



ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK IN 2016



f FRONT LINE
DEFENDERS

On the cover: Operations at the Yanacocha mine in northern Peru (top), and wall mural in Celendín, Peru depicting community water protest (bottom).

Photo Credit: Adam Shapiro, Front Line Defenders

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**ANNUAL
REPORT
ON HUMAN
RIGHTS
DEFENDERS
AT RISK
IN 2016**

THESE ARE THE NAMES OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS WHO WERE KILLED IN 2016, AS REPORTED TO FRONT LINE DEFENDERS. WE REMEMBER THEM AND TO THEM WE DEDICATE OUR WORK.

BRAZIL

Alexsandro dos Santos Gomes
Ruan Hildebran
Alysson Henrique
Nivaldo Batista Cordeiro
Casimiro Batista de Oliveira
Genivaldo Braz do Nascimento
Luis Jorge de Araújo
Sebastião Pereira dos Santos
Luciano Ferreira de Andrade
Adna Teixeira
Geraldo de Campos Bandeira
Luis Carlos da Silva
Cleidiane Alves Teodoro
JesserBatista Cordeiro
Jaison Caique Sampaio
Vilmar Bordim
Leomar Bhorback
Ronair José de Lima
Luiz Antônio Bonfim
João Luiz de Maria Pereira
Titela
Marrone
Valdomiro Lopes de Lorena
Almir Alves dos Santos
João Pereira de Oliveira
Uedson Valentim de Araújo
Sebastião Pereira dos Santos
Nelson Macedo
Edilene Mateus Porto
Isaque Dias Ferreira
Edmilson Alves da Silva
Roni dos Santos Miranda
Manoel Messias Pereira
José Ribamar Rocha
Almir Silva dos Santos
José da Conceição Pereira
Fernando Gamela
Assis Guajajara
Genésio Guajajara
Zé Sapó
Aponuyre Guajajara
Isaiás Guajajara
José Lisboa
Enilson Ribeiro dos Santos
Clodieldo Aquileu Rodrigues de Souza
Joao Natalicio
Xukuru-Kariri
Marcus Vinucius de Oliveira Silva
Francisca das Chagas Silva
Ivanildo Francisco da Silva
Gilmar Alves da Silva
Admilson Alves da Silva
Valdiro Chagas de Moura
Nilce de Souza Magalhães,
Jose Queiros Guajajara
Jose Colirio Oliveira Guajajara
Hugo Pompeu Guajajara
Lopes de Sousa Guajajara
Joes Dias de Oliveira Lopes
Guajajara

COLOMBIA

Roberto Ballena Suárez
Padre Luis Alfonso Leiva
Evaristo Dagua Troches
Naimen Agustín Lara
Wilson Manuel Cabrera Mendoza
Luis Fernando Ortega Rubio
Amado Gómez
Yolay Robinson Chica Jaramillo
Ramón Eduardo Acevedo Rojas
Marco Aurelio Díaz
Gersaín Cerón
Arnulfo González Velázquez
Orlando Olave
Mario Alexi Tarache Perez
Nelly Amaya Perez
Johan Alexis Vargas
Robinson Ávila Ortiz
Senelia Rengifo Gómez
Anibal Coronado
Marisela Tombé
Willar Alexander Oime Alarcón
Klaus Zapata
Gil de Jesús Silgado
Luis Elviar Vergel
Luis Enrique Ramirez Rivera
Adrián Quintero Moreno
Victor Andrés Florez
Samuel Caicedo Portocarrero
Esteban Rodriguez Vega
Oswaldo Hernández Gutierrez
Jesús Adilio Mosquera Palacios
Wilson Hoyos
Manuel Dolores Pino Perafán
José Albino Solarte
Gonzalo Rentería Mosquera
Arvinson Flórez González
Manuel Chimá Perez
Willington Quibarecama
Naquirucama
Feliz Arturo Rodríguez Fajardo
Yimer Chávez Rivera,
William Castillo Chima
Oriana Nicoll Martínez
Nohora Rocío Hernández
Raúl De Jesús Pérez
Camilo Roberto Taicus Bisbicus
Diego Alfredo Chirá Nastacuas
Joel Meneses Meneses
Nereo Meneses Guzmán
Luciano Pascal García
Alberto Pascal García
Ariel Sotelo
Cecilia Coicué
María Fabiola Jiménez de Cifuentes
Néstor Iván Martínez
Ovidio Arley Bustamante Chavarría
William García Cartagena
Ramiro Culma Carepa
Gilberto Hernández Flores
Noel Salgado
Cristian Anaconda Castro

