a população LGBTQIAPN+ dos quilombos, que visa coletar informações sobre essa população nos quilombos e fortalecer políticas públicas específicas.

Ela lidera a Associação Comunitária de Moradores do Quilombo Conceição dos Caetanos e também é fundadora do Coletivo África Nordestina, por meio do qual utiliza a arte, a defesa de direitos, a cultura, oficinas, mobilização e iniciativas de comunicação para afirmar a identidade negra, quilombola e nordestina.

QUEBRANDO A INVISIBILIDADE

Grande parte do trabalho de Adda consiste em transformar aspectos invisíveis da sociedade em algo impossível de ignorar. Em 2025, ela organizou o primeiro Seminário Quilombo Vivo, em Conceição dos Caetanos, trazendo as questões quilombolas e LGBTQIAPN+ para um espaço compartilhado construído pela própria comunidade e para ela. Ela considera sua própria presença em espaços

políticos e institucionais nacionais uma conquista por si só, rompendo com uma história em que pessoas como ela eram invisíveis e careciam de representatividade.

Para Adda, o significado dessa visibilidade vai além de sua própria carreira. Ela representou a CONAQ em fóruns internacionais, incluindo a terceira sessão do Fórum Permanente das Nações Unidas para Pessoas de Ascendência Africana, em Genebra, em 2024, levando as demandas das comunidades quilombolas brasileiras — especialmente em relação aos direitos territoriais e à proteção das pessoas quilombolas LGBTQIAPN+ — ao cenário mundial.

Mas o trabalho de Adda não se limita a reuniões ou eventos. Ele consiste em construir redes, ouvir as comunidades, desenvolver projetos, coordenar com instituições, defender direitos e criar espaços para que pessoas que historicamente foram silenciadas possam se manifestar e serem reconhecidas.

Ela mede o sucesso não tanto pelas salas em que entra, mas pelo que acontece depois: se uma jovem mulher trans de um quilombo vê a trajetória de Adda e acredita que também pode ocupar esse espaço, Adda considera que uma parte significativa de seu trabalho já foi realizada. Para ela, a representatividade pode mudar destinos.

TRANSFORMANDO AMEAÇAS EM RESISTÊNCIA COLETIVA

A visibilidade de Adda teve seu preço. Como mulher trans, negra e quilombola em posição de liderança, ela enfrentou ameaças, intimidações, ataques online, violência simbólica e repetidas tentativas de desacreditá-la, diretamente ligadas ao seu papel público, à sua defesa dos direitos dos quilombolas

e ao seu ativismo pela comunidade LGBTQIAPN+. Ela descreve esses ataques como direcionados não apenas ao que faz, mas a quem ela é.

Nos últimos anos, seu papel como liderança tem sido questionado e sua reputação tem sido atacada com o objetivo de minar sua credibilidade dentro da comunidade e junto a outras instituições. Enfrentar ameaças e hostilidade reforçou uma realidade que Adda conhece muito bem: a violência muitas vezes começa com a tentativa de silenciar vozes. Quando uma liderança quilombola é intimidada por defender seu território, sua comunidade e seus direitos humanos básicos, toda a comunidade sente os efeitos.

Essas experiências magoaram Adda, mas não definem o caminho que ela escolheu. Seu território representa ancestralidade, memória e resistência, e, em vez de enfrentar isso sozinha, Adda transformou ameaças individuais em processos coletivos de proteção e resistência. Ela tem trabalhado para fortalecer suas redes de apoio, construir parcerias institucionais, documentar incidentes e buscar orientação sobre mecanismos de proteção para defensores dos direitos humanos. Em vez de responder às dificuldades sozinha, ela buscou traçar caminhos junto com a comunidade. Como ela mesma diz, resistência não significa ignorar o medo; significa reconhecer o risco, buscar proteção e seguir em frente mesmo assim, para que o medo nunca consiga silenciá-la nem à sua comunidade.

DESAFIOS

A Adda luta contra barreiras estruturais profundamente enraizadas. As comunidades quilombolas no Brasil continuam enfrentando racismo, desigualdade social

e acesso restrito às políticas públicas, aos recursos e à proteção a que têm direito. Décadas após a fundação da CONAQ, muitas comunidades quilombolas ainda lutam para garantir a regularização fundiária de suas terras. Como mulher trans, Adda carrega um fardo adicional nessa luta: questionamentos sobre sua legitimidade; preconceito tanto dentro quanto fora de sua própria comunidade, inclusive por parte de pessoas homofóbicas e de indivíduos ou grupos que instilam medo e insegurança; e o fardo de representar não apenas a si mesma, mas as esperanças coletivas das pessoas que ela lidera. Recursos limitados agravam tudo isso, com a magnitude dos problemas históricos muitas vezes superando as estruturas existentes para resolvê-los.

Adda descreveu um de seus maiores desafios como não ceder à vontade de desistir devido ao cansaço de lidar constantemente com ameaças e pessoas que resistem à mudança. Ainda assim, ela não se descreve como destemida diante de tal perigo. Ela simplesmente supera o medo para garantir que ele nunca supere sua crença no que é certo.

CONCLUSÃO

A inspiração de Adda vem dos próprios quilombos: as mulheres que têm sustentado suas comunidades, os líderes que enfrentaram violência para defender seus territórios, os jovens que estão reinventando a forma da resistência e as pessoas LGBTQIAPN+ que continuam a existir mesmo quando lhes dizem que não pertencem à sociedade. Mas ela também encontra motivação nas pessoas que ainda não chegaram lá: as meninas trans dos quilombos que estão crescendo agora; os jovens que ainda buscam modelos a seguir; as comunidades que ainda lutam por títulos de propriedade; e as futuras gerações.

“Venho de uma história de resistência”, diz ela. “Sou mulher trans, sou quilombola, sou negra e sou do Nordeste [do Brasil]. Aprendi que defender os direitos humanos significa defender o direito de existir com dignidade. Luto pela posse de nossos territórios porque território é vida, ancestralidade e futuro. E luto para que ninguém precise esconder quem é para ter o direito de pertencer.”

É essa convicção que ela espera deixar como legado: organizações mais fortes; comunidades mais bem protegidas; jovens mais bem preparados; e uma sociedade mais justa para a próxima geração. A luta de Adda começou com sua própria história, mas agora pertence a um coletivo — um coletivo que ela ainda está construindo, seminário por seminário, lugar por lugar, para que ninguém precise lutar pelas mesmas coisas que sua geração teve de enfrentar. Sua esperança é que, no futuro, esse coletivo encontre portas mais abertas do que as que ela encontrou.



Umar Khalid

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Umar Khalid is a well known name in India today. To those who try to silence his work, he is an “enemy of the state” and an “anti-national”, but to those who know the real Umar Khalid, he is a national hero, a voice of the people, and a human rights defender. Now 39, he grew up in Jamia Nagar, a Muslim-majority neighbourhood in South East Delhi. It was here that he witnessed first-hand how the rise of Hindu nationalist politics progressively fractured Indian society along religious lines, with Muslims facing growing social and political exclusion. Umar has said that growing up amid the marginalisation of his community sparked a flame for justice in him and made activism, for him, unavoidable.

For the last six years, Umar Khalid has been shackled behind bars for his leadership in the peaceful and democratic civil movement against the unconstitutional and anti-Muslim amendments to India’s citizenship laws. In

December 2019, the strongly right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government introduced the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which discriminates on the basis of religion by explicitly excluding Muslims from expedited access to citizenship and from legislative protection against deportation and imprisonment. The law, which accompanied an increasingly hostile climate of growing Hindu nationalism, threatens to disproportionately strip Muslims of documentation and legal status. Umar Khalid is seen as one of the key voices speaking out against this injustice.