Eugenio Gil Acosta
Joaquin Emilio Lopez
Samuel Hernández Hernandez
Jose Alfredo Ayala
Eduardo Arias
Jose Gustavo Perez Gutierrez
Duvan Andres Lopez Diaz
Jorge Gomez Daza
Herney Narvaez Delgado
Hipolita Casina Teheran Acosta
James Londono Jimenez
Javier Alexander Salazar
Norberto Ruiz Ruiz
Eduar Andres Anponza
Jose Antonio Velasco Taquinas
Rodrigo Cabrera
Erley Monroy
Didier Losada Barreto
Jhon Jairo Rodriguez Torres
Fraidan Cortes
Marcelina Canacue
Gustavo Bermudez
Jose Abdon Collazos
Mario Jose Martinez
Gilmar Alejandro Possu Arrechea
Guillermo Veldano

EL SALVADOR

Angélica Miriam Quintanilla

GUATEMALA

Walter Méndez Barrios
Brenda Marleni Estrada Tambito
Walter Manfredo Mendés Barrios
Benjamin Roderico Ic Coc
Benedicto de Jesús Gutiérrez Rosa
Juan Mateo Pop Cholóm
Héctor Joel Saquil Choc
Diego Salomón Esteban Gaspar
Blanca Estela Asturias
Victor Hugo Váldez Cardona
Daniel Choc Pop
Álvaro Añfredo Aceituno López

HONDURAS

Estefany Suyapa Castro Gradiz
Wilmer González
Ángel Sandoval
Juan Carlos Recarte
José Asencio Gonzales López
Nelson Monge
Denis Montes
Horacio Solano
Lesbia Yaneth Urquía
Rúben Adolfo Cerna
Alejandra Padilla
Jairo Ramírez
Manuel Milla
Allan Reyneri Martínez Perez
René Martínez Izaguirre
Pamela Martínez
Kevin Josué Ferrera

Dorian Hernández
Nelson Noe García Láinez
Santos Matute
Silmer Dionosio George
Berta Caceres
Paola Barraza
Mirza Estefania Avila Zuniga
José Ángel Flores
Henry Reyes
Hector Francisco Medina
Kevin Herrera Orozco
Nahum Alberto Morazan
Roberto Carlos Palencia
José Alvarenga
Elvin Joel Alvarenga
Marlon David Martínez Caballero

MEXICO

Juan Carlos Jiménez Velasco
Hilario de Jesus Flores
Enrique Quiroz Quiroz
Miguel Angel Castillo Rojas
Naviel Pérez Pérez
Baldomero Enríquez Santiago
Ramon Chávez Ávila
Victor Manuel "Camach Urióstegui"
Francisco Pacheco Beltrán
Oscar Aguilar Ramirez
Andres Aguilar Sanabria
Jesus Cadena Sanchez
Anselmo Cruz Aquino
Omar Gonzalez Santiago
Cesar Hernandez Santiago
Yalid Jimenez Santiago
Oscar Nicolas Santiago
Antonio Perez Garcia
Silverio Sosa Chavez
Jose Jesus Jimenez Gaona
Salvador Olmos Garcia
Jose Caballero Julian
Francisco Reyes Vargas
Ricardo Mejia Samaniego
Agustin Pavia Pavia
Jorge Vela Diaz

PERU

Hitler Ananias Gonzales Rojas

VENEZUELA

Hector Sanchez Losada

DRC

Fr Vincent Machozi
Marcel Kasereka Tengeneza
Evariste Kasali Mbogo
Namuhobo Byamungu

KENYA

John Waweru
Willie Kimani

NIGERIA
Ken Atsuwete

SOUTH AFRICA
Sikhosphi Rhadebe

SUDAN
Mohamed Al-Sadiq Tambash

BANGLADESH
Xulhaz Mannan
Tonoy Mahbub

CAMBODIA
Kem Ley

MALAYSIA
Bill Kayong

INDIA
Rajdeo Ranjan

Javantraj Parasmal
Indradev Yadav
Chinnasamy
Karun Mishra
"Vinayak" Panduranga Baliga

INDONESIA
Salim Kancil

MYANMAR
Naw Chit Pandaing

PAKISTAN
Zaki Khurram
Alesha
Zafar Lund

PHILIPPINES
Teresita Navacilla
Gloria Capitan
Ricky Penaranda

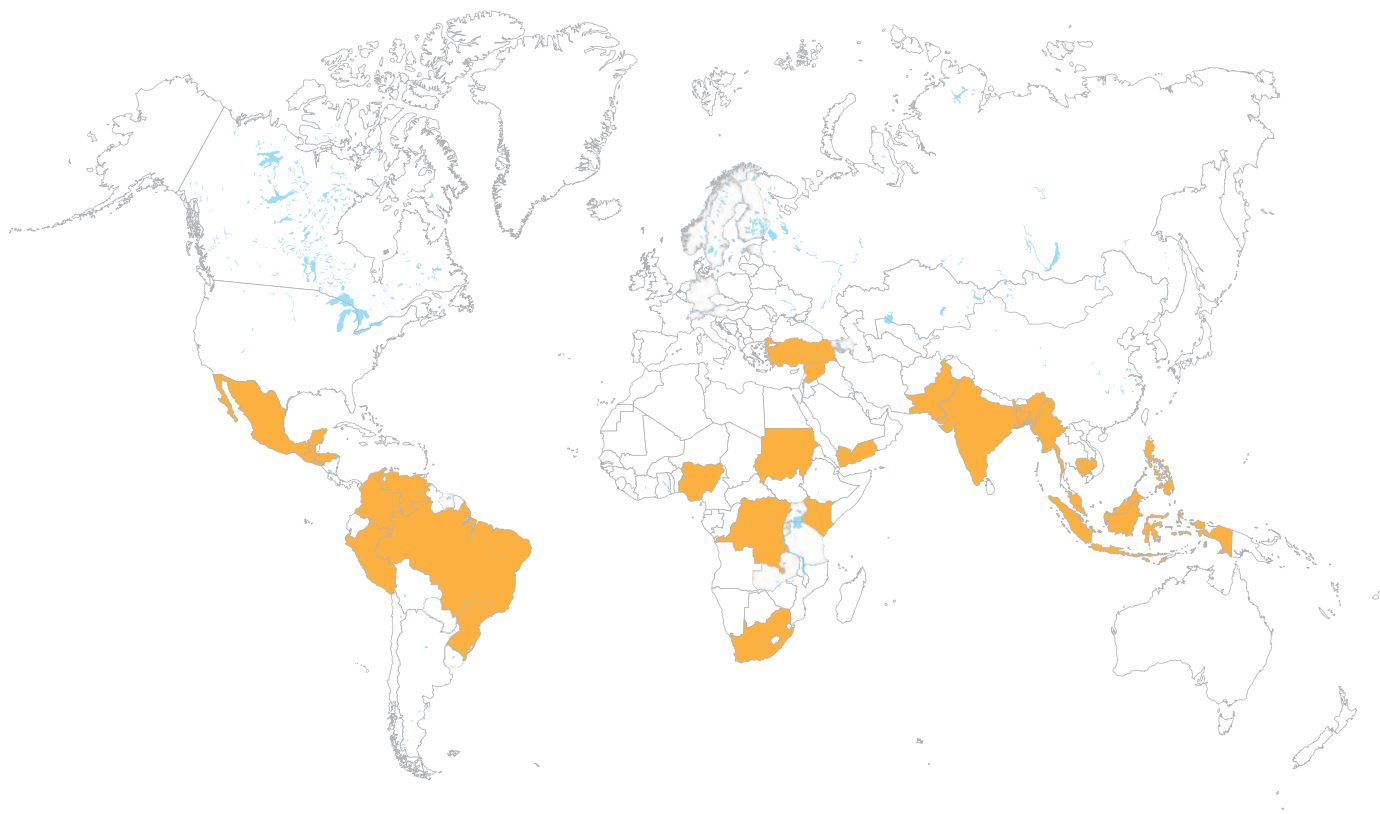
Christopher Matibay
Alejandro Laya-og
Elvis Banggoy Ordaniza
Darwin Sulang
Rolan Lonin Casiano
Emil Go
Maria Myrna Cayag
Alex Balcoba
Remar Mayantao
Rogen Suminao
Senon Nacaytuna
Hermie Alegre
Danny Diarog
Jimmy Mapinsahan Barosa
Elijo Barbado
Guadecio Bagalay
Emerencia de la Rosa
Violeta Mercado
Baby Mercado
Ariel Diaz