THE PEAK OF 2019 PROTESTS

At the time, the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) campus, where Umar was a student, and celebrated historian and activist, became a focal point of opposition to the law, and protest movements sprouted from the campus. Despite



the risks, Umar Khalid travelled extensively across the country, bravely speaking out against the discriminatory laws, addressing numerous public meetings and protests, and inspiring others to stand up against the discrimination they were facing. Focusing on equality, constitutional secularism, democratic rights and freedom from discrimination, he argued that Indian citizenship should not be determined by religion. He consistently appealed for the protests to remain non-violent and rooted in solidarity rather than retaliation, even as the political and media environment around him grew increasingly hostile.

“We won’t respond to violence with violence. We won’t respond to hate with hate,” he told crowds in a now-famous speech.

“If they spread hate, we will respond to it with love.”³

In February 2020, following legislative assembly elections in Delhi, violence reached a peak, with widespread riots leaving 53 people dead — 38 of them Muslims — and hundreds injured. The Delhi Police arrested peaceful protesters, including at least 18 students and activists, the majority of them Muslims. They arrested Umar on 13 September 2020 at his family home, citing his public speeches as an instigation towards

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jun/30/umar-khalid-inter-view-six-years-indian-jail-without-trial-modi-opposition-political-prisoner>

violence, and accused him of being part of a wider conspiracy behind the riots. They charged him under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, along with numerous provisions of the Indian Penal Code, which has been aggressively used to target many human rights defenders in India.

AN EVER-PRESENT QUEST FOR JUSTICE

From a young age, Umar was always interested in the rights of minorities. He studied history at University of Delhi, before pursuing an MA, MPhil and PhD at JNU’s Centre for Historical Studies, with his academic and human rights work focusing on marginalised communities. He spoke up consistently for

the rights and dignity of Adivasis, Dalits and other marginalised communities, while also advocating for workers, farmers, students, and the right to accessible education and opportunities for every Indian regardless of their class, caste, religion, and gender.

Amid his doctoral studies at JNU, Umar became active in student politics and movements, defending students’ and citizens’ rights. In 2016, he was arrested on sedition charges for organising a programme at JNU to bring awareness to human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir. He spent 24 days in arbitrary detention. He became the subject of an intense defamation and smear campaign. Indian media branded him an “anti-national”

figure in extensive and hostile coverage. Umar describes this as a turning point in his life. The case, and the government's use of a sedition law against students, turned him into a prominent symbol of the debate over dissent, nationalism and freedom of expression in India. However, this only inspired him to fight harder against the injustice he was witnessing and experiencing.

In 2017, he then became one of the prominent faces of United Against Hate, a civil-society initiative that responded to communal violence, lynchings and hate crimes. Even though he was later suspended from JNU for a semester, he was determined to continue his crucial academic work. He eventually submitted his PhD thesis in 2018 after the Delhi High Court intervened when the university initially refused to accept it, showing that he would not back down in the face of injustice.

THE HIGH PRICE OF DISSENT

As Umar's public presence grew after his initial arrest, so did the threats against him. They got so serious that he had to seek out police protection. In August 2018, while attending an event near Constitution Club in New Delhi organised around the theme "Khauf Se Azaadi" (Freedom from Fear), a gunman opened fire at him. Luckily, he escaped unharmed.

However, the State wanted to demonstrate the consequences of dissent, and made an example of Umar and others, which eventually led to his re-arrest on 13 September 2020. He has remained behind bars in Tihar Jail ever since, making his one of the most prominent prolonged-pretrial-incarceration cases involving an Indian human rights defender. Courts have repeatedly rejected his applications for bail, including on January 2026, when the Supreme Court denied him bail once again and barred him from reapplying for one year. In the same judgment, bail was granted to several of his co-defendants.

Umar's prolonged and unresolved detention in harsh conditions illustrates a pattern documented across multiple UAPA-related cases of HRDs in India.

"Even those who sympathise with you, or portray you as someone larger than yourself, forget that I am a human being with my own share of vulnerabilities, fears and imperfections. And that these long years in prison have wreaked havoc on my mind and body and exacerbated all these anxieties within me," he said in an interview with the Guardian.⁴

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jun/30/umar-khalid-interview-six-years-indian-jail-without-trial-modi-opposition-political-prisoner>



Several major international human rights organisations, as well as the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, have repeatedly highlighted the injustice and illegality of Umar’s arrest and ongoing incarceration. He remains one of those voices under this authoritarian government whose continued imprisonment bears testimony to the times, the role of the media, the police, the use of draconian laws, the crushing of dissent and the targeting of individuals who speak up against injustice. Umar tries his best to remain positive behind bars while his family, friends and supporters advocate strongly for his release.





Ljiljana Nešić

INTRODUCTION

Ljiljana Nešić is a Serbian human rights defender, feminist, and peace activist who has advanced and protected women's rights for more than 33 years. At 62 years of age, she was born and raised in Leskovac, a city in southern Serbia. It is where she grew up, started a family, and carried out her life-changing human rights work which has positively impacted hundreds of women. Ljiljana has a deep love for her country and culture, and learned early on that where you are born can strongly determine your life opportunities, especially as a woman.

Throughout her career, she has been dedicated to supporting women victims of domestic and intimate partner violence, advocating for gender equality, women's safety, and access to justice, with a particular focus on women living in rural and marginalised communities in southern Serbia. She is now the President of Žene za mir

(Women For Peace), an association in Leskovac created to protect and promote women's rights, and she is seen as a true hero of her community.

Before identifying as a human rights defender, Ljiljana sees herself first as a woman and a mother, and it is these layers of her lived experience and identity which continue to influence her human rights work. She grew up in an environment where women were strong, hard-working, and resilient, but where their strength was often taken for granted, and their voices silenced by patriarchal norms. Generations of women in her family were taught to sacrifice, to put family and others before themselves, to stay silent in the face of violence and domestic abuse, and to leave what happens "behind closed doors" there. Over time, she realised that "silence is not peace. Silence sometimes just hides injustice." And that's why she chose to do something about it.

HOW IT STARTED

“My struggle for peace began the day I realised I couldn’t promise my children a future. The moment I looked them in the eyes and understood: I no longer had the right to be silent. It began in the silence, between two tears, as I watched the news and asked myself: how did we get here? Not here, not today, not while injustice spreads like smoke through the homes where women have stopped dreaming, and children are growing up too soon. It began when I refused to let hatred speak for me.”

Ljiljana’s human rights work has spanned more than three decades. She believes that human rights should not only be defended in big cities, institutions, and international halls, but that they need to begin at home — in a small village; in the home of a woman who can’t afford a bus fare; through a conversation with a victim of domestic abuse who is afraid for her life. In the 1990s, Serbia was deeply impacted by war, nationalism, fear, and political division. Ordinary people struggled with economic insecurity and social upheaval. Political elites transformed fear, economic collapse, and social insecurity into nationalism and hatred of others. Citizens were exposed to war propaganda every day and were expected not to ask questions, to accept the state-provided “official” truth, and to align themselves with the

nation. Critical thinking was branded as treason, opposition to war as weakness, and solidarity with people ‘on the other side’ as suspicious and undesirable. In this context, choosing to work on human rights and solidarity was not always easy or popular, but Ljiljana chose to speak up even when she was told to be silent.

During the Yugoslav wars, thousands of men from Jablanica district were forcibly recruited, and others volunteered to go to war. The men who resisted this mobilisation or conscientiously objected were branded cowards and traitors. Thousands of men returned from the war with intense trauma and PTSD which went untreated. This resulted in many cases of domestic violence perpetrated by soldiers who returned to Leskovac. In a society that glorified force and weapons, domestic violence was even more readily dismissed as a private matter. They were connected by the same pattern of power: one person assuming the right to control another person’s life, body and freedom. For years, Ljiljana worked with women who survived domestic and intimate partner violence. Women from rural areas, Roma women, women with disabilities, single mothers, and many other women. Ljiljana says she has heard stories that are hard to forget, but she has also seen something much greater.





INSPIRED TO TAKE ACTION

In 1994, she was part of creating the first-ever safe support space for women victims of abuse in Leskovac. She and nine other brave women came together in an informal group and established the first SOS hotline for women targeted by intimate partner violence. Their work was sorely needed, and from an informal start, they quickly developed further programmes, leading to the formal registration of an association called *Žene za mir* (“Women for Peace”) in 2007, of which she is now the proud President. The association now runs four programmes: support for women and girls who have experienced violence; empowerment of women and girls in rural areas through support points; women’s safety in public spaces; and

peace activism through UN Resolution 1325 — Women, Peace, and Security.

Outside of their crucial groundwork in the community and surrounding areas, under Ljiljana’s leadership, the organisation has pioneered contributions to policy change and implementation on women’s rights. They closely monitor the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality, Local Action Plan, National Action Plan on UN Resolution 1325: Women, Peace, and Security, and the standardisation of social protection services. Their work is well-respected internationally, demonstrated by the OSCE mission in Serbia and other donors supporting their projects.

THREATS

Ljiljana’s work, and that of Women For Peace, did not come without difficulties and costs in a political context where they were seen as threats to the status quo. Throughout the last 30 years, there have been numerous pressures, threats, defamation attempts, and situations where Ljiljana’s personal safety was in jeopardy. She has been detained and questioned multiple times under different political regimes for speaking out against forced mobilisation of men in wars, advocating for women’s rights and other issues which were contrary to state-backed ideologies or ideas.

Women for Peace members have been targeted at protests and public gatherings — there have been instances of groups of men coming to harass the women, throwing eggs at them, while police stood on the sidelines and did not intervene. The organisation’s email account and website were also hacked and email addresses, bank statements and website content were deleted. In 2022, a significant defamation campaign against the organisation was launched after they publicly criticised and questioned the launch of a new SOS hotline for domestic violence with questionable credentials, set up by an association whose president had twice been convicted of domestic violence himself.

Both online and offline, men have consistently insulted Ljiljana and other members of Women for Peace, and threatened them with violence, including sexual violence. The threats against Ljiljana extended to her family, making indirect threats against them.

The threats have increased significantly in the last few years, and she says she has never felt as unsafe in her work as she does now. In December 2025, her home was broken into and ransacked, but not many items taken, leading her to believe it was an act of intimidation.

A CONSISTENT BELIEF IN PERSEVERANCE AND COURAGE

However, Ljiljana says that every time fear tried to make her give up, she faced the same question: “If those of us who have a platform to speak are silenced, what is left for the women whose voices are almost never heard?” She did not give up, she explains, not because she is unafraid — she is afraid — but because courage means persevering despite the fear, because you truly believe in what you are doing.

She realised that she didn’t need to be part of the system in order to change it. Her activism truly began in the home, inspired by the right for her daughter not to have to choose between safety

and freedom; for her son and her grandson to grow up without repeating patriarchal norms; to know that a man’s strength lies not in dominating others, but in respect, and solidarity. And for her granddaughter to grow up knowing that her voice matters, that she doesn’t owe anyone obedience just because she’s a girl, and that she never has to accept violence, humiliation, or inequality as a normal part of life.

Ljiljana is the true definition of an activist and human rights defender whose values align through all areas of her life, and who inspires others to be courageous and fight for their rights. She wants a society in which both girls and boys will grow up free from violence, fear, discrimination, and unhealthy gender norms, and she is laying those foundations brick by brick, no matter how long it takes. Despite being close to retirement age, she is nowhere near close to stopping the fight for women’s rights.

She says, “If I could talk to the younger Ljiljana who started on this path more than three decades ago, I would tell her: it won’t be easy. Sometimes you’ll be tired. Sometimes you’ll be scared. Sometimes you’ll wonder if it all makes sense. But one day you’ll look at the women who have found their voice again, their children and their grandchildren, and you’ll know why you didn’t give up.”

“The deepest struggle is fought quietly, every day, with every thought, with every step that does not go backward. And that is my power... The power to remind the world that peace is not a luxury, but a right.”

“I have seen what happens when a woman who has spent years being told she doesn’t matter starts to believe in herself again. I have seen a woman who thought she had no choice realize she has rights. I have seen fear turn into determination, and isolation into solidarity. It is for these moments that I know why I do this work. I didn’t want to just be a witness to injustice. I wanted to change it.”

My message to the future defenders of human rights: I am addressing you, young people, not to tell you what to think, but to call on you not to give up. Let your courage be gentle.

“Let your word be a bridge. And let your heart never settle for a world where women are silent and peace is a privilege. That is why I speak today: activism knows no borders; it erases them.”



LJILJANA NEŠIĆ

Srbija, Evropa i centralna azija

UVOD

Ljiljana Nešić je srpska braniteljka ljudskih prava, feministkinja i mirovna aktivistkinja koja unapređuje i štiti ženska prava već više od 33 godine. Sa 62 godine, rođena je i odrasla u Leskovcu, gradu na jugu Srbije. Tu je odrastala, zasnovala porodicu i započela svoj životno važan rad na ljudskim pravima koji je pozitivno uticao na stotine žena. Ljiljana duboko voli svoju zemlju i kulturu i rano je naučila da mesto rođenja može snažno da odredi životne prilike, posebno za žene. Tokom svoje karijere posvetila se podršci ženama žrtvama porodično i partnersko nasilje, zalažući se za rodnu ravnopravnost, bezbednost žena i pristup pravdi, sa posebnim fokusom na žene koje žive u ruralnim i marginalizovanim zajednicama na jugu Srbije. Sada je predsednica udruženja Žene za mir (Women For Peace) u Leskovcu, osnovanog radi zaštite i unapređenja ženskih prava, i smatra se pravom heroinom svoje zajednice.

Pre nego što se prepoznala kao braniteljka ljudskih prava, Ljiljana sebe vidi pre svega kao ženu i majku, i upravo ti slojevi njenog životnog iskustva i identiteta i dalje utiču na njen rad u oblasti ljudskih prava. Odrasla je u okruženju u kome žene bile snažne, vredne i izdržljive, ali u ko se njihova snaga često podrazumevala, a njihovi glasovi utišavali patrijarhalnim normama. Generacije žena u njenoj porodici učene su da se žrtvuju, da porodicu i druge stavljaju ispred sebe, da ćute pred nasiljem i zlostavljanjem

u porodici i da ono što se dešava „iza zatvorenih vrata“ tu i ostane. Vremenom je shvatila da „ćutanje nije mir. Ćutanje ponekad samo skriva nepravdu.“ I zato je odlučila da nešto preduzme.