Arnel Figueroa
Sixto Calcena
Orlando Abangan
Joselito Pasaporte
Jimmy Saypan
Jessybel Sanchez
Julio Laracio

SYRIA
Sami Jawdat Rabah
Mahmoud Sha'aban al-Haj Khezr
Marwan Mahmoud al-Eissa
Mustafa Hassa
Samer Mohamed About

YEMEN
Awab Al-Zubairi

TURKEY
Hande Kader




HRD
memorial
CELEBRATING THOSE WHO WERE KILLED
DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

Front Line Defenders, in partnership with a network of more than 20 national and international organisations, is currently working on the development of an International Human Rights Defenders Memorial, which will document the cases of all those human rights defenders killed since the adoption of the UN Declaration of Human Rights Defenders in 1998. Since that day, when the international community agreed to make protection for rights defenders a key priority, an estimated 3,500 have been murdered.

WWW.HRDMEMORIAL.ORG

global analysis

Throughout 2016 human rights defenders (HRDs) in every region of the world faced attacks because of their work to advance and defend the human rights of their communities. They were targeted by both state and non-state actors who sought to discourage, discredit and disrupt their non-violent activities. Smear campaigns and stigmatisation were widely employed, though legal action remained the most commonly used state tactic. Killings continued to take place at an alarming rate and in the vast majority of cases perpetrators were not brought to justice, nor did any systematic changes take place to better ensure the protection of HRDs in countries where they are most at risk of assassination. On the contrary, in the Philippines – which already ranks as the most dangerous country in Asia for HRDs – President Rodrigo Duterte normalised the act of extra-judicial killing in his war on drugs, lowering the political cost of murder and thus raising the risk to defenders whose work threatens powerful interests.

The number of **killings** reported to Front Line Defenders in 2016 represented an increase to the number reported in the previous year. 281 were murdered in 25 countries.¹ 49% of these defenders were working to defend land, indigenous and environmental rights. Some of the cases occurred when local HRDs engaged in campaigns against multi-national companies and were resisting encroachment on their land and forced resettlements, often without adequate consultation or compensation. In Honduras, the killing of Berta Cáceres, a leading indigenous, environmental and women's rights defender, shocked the human rights community: she had a strong national and international profile, a wide network of support and was the beneficiary of precautionary measures of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). Her killing illustrates the limitations of protection when a government is determined to blindly pursue economic interests and ignore growing social tensions in communities affected by large scale projects. It also shows the need for those supportive of HRDs to engage governments and corporations in a more robust, sustained and effective way.