KAKO JE POČELO

„Moja borba za mir počela je onog dana kada sam shvatila da ne mogu da obećam svojoj deci budućnost. U trenutku kada sam ih pogledala u oči i razumela da više nemam prav da ćutim. Počela je u tišini, između dve suze, dok sam gledala vesti i pitala se: kako smo dospeli do ovde? Ne ovde, ne danas, ne dok se nepravda širi kao dim kroz domove u kojima su žene prestale da sanjaju, a deca prerano odrastaju. Počela je kada sam odbila da mržnja govori umesto mene.“

Ljiljanin rad na ljudskim pravima traje više od tri decenije. Veruje da se ljudska prava ne brane samo u velikim gradovima, institucijama i međunarodnim salama, već da moraju da počnu kod kuće — u malom selu; u domu žene koja nema novca ni za autobusku kartu; kroz razgovor sa žrtvom porodičnog nasilja koja strahuje za svoj život. Devedesetih godina Srbija je bila duboko pogođena ratom, nacionalizmom, strahom i političkim podelama. Obični ljudi su se suočavali sa ekonomskom nesigurnošću i društvenim previranjima. Političke elite pretvarale su strah, ekonomsku propast i društvenu nesigurnost u nacionalizam i mržnju prema drugima. Građani su svakodnevno bili izloženi ratnoj propagandi i od njih se očekivalo da ne postavljaju pitanja, da prihvate državnu „zvaničnu“ istinu i da se svrstaju uz naciju. Kritičko mišljenje proglašavano je izdajom, protivljenje ratu slabošću, a solidarnost sa ljudima „sa druge strane“

sumnjivom i nepoželjnom. U tom kontekstu, odluka da radi na ljudskim pravima i solidarnosti nije uvek bila laka ni popularna, ali je Ljiljana odlučila da progovori čak i kada su joj govorili da ćuti.

Tokom ratova u Jugoslaviji, hiljade muškaraca iz Jablaničkog okruga bili su prisilno mobilisani, dok su se drugi dobrovoljno prijavili da odu u rat i kao vojnici brane svoju zemlju. Muškarci koji su se opirali mobilizaciji ili prigovorili savesti bili su proglašavani kukavicama i izdajnicima. Hiljade muškaraca vratile se iz rata sa teškim traumama i PTSP-om koji je ostao nelečen. To je dovelo do brojnih slučajeva porodičnog nasilja koje su činili vojnici koji su se vratili u Leskovac. U društvu koje je veličalo silu i oružje, porodično nasilje još lakše se odbacivalo kao privatn . Povezivao ih je isti obrazac moći: jedna osoba prisvaja pravo da kontroliše tuđi život, telo i slobodu. Godinama je Ljiljana radila sa ženama koje su preživele porodično i partnersko nasilje. Žene iz ruralnih sredina, Romkinje, žene sa invaliditetom, samohrane majke i mnoge druge žene. Ljiljana kaže da je čula priče koje je teško zaboraviti, ali da je videla i nešto mnogo veće.

INSPIRISANA DA PREDUZME AKCIJU

Godine 1994. učestvovala je u stvaranju prvog sigurnog prostora podrške za žene žrtve nasilja u Leskovcu. Ona i još devet hrabrih žena okupile su se u neformalnu grupu i uspostavile prvu SOS liniju za žene koje su mete partnerskog nasilja. Njihov rad je bio preko potreban i, od neformalnog početka, brzo su razvile dodatne programe, što je dovelo do zvanične registracije udruženja pod nazivom Žene za mir (“Women for Peace”) 2007. godine, čija je ona sada ponosna predsednica. Udruženje danas vodi četiri programa: podršku ženama i devojčicama koje su preživele nasilje; osnaživanje žena i devojčica u

ruralnim sredinama kroz punktove podrške; bezbednost žena u javnim prostorima; i mirovni aktivizam kroz UN Rezoluciju 1325 — Žene, mir i bezbednost.

Pored ključnog rada na terenu u zajednici i okolnim područjima, pod Ljiljaninim vođstvom organizacija je bila pionir u doprinosu promenama politika i njihovoj primeni u oblasti ženskih prava. Pažljivo prate sprovođenje Zakona o rodnoj ravnopravnosti, Lokalnog akcionog plana, Nacionalnog akcionog plana za primenu UN Rezolucije 1325: Žene, mir i bezbednost, i standardizaciju usluga socijalne zaštite. Njihov rad je visoko cenjen na međunarodnom nivou, o čemu svedoči podrška Misije OEBS-a u Srbiji i drugih donatora njihovim projektima.

PRETNJE

Ljiljanin rad, kao i rad udruženja Women For Peace, nije prošao bez teškoća i posledica u političkom kontekstu u kome su viđene kao pretnja postojećem stanju. Tokom poslednjih 30 godina bilo je brojnih pritisaka, pretnji, pokušaja klevete i situacija u kojima je lična bezbednost Ljiljane bila ugrožena. Više puta je bila zadržavana i ispitivana pod različitim političkim režimima, zato što je javno govorila protiv prisilne mobilizacije muškaraca u ratovima, zalažući se za ženska prava i druga pitanja koja su bila suprotna državnim ideologijama ili idejama.

Članice udruženja Women for Peace bile su mete napada na protestima i javnim okupljanjima — bilo je slučajeva da grupe muškaraca dolaze da uznemiravaju žene, gađaju ih jajima, dok je policija stajala po strani i nije reagovala. Email nalog i veb-sajt organizacije takođe su bili hakovani, a email adrese, bankovni izvodi i sadržaj sajta obrisani. Godine 2022. pokrenuta je ozbiljna kampanja klevetanja protiv organizacije nakon što su javno kritikovali i doveli u

pitanje pokretanje nove SOS linije za porodično nasilje s upitnim referencama, koju je osnovalo udruženje čiji je predsednik dva puta bio osuđivan za porodično nasilje.

I na internetu i van njega, muškarci su uporno vređali Ljiljanu i druge članice Women for Peace i pretili im nasiljem, uključujući seksualno nasilje. Pretnje upućene Ljiljani proširile su se i na njenu porodicu, kroz posredne pretnje njima.

Pretnje su se poslednjih godina značajno pojačale i kaže da se nikada nije osećala tako nesigurno u svom radu kao sada. U decembru 2025. godine, njen dom je obijen i ispreturan, ali nije ukradeno mnogo stvari, što ju je navelo da poveruje da je reč o aktu zastrašivanja.

DOSLEDNA VERA U ISTRAJNOST I HRABROST

Međutim, Ljiljana kaže da je svaki put kada je strah pokušao da je natera da odustane, sebi postavljala isto pitanje: „ako se nas, koje imamo platformu da govorimo, učutka, šta onda ostaje ženama čiji se glas gotovo nikada ne čuje?” Kaže da nije odustala ne zato što se ne plaši — plaši se — već zato što je hrabrost kada istrajavaš uprkos strahu, jer zaista veruješ u to što radiš.

Shvatila je da ne mora da bude deo sistema da bi ga menjala. Njen aktivizam je zaista počeo u domu, inspirisan pravom njene ćerke da ne mora da bira između bezbednosti i slobode; pravom njenog sina i unuka da odrastaju a da ne ponavljaju patrijarhalne norme; da znaju da snaga muškarca ne leži u dominaciji nad drugima, već u poštovanju i solidarnosti. I pravom njene unuke da odrasta znajući da se njen glas računa, da

nikome ne duguje poslušnost samo zato što je devojčica i da nikada ne mora da prihvati nasilje, poniženje ili nejednakost kao normalan deo života.

Ljiljana je prava definicija aktivistkinje i braniteljke ljudskih prava čije su vrednosti usklađene u svim oblastima njenog života i koja inspiriše druge da budu hrabri i bore se za svoja prava. Želi društvo u koje i devojčice i dečaci odrastati oslobođeni nasilja, straha, diskriminacije i nezdravih rodni normi, i te temelje postavlja ciglu po ciglu, bez obzira na to koliko će trajati. Iako je blizu penzionerskih godina, nimalo ne usporava u borbi za ženska prava.

Kaže: „kada bih mogla da razgovaram sa mlađom Ljiljanom koja je krenula ovim putem pre više od tri decenije, rekla bih joj: Neće biti lako. Ponekad ćeš biti umorna. Ponekad ćeš se plašiti. Ponekad ćeš se pitati da li sve to ima smisla. Ali jednog dana gledaćeš žene koje su ponovo pronašle svoj glas, njihovu decu i unuke i znaćeš zašto nisi odustala.’

„Najdublja borba vodi se tiho, svakog dana, svakom mišlju, svakim korakom koji ne ide unazad. I to je moja moć... Moć da podsetim svet da mir nije luksuz, već pravo.’

„Videla sam šta se dešava kada žena koja je godinama slušala da nije važna ponovo počne da veruje u sebe. Videla sam ženu koja je mislila da nema izbora kako shvata da ima prava. Videla sam kako se strah pretvara u odlučnost, a izolacija u solidarnost. Zbog tih trenutaka znam zašto radim ovaj posao. Nisam želela samo da budem svedok nepravde. Želela sam da je promenim.”

Moja poruka budućim braniteljima i braniteljicama ljudskih prava: Obraćam vam se, mladi ljudi, ne da vam kažem šta da mislite, već da vas pozovem da ne odustanete. Neka vaša hrabrost bude nežna. Neka vaša reč bude most. I neka se vaše srce nikada ne pomiri sa

svetom u kome žene čute, a mir je privilegija. Zato danas govorim: aktivizam ne poznaje granice; on ih briše.





Ahmadreza Haeri

A LIFE DEDICATED TO HUMAN DIGNITY

Ahmadreza Haeri is an Iranian Kurdish human rights defender and anti-death penalty campaigner who has dedicated his life to defending the dignity and fundamental rights of others. On 9 September 2026, he was released after over three and a half years of imprisonment, during which neither physical assault, solitary confinement nor judicial harassment succeeded in silencing his courageous defence of prisoners' rights, including their right to life.

Ahmadreza is one of the initiators of the "No to Death Penalty on Tuesdays" campaign, a grass roots, prisoner-led movement against prisoner executions in Iran. Each Tuesday, prisoners protest against the death penalty and their fellow inmates being deprived their right to life through the executions, often scheduled on Wednesdays.

As a prisoner himself in the recent past, Ahmadreza has become well known for his human rights work within prison. He never allowed his confinement to stop his voice from reaching beyond prison walls. Through his documentation, advocacy and determination to keep prisoners' stories alive, Ahmadreza remains a powerful force within Iran's human rights movement.

AN UNWAVERING BELIEF IN JUSTICE

Ahmadreza was born in 1980 in Mehran, one of Iran's westernmost cities. However, the life his family built in Mehran was short lived. Kurdish-speaking and raised in a highly tense geopolitical environment, his childhood was shaped by the Iran-Iraq war, with his family subsequently losing their home and becoming internally displaced. He also lost loved ones during the war, including his beloved uncle, a teacher who went to the front lines and died for his country.



The political situation for human rights defenders in Iran remains dangerous: highly restrictive authorities continue to treat peaceful human rights work, criticism of the government, and protest activity as national-security breaches, exposing defenders to arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, torture, unfair trials, travel restrictions and the death penalty. During the most recent armed conflict with Israel and the US, Iran intensified arrests and attacks on HRDs even more. Hundreds of individuals, including protesters, social media users, journalists, human rights defenders, foreign nationals—particularly Afghans—and members of ethnic and religious minorities such as Bahá'ís, Kurds, Balouchis and Ahwazi Arabs, have been detained on accusations of “national security” or “espionage” which can be punished by death sentence under the July 2025 Amendments to the Espionage law.



From an early age, Ahmadreza was politically sensitised and developed an unwavering belief in democracy, justice and human freedom. But his family's life and political circumstances changed when his father was elected as Ilam member of the third Parliament and they moved to Tehran.

Initially wanting to pursue politics, he believed that the reform of the authoritarian Islamic Republic was possible. Together with friends, Ahmadreza established a formal student organisation during his graduate studies in political science at Kharazmi University. In Tehran, they took part in political reformist activities and, through meetings and gatherings, they sought to promote democracy and secularism. Although government repression and other challenges ultimately prevented these efforts from succeeding, it did not weaken Ahmadreza's commitment to human rights.



In May 2014, Ahmadreza was arrested after a house raid and held for two weeks in solitary confinement in Evin Prison for his activism. His lawyers helped to reduce his initial 3.5 year prison, sentence to six months.

The suppression of popular protests in 2019 eventually caused Ahmadreza to begin to lose hope that politics was the most viable route to reform, and led him to suspend his political activities and turn fully towards human rights work. Also studying politics while at university, he eventually came to understand the complexity of pursuing human rights principles in a system where state control extends over political activity and people's everyday lives. Ahmadreza believes that the erosion of judicial independence is among the system's most serious consequences, making justice difficult to secure and human rights defence particularly dangerous.



A DEEPER MISSION

A decisive turning point came with the brutal suppression of the November 2019 protests, an expression of widespread anger over government repression and corruption. Authorities imposed a near-total internet shutdown and carried out one of the country's most severe crackdowns in decades, during which hundreds of protesters are estimated to have been killed.

Ahmadreza organised numerous protest gatherings as the representative of the families of the political prisoners, including his brother who was held in Evin Prison on a two-year sentence for his student activism. Shortly afterwards, as the state cracked down on HRDs in 2019, Ahmadreza was arrested in connection with a court case ongoing since 2014. While detained in Greater Tehran Prison,

Ahmadreza heard first-hand accounts of the crimes committed during the 2019 crackdown and the indiscriminate shooting of, and violence against, unarmed people. His political activism subsequently developed into an even deeper human rights mission — one not only active outside prison walls, but defending the voices of those inside as well.

KEEPING PRISONERS’ STORIES ALIVE

Ahmadreza has spent over four years of his life in prison. Yet this has only inspired him to continue his work despite the harsh conditions he faced behind bars. He used the time to listen to prisoners, document their experiences and ensure their stories reach the outside world. This prevents the state from silencing their voices and provides an accurate picture of human rights violations in Iran.

Between his release in 2020 and subsequent re-arrest later, Ahmadreza wrote about the injustices suffered by fellow political prisoners, spoke repeatedly to the media and worked to keep public attention on their situation.

His activism has taken both personal and collective forms. In one case, he refused to appear before a court in proceedings brought against him due to his human rights activities under detention. This personal act of protest was intended to draw attention to people who

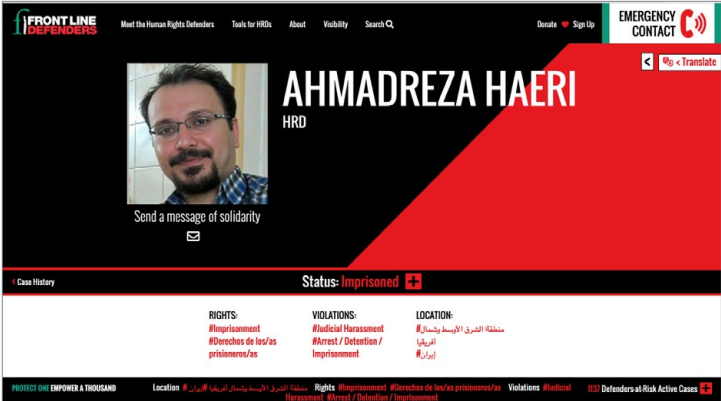
remained imprisoned following the November 2019 protests. He maintained his position, demonstrating how individual initiatives can advance a wider collective cause.