A review of cases reported to Front Line Defenders shows that killings rarely happen in isolation, but usually occur following a series of (often increasing) threats and warnings. Appropriate and decisive reactions by police and other competent authorities at an early stage, after reports of threats, would act as a **significant deterrent** and could lead to a reduction in the number of killings. Yet, in most of the cases reviewed by Front Line Defenders, when a threat which eventually resulted in a killing was reported to police, no action was taken. In such circumstances, authorities are effectively enabling an environment in which killings are permitted to occur.

The **impact of killings** goes well beyond the murdered HRD, their family and colleagues, and affects the entire human rights community. In Bangladesh, the spate of killings that started in 2013 and continued in 2016 resulted in the breakdown of networks of support, decreased engagement between HRDs and the communities they represented and decreased cross-sector collaboration. This was in addition to increased self-censorship, a sharp reduction of engagement with human rights issues by the groups affected by the killings, and the fact that at least 25 HRDs were forced to leave the country out of security concerns.²

Over half of the cases reported by Front Line Defenders in 2016 concerned **criminalisation**, a tactic which remained the first choice of governments to silence defenders and to dissuade others. Arbitrary detention was widespread and ranged from a few hours in Nicaragua to prevent HRDs from attending protests to years-long house arrest in China. Frequently, the legally prescribed length of detention prior to formal charges or release was ignored or access to legal counsel was refused. Ironically while states carried out slander campaigns against HRDs, defenders themselves were often charged with libel because of their work highlighting human rights abuses or exposing corruption. This is the case in Thailand where three HRDs are facing trial for documenting cases of torture by the military in the south of the country. Vaguely worded laws allowed criminal justice systems to be used as political tools. In some countries, the law itself was routinely ignored.

Numerous HRDs continued to serve lengthy prison terms as their supporters struggled to keep international attention on their cases. Former Front Line Defenders Protection Coordinator Abdulhadi Al Khawaja completed his fifth year of a life sentence in Bahrain, handed down following his participation in the pro-democracy protests in the country in 2011. In Eritrea, journalist Dawit Isaak has been held incommunicado for over 15 years. In that time he has had no contact with relatives nor any recourse to a lawyer nor access to adequate medical attention.

Resource-rich lands in South and Central America, Africa and Asia continued to bring extractive industries into conflict with indigenous peoples in projects which are frequently funded by **international financial institutions (IFIs)** or Western- and Chinese-based corporations. A lack of institutionalised human rights-related checks and balances within those

institutions, often matched with the complicity or corrupt acquiescence of the concerned government, has led to the intimidation and worse of local people who feel their concerns have not been properly addressed. In the aftermath of the murder of Berta Cáceres for her opposition to the Agua Zarca dam project, Dutch development bank FMO and Finnish finance company Finnfund, two of the project's investors, suspended their support and subsequently announced they were seeking to exit the project. Since then, FMO embarked on a revision of its Sustainability Policy and its Position Statement on Human Rights. However, despite the events in Honduras, the proposed new documents failed to include any reference to HRDs or the issue of reprisals against communities opposing projects. Similarly, the World Bank failed to address this issue when it adopted its new Environmental and Social Framework in August. In a widely criticised comment in the wake of Berta Cáceres' murder, World Bank President Jim Kim stated that "you cannot do the work we're trying to do and not have some of these incidents happen".³

The threat of the so-called **Islamic State** continued to impact directly on the work of HRDs, especially in the MENA region. Defenders working in conflict zones attempting to document atrocities were subjected to appalling violations, including murder and abduction. Due to the nature of the ongoing slaughter, their deaths were largely subsumed in the context of wider conflicts.

Repressive governments continued to use **national security arguments** in an attempt to give a veneer of credibility to their moves against HRDs. Human rights lawyers in China were paraded in front of television cameras to give forced confessions while state media ran campaigns portraying them as fundamental threats to the stability of the country. Many other countries adopted a similar approach. In Sudan, the authorities levelled charges of 'waging war against the state' against six HRDs from an NGO providing training to civil society, while in Iran, Narges Mohammadi was sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment on charges of 'assembly and collusion against national security' and 'propaganda against the state'. She had campaigned extensively against the use of the death penalty in the country. This tactic was especially noticeable in Turkey where the failed coup of July resulted in the almost immediate rounding up of thousands of alleged coup-supporters, including HRDs, suggesting that a blacklist of government critics had been previously drawn up by the Erdoğan administration.