PUTTING ONE’S BODY ON THE LINE FOR LIFE

While in prison, Ahmadreza became a prominent voice within the “No to Death Penalty on Tuesdays” campaign, helping to amplify its courageous opposition to executions and extend its reach to the broader society. For years, Iran has typically been among the world’s most prolific state executioner, and executions spiked in 2025, with at least 2,159 people hanged, according to Amnesty International.

On 28 January 2024, the campaign released its first statement condemning the rise in executions. They warned that prisoners faced imminent execution without fair trials or adequate legal representation, and pledged to begin a hunger strike every Tuesday, which is normally the day that prisoners condemned to death are transferred to solitary confinement before being hanged the following day.

The first act of protest in the form of a hunger strike took place two days later, when 10 political prisoners joined the protest and vowed to continue until justice prevailed. What began in Ghezel Hesar grew into the most sustained



organised protest ever against the death penalty in Iran's prisons.

Prisoners across tens of prisons now participate in the weekly hunger strikes despite severe security pressure, threats, punitive measures and restrictions on their communications with the outside world. By putting their own bodies on the line, they have transformed their physical vulnerability into a powerful collective defence of human dignity and the right to life.

The campaign has gained momentum across Iran and increasing international recognition. Prisoners, their families and wider public opinion have helped to carry its message far and wide. In October 2026, it reaches its 140th week — over two and a half years — a remarkable demonstration of the prisoners' endurance and society's growing response to their call for justice. One of its most important achievements was raising awareness among prisoners themselves, their families and society more broadly that execution is not, and has never been, a solution to social problems.

For me, these efforts against executions are among the most important parts of my human rights work," said Ahmadreza.

THE COST OF COURAGE

"If you are determined to defend human rights in Iran, you may have to experience almost every kind of challenge."

Since his early years of activism, Ahmadreza has endured arrest, imprisonment, solitary confinement, surveillance, interrogation, defamation, judicial harassment, and physical violence. He has, like many other Iranian HRDs, had numerous trumped-up charges against him such as "propaganda against the state", "gathering and collusion with the intention of acting against national security," and others.

When Ahmadreza exposed the mock execution of Saman Yasin, a Kurdish rapper arrested and sentenced to death in connection with Iran's 2022 "Women, Life, Freedom" mass protests, state-controlled media outlets accused him of lying, and a new legal case was brought against him for allegedly spreading false information.

During the violent crackdown of July 2025, known among prisoners as "Black Saturday" at Ghezel Hesar Prison, prison authorities raided the political ward, beating and transferring prisoners. Ahmadreza was assaulted, stripped, handcuffed and placed once more in solitary

confinement. Two fellow prisoners were separated from the group and executed that night. Surviving prisoners said they believed the raid was in retaliation for their campaign and activism within prison.

Outside prison, he has faced continuing surveillance, interrogations and arrests, as well as attempts to persuade him to abandon his work through political and financial offers. The authorities have also harassed his family in attempts to deter him from his work,

"One of the most difficult aspects of being a human rights defender is the pressure placed on your family," Ahmadreza said. "Every unexpected knock on the door, every anonymous telephone call and every repeated summons can create fear and anxiety for those closest to you."

A POWERFUL FORCE FOR CHANGE

On 9 September 2026, Ahmadreza was released from Qezel-Hesar prison. Five criminal cases were brought against him while in detention, however; he is now fully acquitted of all charges against him. Despite the immense personal cost, Ahmadreza remains resolved; he is deeply committed to his homeland and acquiring justice

for all those who belong to it. His work, alongside that of other Iranian defenders, has contributed to greater awareness of human rights in Iran and increased solidarity among other human rights defenders.

The courageous action of prisoners through the "No to Death Penalty on Tuesdays" campaign has carried the call for justice beyond prison walls, reaching families, activists and communities across Iran and around the world.

Ahadreza's relentless commitment ensures that violations committed in Iran's prisons are documented, that those harmed by repression are not abandoned, and that the right to life remains at the heart of Iran's human rights movement. For him, this struggle is the clearest expression of his lifelong belief in human dignity.

“They are seeking death, while we are fighting for life. I am certain that in our struggle for the right to life, there is no defeat.”

زندگی وقف کرامت انسانی

احمد رضا حائری مدافع حقوق بشر کرد ایرانی و فعال ضد اعدام است که زندگی خود را وقف دفاع از کرامت و حقوق بنیادین دیگران کرده است. در ۱۷ شهریور ۱۴۰۵، او پس از بیش از سه سال و نیم زندان آزاد شد، در این مدت، نه آزار جسمی، نه سلول انفرادی و نه آزار قضایی نتوانستند دفاع شجاعانه او از حقوق زندانیان، از جمله حق حیات، را خاموش کنند.

احمد رضا یکی از بنیان‌گذاران کمپین «سه‌شنبه‌های نه به اعدام» است، جنبشی مردمی و ریشه‌دار که توسط زندانیان علیه اعدام زندانیان در ایران رهبری می‌شود. هر سه‌شنبه، زندانیان در اعتراض به حکم اعدام و محروم شدن هم‌بندان‌شان از حق حیات از طریق اعدام‌هایی که اغلب در روز چهارشنبه برنامه‌ریزی می‌شوند، اعتراض می‌کنند.

احمد رضا خود در گذشته زندانی بوده است، به‌خاطر فعالیت‌های حقوق بشری‌اش در زندانشناخته شده است. او هرگز اجازه نداد که حبس، مانع از رسیدن صدایش فراتر از دیوارهای زندان شود. از طریق مستندسازی، حمایت‌گری و عزم راسخ برای زنده نگه داشتن داستان‌های زندانیان، احمد رضا همچنان نیرویی قدرتمند در جنبش حقوق بشر ایران باقی مانده است.

باوری راسخ به عدالت

احمد رضا در سال ۱۳۶۰ در مهران، یکی از غربی‌ترین شهرهای ایران، متولد شد. با این حال، زندگی‌ای که خانواده‌اش در مهران ساخته بودند، کوتاه‌مدت بود. او که کردزبان بود و در یک محیط ژئوپلیتیکی بسیار پرتنش بزرگ شده بود، کودکی‌اش تحت تأثیر جنگ ایران و عراق شکل گرفت و خانواده‌اش متعاقباً خانه‌شان را در جنگ از دست دادند و آواره‌بیشدند. او همچنین در طول جنگ عزیزانش را از دست داد، از جمله دایی عزیزش، معلمی که به خط مقدم رفت و برای کشورش جان باخت.

وضعیت سیاسی برای مدافعان حقوق بشر در ایران همچنان خطرناک است؛ مقامات کار مسالمت‌آمیز حقوق بشری را سرکوب می‌کنند، و انتقاد از دولت و فعالیت‌های اعتراضی را به عنوان نقض امنیت ملی تلقی می‌کنند، مدافعان حقوق بشر را در معرض بازداشت خودسرانه، ناپدیدسازی اجباری، شکنجه، محاکمات ناعادلانه، محدودیت‌های سفر و مجازات اعدام قرار می‌دهند. در طول جنگ‌های اخیر با اسرائیل و ایالات متحده، مقامات ایران، بازداشت‌ها و حملات به مدافعان حقوق بشر را بیش از پیش تشدید کردند. صدها نفر، از جمله معترضان، کاربران شبکه‌های اجتماعی، روزنامه‌نگاران، مدافعان حقوق بشر، اتباع خارجی - به‌ویژه افغان‌ها - و اعضای اقلیت‌های قومی و مذهبی مانند بهائیان، کردها، بلوچ‌ها و اعراب اهوازی، به اتهامات «امنیت ملی» یا «جاسوسی» بازداشت شده‌اند که طبق اصلاحات قانون جاسوسی در تابستان ۱۴۰۴، مجازات آن می‌تواند اعدام باشد.

احمد رضا از سنین پایین از نظر سیاسی فعال شد و ایمانی راسخ به دموکراسی، عدالت و آزادی انسان پیدا کرد. اما زندگی و شرایط سیاسی خانواده‌اش زمانی تغییر کرد که پدرش به عنوان نماینده ایلام در سومین دوره مجلس انتخاب شدو آنها به تهران نقل مکان کردند.

او در ابتدا که قصد داشت وارد سیاست شود، معتقد بود اصلاح نظام جمهوری اسلامی اقتدارگرا ممکن است. احمد رضا به همراه دوستانش در حین تحصیل کارشناسی ارشد در علوم سیاسی یک سازمان دانشجویی رسمی در دانشگاه خوارزمی تأسیس کرد. در تهران، آنها در فعالیت‌های اصلاح‌طلبانه سیاسی شرکت کردند و از طریق جلسات و گردهمایی‌ها، در تلاش برای ترویج دموکراسی و سکولاریسم بودند. اگر چه سرکوب دولتی و چالش‌های دیگر در نهایت مانع از موفقیت این تلاش‌ها شد، اما این امر تعهد احمد رضا به حقوق بشر را تضعیف نکرد.

در اردیبهشت ۱۳۹۳، احمد رضا پس از یورش به خانه‌اش به دلیل فعالیت‌هایش دستگیر و به مدت دو هفته در سلول انفرادی زندان اوین نگهداری شد. وکلای او به کاهش حکم اولیه زندان او از سه سال و نیم به شش ماه کمک کردند.

سرکوب اعتراضات مردمی در سال ۱۳۹۸ خورشیدی در نهایت باعث شد که احمد رضا امید خود را به سیاست به عنوان قابل‌اجرترین مسیر برای اصلاحات از دست

بدهد و او را بر آن داشت تا فعالیت‌های سیاسی خود را متوقف کرده و کاملاً به سمت فعالیت‌های حقوق بشری روی آورد. او که در دانشگاه نیز در رشته سیاست تحصیل می‌کرد، در نهایت به دشواری‌های پیگیری اصول حقوق بشر در سیستمی پی برد که دولت تمام فعالیت‌های سیاسی و زندگی روزمره مردم را به صورت گسترده کنترل می‌کند. احمد رضا معتقد است که فروپاشی استقلال قضایی از جدی‌ترین پیامدهای این نظام است که تأمین عدالت را دشوار و دفاع از حقوق بشر را به‌ویژه خطرناک می‌سازد.

مأموریتی عمیق‌تر

یک نقطه عطف سرنوشت‌ساز با سرکوب وحشیانه اعتراضات آبان ۱۳۹۸ فرا رسید؛ اعتراضاتی که بیانگر خشم گسترده نسبت به سرکوب و فساد دولتی بود. مقامات اینترنت را به طور کامل قطع کردند و یکی از شدیدترین سرکوب‌های کشور در دهه‌های اخیر را به اجرا گذاشتند که در طی آن تخمین زده می‌شود صدها معترض کشته شده باشند.

احمد رضا به عنوان نماینده خانواده‌های زندانیان سیاسی، از جمله برادرش که به دلیل فعالیت‌های دانشجویی‌اش در زندان اوین در حال تحمل دو سال زندان بود، گردهمایی‌های اعتراضی متعددی را سازماندهی کرد. مدت کوتاهی پس از آن، در حالی که دولت در سال ۱۳۹۸ به سرکوب فعالان حقوق بشر می‌پرداخت، احمد رضا در

ارتباط با پرونده‌ای که از سال ۱۳۹۳ در جریان بود، دستگیر شد. احمد رضا در حین بازداشت در زندان بزرگ تهران، روایت‌های دست‌اولی از جنایات ارتکاب یافته در جریان سرکوب سال ۹۸ و تیراندازی بی‌رویه و خشونت علیه مردم بی‌سلاح را شنید. فعالیت سیاسی او بعدها به مأموریتی عمیق‌تر در زمینه حقوق بشر تبدیل شد؛ مأموریتی که نه تنها در خارج از دیوارهای زندان فعال بود، بلکه از صداهای کسانی که در داخل آن بودند نیز دفاع می‌کرد.

زنده نگه داشتن روایت‌های زندانیان

احمد رضا بیش از چهار سال از عمر خود را در زندان گذرانده است. با این حال، این امر تنها الهام‌بخش او برای ادامه کارش بوده است، علی‌رغم شرایط سختی که در زندان با آن روبرو بوده است. او از این زمان برای گوش دادن به زندانیان استفاده کرد، و به مستند کردن تجربیات، شان پرداخت تا اطمینان حاصل شود که داستان‌های، شان به دنیای خارج برسد کاری که مانع از ساکت کردن صدای آنها توسط دولت می‌شود و تصویری دقیق از نقض حقوق بشر در ایران ارائه می‌دهد.

احمد رضا در فاصله بین آزادی‌اش در سال ۱۳۹۴ و دستگیری مجددش پس از آن، درباره بی‌عدالتی‌هایی که بر هم‌پندان سیاسی‌اش رفته بود نوشت، بارها با رسانه‌ها صحبت کرد و برای جلب توجه عمومی به وضعیت آن‌ها تلاش کرد.

فعالیت‌های او هم به شکل فردی و هم جمعی بوده است. در یکی از موارد، او از حضور در دادگاهی که به دلیل فعالیت‌های حقوق بشری‌اش در دوران بازداشت علیه‌ش تشکیل شده بود، امتناع کرد. این اقدام اعتراضی فردی با هدف جلب توجه به افرادی بود که در پی اعتراضات نوامبر آبان ۹۸ هم‌چنان در زندان باقی مانده بودند. او بر موضع خود پافشاری کرد و نشان داد که چگونه ابتکارات فردی می‌تواند یک هدف جمعی گسترده‌تر را پیش ببرد.

فدا کردن جان برای زندگی

احمد رضا در زندان، به یکی از صداهای برجسته در کمپین «سه‌شنبه‌های نه به اعدام» تبدیل شد و به تقویت مخالفت شجاعانه این کمپین با اعدام‌ها و گسترش دامنه آن در جامعه کمک کرد. ایران سال‌هاست که معمول آیکی از بالاترین نرخ اعدام در میان دیگر کشورهای جهان را به خود اختصاص داده است و طبق گزارش دیده‌بان حقوق بشر، اعدام‌ها در سال ۲۰۲۵ با به دار آویختن دست‌کم ۲۱۵۹ نفر، افزایش چشمگیری یافت.