Accusations that HRDs present risks to the security of the state were often linked to allegations that they were **in receipt of foreign funding**, often a necessity for HRDs and NGOs who are unable to or prohibited from raising funds domestically. Although far from a new tactic, efforts to choke civil society organisations by cutting off their funding streams continued apace in 2016. Bangladesh passed a law allowing for the closure of foreign-funded NGOs which engage in 'anti-state' activities, while in China a more-encompassing law came into force on 1 January 2017 outlawing any financial or other support to HRDs or NGOs in mainland China from international organisations which are not registered in the mainland. In Israel, a bill was passed requiring NGOs to repeatedly publicly declare if over 50% of their funding comes from abroad in a move that articulates a growing sense of unease in democracies around the work of individuals and organisations challenging government policy. Accusations of illegally receiving foreign funding was one of a variety of methods used in the unprecedented crackdown against NGOs in Egypt.

The targeted **delegitimisation** of HRDs occurred in all regions. This ranged from criticisms of 'activist left-wing human rights lawyers' attempting to hold British soldiers responsible for murder in conflict zones by Prime Minister Theresa May to the near weekly slandering of HRDs by Venezuelan Congressman Diosdado Cabello broadcast on a weekly TV programme. While in democracies the milder criticisms may be written off as ideologically-driven political pandering, the reality is that such comments help feed an incremental and insidious narrative which questions the universal nature of human rights and puts the onus on the HRD to defend their actions. The rise of far-right movements in a number of countries in Europe and in the Americas is creating an environment marked by a noticeable shift in what is deemed acceptable public discourse. In non-democratic countries, where HRDs are often exclusively reliant on the support of their communities to continue their work, efforts to discredit them can have a profoundly debilitating impact on their work and sense of security.

Many states took steps to cut HRD networks by banning them from leaving the country. Front Line Defenders documented a 100% increase in the use of **travel bans** in 2016. These bans deprive HRDs of the chance to avail of rest and respite programmes or learning opportunities they would be unable to obtain in their own countries; they also prevent them from giving their invaluable contributions and expertise to international fora, and were at times imposed in retaliation for cooperating with international mechanisms, such as the UN Human Rights Council (HRC).

In a welcome move, in October, the UN Secretary-General announced that he had appointed Assistant Secretary-General Andrew Gilmore as UN focal point on **reprisals** to fight against the growing problem of governments targeting HRDs for cooperating with UN bodies. This initiative, called for by the HRC in a 2015 resolution, had been subsequently blocked by the African group at the General Assembly. Attempts to weaken the international protection of HRDs reached new heights

at the 31st session of the HRC in March. The governments of China, Cuba, Egypt, Pakistan and Russia tabled amendments requesting to remove the term ‘human rights defender’ and references to the legitimacy of their work from the biennial resolution on HRDs, which addressed the need for protection of those working on economic, social and cultural rights. The amendments were eventually rejected.

Although not as widely documented as other risks facing HRDs, **cyberattacks** continued to be widely used as a means of disrupting HRD work or obtaining information that could be used to prosecute or otherwise harm them. In all regions, HRDs were subjected to hacking attempts, often using technology designed and produced in Western countries. In an exemplary case, Ahmed Mansoor, a blogger in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), received a text message with a weblink promising him information about imprisoned HRDs in the country. He recognised this as an attack and sent his phone for examination to digital forensic specialists. An investigation revealed that the spyware used had come from an Israeli technology company at an estimated cost of USD 3 million and that he was the first person known to be targeted by it, showing just how much governments are willing to invest, in terms of time and resources, to monitor HRDs.⁴