در هشتم بهمن ۱۴۰۲، این کمپین اولین بیانیه خود را برای محکومیت افزایش اعدام‌ها منتشر کرد. آن‌ها هشدار دادند که زندانیان بدون دسترسی به محاکمه عادلانه یا وکیل مدافع مناسب، با خطر اعدام قریب‌الوقوع مواجه هستند و متعهد شدند که هر سه‌شنبه، روز انتقال محکومان به اعدام به انفرادی پیش از اعدام در روز بعد، اقدامی اعتراضی چون اعتصاب غذا انجام دهند.

اولین اقدام اعتراضی به شکل اعتصاب غذا دو روز بعد رخ داد، زمانی که ۱۰ زندانی سیاسی به این اعتراض پیوستند و متعهد شدند تا زمان حاکم شدن عدالت به اعتراض ادامه دهند. آنچه در زندان قزل‌حصار آغاز شد، به پایدارترین اعتراض سازمان‌یافته علیه مجازات اعدام در زندان‌های ایران تبدیل شد.

زندانیان در ده‌ها زندان اکنون علی‌رغم فشار امنیتی شدید، تهدیدها، اقدامات تنبیهی و محدودیت‌ها در ارتباطاتشان با دنیای خارج، در اعتراض و اعتصابات غذای هفتگی شرکت می‌کنند. آنها با به خطر انداختن جان خود، آسیب‌پذیری جسمانی‌شان را به یک دفاع جمعی قدرتمند از کرامت انسانی و حق حیات تبدیل کرده‌اند.

این کارزار زندان‌های سراسر ایران را فرا گرفته و به شناخت بین‌المللی فزاینده‌ای دست یافته است. زندانیان، خانواده‌هایشان و افکار عمومی گسترده‌تر به رساندن پیام آن به دورترین نقاط کمک کرده‌اند. در مهرماه ۱۴۰۵، ۱۴۰ هفته‌ای خواهد بود که این کارزار - بعد از بیش از دو سال و نیم - نمایشی قابل توجه از استقامت زندانیان و پاسخ فزاینده جامعه به ندای عدالت‌خواهی آن‌ها خواهد بود. یکی از مهم‌ترین دستاوردهای آن، افزایش آگاهی در میان خود زندانیان، خانواده‌هایشان و جامعه به طور کلی بود که اعدام نه یک راه‌حل برای مشکلات اجتماعی است و نه هرگز بوده است. به قول احمد رضا: «برای من، این تلاش‌ها علیه اعدام‌ها از مهم‌ترین بخش‌های فعالیت حقوق بشری‌ام هستند.»

هزینه شجاعت

«اگر مصمم باشید که از حقوق بشر در ایران دفاع کنید، ممکن است تقریباً هر نوع چالشی را تجربه کنید.»

احمد رضا از سال‌های اولیه فعالیت خود، دستگیری، زندان، انفرادی، تحت نظر بودن، بازجویی، تهمت، آزار قضایی و خشونت فیزیکی را تحمل کرده است. او نیز مانند بسیاری از مدافعان حقوق بشر ایرانی، با اتهامات ساختگی متعددی مانند «تبلیغ علیه نظام»، «اجتماع و تبانی به قصد اقدام علیه امنیت ملی» و اتهامات دیگر مواجه شده است.

زمانی که احمد رضا به اعدام نمایشی سامان یاسین، رپر کردی که در ارتباط با اعتراضات سراسری «زن، زندگی، آزادی» در سال ۱۴۰۱ ایران دستگیر و محکوم به اعدام شده بود، اعتراض کرد، رسانه‌های تحت کنترل دولت او را به دروغ‌گویی متهم کردند و یک پرونده حقوقی جدید به اتهام انتشار اطلاعات نادرست علیه او تشکیل شد.

در جریان سرکوب خشونت‌آمیز مرداد ۱۴۰۴، که در میان زندانیان به «شنبه سیاه» در زندان قزل‌حصار معروف است، مقامات زندان به بخش سیاسی زندان یورش برده و زندانیان را مورد ضرب و شتم قرار دادند و به سلول انفرادی منتقل کردند. احمد رضا مورد حمله قرار گرفت، لباس‌هایش دریده شد، به او از پشت دستبند زده شد و بار دیگر به سلول انفرادی منتقل شد. دو تن از هم‌پندان‌ش



هنگفت، مصمم و استوار باقی مانده است؛ او عمیقاً به وطن خود و برقراری عدالت برای تمام کسانی که به آن تعلق دارند، متعهد است. فعالیت او در کنار دیگر مدافعان حقوق بشر ایرانی، به افزایش آگاهی در مورد حقوق بشر در ایران و تقویت همبستگی میان دیگر مدافعان حقوق بشر کمک کرده است . اقدام شجاعانه زندانیان از طریق کمپین «سه‌شنبه‌های نه به اعدام» فریاد عدالت را فراتر از دیوارهای زندان برده و به خانواده‌ها، فعالان و جوامع سراسر ایران و جهان رسانده‌است .

تعهد خستگی‌ناپذیر احمد رضا سبب می‌شود نقض حقوق در زندان‌های ایران مستندسازی شود، کسانی که از سرکوب آسیب دیده‌اند رها نشوند و حق حیات در قلب جنبش حقوق بشر ایران باقی بماند. برای او، این مبارزه روشن‌ترین ابراز باور همیشگی او به کرامت انسانی است.

«آن‌ها در پی مرگ هستند، در حالی که ما برای زندگی می‌جنگیم. من مطمئنم که در مبارزه ما برای حق زندگی، هیچ شکستی وجود ندارد.»

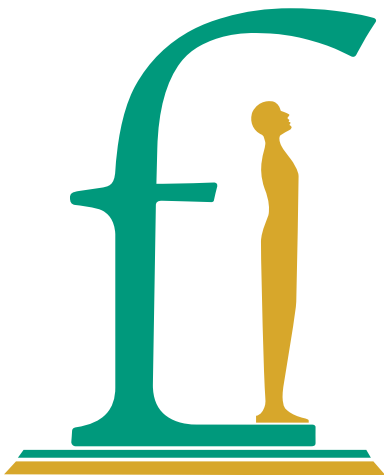
از گروه جدا و در همان شب اعدام شدند. زندانیان بازمانده گفتند که معتقد بودند این یورش در تلافی کارزار و فعالیت‌های آن‌ها در داخل زندان بوده است .

در خارج از زندان، او با نظارت مداوم، بازجویی‌ها و بازداشت‌ها و همچنین تلاش‌هایی برای متقاعد کردن او به ترک کارش از طریق پیشنهادهای سیاسی و مالی مواجه بوده است. مقامات همچنین در تلاش برای منصرف کردن او از کارش، خانواده‌اش را آزار داده‌اند.

احمد رضا گفت: «یکی از دشوارترین جنبه‌های مدافع حقوق بشر بودن، فشاری است که بر خانواده‌تان وارد می‌شود. هر در زدن غیرمنتظره، هر تماس تلفنی ناشناس و هر احضاریه مکرر می‌تواند برای نزدیک‌ترین افراد به شما، ترس و اضطراب ایجاد کند.»

نیروی قدرتمند برای تغییر

در ۱۷ شهریور ماه ۱۴۰۵ ، احمد رضا از زندان قزل‌حصار آزاد شد. در دوران بازداشت، پنج پرونده کیفری علیه او تشکیل شد ، اما اکنون از تمام اتهامات علیه خود تبرئه شده است. احمد رضا علی‌رغم هزینه شخصی



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