Finally, the trend of **introducing restrictive cybercrime legislation** continued apace. Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Russia, the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe introduced or presented drafts of laws purportedly designed to combat terrorism or computer hacking but with significant implications for critical voices. The most extreme of these was in Zimbabwe where a draft Computer Crime and Cyber Crime Bill would go so far as to allow police to confiscate electronic equipment in order to prevent protesters from mobilising and was introduced following a successful protest movement organised on social media.

africa

Although the African Union declared 2016 ‘The African year of human rights’, the reality on the ground proved wildly at odds with this stated goal. Those engaged in human rights work were targets of death threats, police violence during peaceful demonstrations, administrative and judicial harassment, arbitrary detention, freezing of funds as well as smear campaigns.

Arbitrary arrest and judicial harassment remained by far the most common risk for African HRDs. Such cases were reported in Angola, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Mauritania, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The pervasive nature of this threat pointed to the effective criminalisation of human rights work in a number of African countries. In Mauritania, members of the anti-slavery group Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement have been targeted with arbitrary arrest and judicial harassment for years. The latest crackdown culminated in August when 13 members were arrested in the aftermath of protests in Nouakchott and sentenced to between three and 15 years’ imprisonment on various charges. Following their sentencing, the 13 were moved to a detention centre 700km away from their families and legal representation, making their appeal process all the more challenging.

GOOD NEWS

Following the example of Cote d’Ivoire, which adopted a law on the protection of HRDs in 2014, civil society coalitions in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Sierra Leone are campaigning for similar laws to be passed in their countries. In Mali, in April, the Minister of Justice pledged to table in parliament a draft law on the protection of HRDs composed by civil society.

Death threats remained a commonly used tactic against HRDs working on a variety of issues. These included defenders who undertook campaigns touching on big business interests in the DRC; those exposing or challenging corrupt practices by public officials in Burundi and Uganda, and those highlighting cases of injustice in Kenya. Threats were generally made through phone calls or text messages. While in the vast majority of cases, such threats did not lead to physical harm, they did often serve their purpose of putting a stop to the work of HRDs and causing them to fear for their safety. In the wake of a series of death threats, human rights lawyer Wendy Mutegi, who had been at the forefront of community efforts against illegal logging in Eastern Kenya, was forced to end her regular advocacy trips and remained in hiding for most of the year several miles away from her home.

In a number of cases, HRDs were **physically attacked or killed** as a result of their work. In South Africa, Sikhosiphi Rhadebe, chairperson of Amadiba Crisis Committee (ACC), was shot eight times in the head in March following his leadership of a campaign opposing open-cast mining of titanium in the Xolobeni area. Mineral Commodities Limited (MRC), the Australian-based company owning the mine, denied any foreknowledge of or involvement with his murder, though in the year preceding his death, incidents of intimidation and assault against members of ACC had escalated. At least two violent attacks by armed men were carried out against ACC in 2015, and in February 2016 the ACC reported to police they feared that their lives were in danger. In what has become routine in many such cases, the perpetrators of this murder have not been apprehended and intimidation against HRDs who continue their campaign has only intensified.

Environmental HRDs combatting trafficking in natural resources in Madagascar were subjected to regular pressure and harassment for attempting to expose this illegal but lucrative practice. They received little assistance from public institutions in the face of threats to harm their family members from networks of traffickers and also faced defamation charges. Due to the geographic location of the country, HRDs are isolated from support structures existing on the continent, contributing to a lack of reporting on their situation. In September, Pierre Robson and Tsihoarana Andrianony were arrested and charged with, among other crimes, breach of state security following a series of mass protests against a Chinese-owned gold mining project. They eventually received a one-year suspended sentence for leading an unauthorised protest.

In many countries the **right to freedom of assembly** was severely curtailed. This was especially true in countries where HRDs advocated for good governance and democratic reforms, including Angola, DRC, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Their campaigns were met with excessive force and sometimes prosecution. Ethiopia represents perhaps the most blatant example in 2016 of a government’s absolute disregard for dissenting voices, human lives and human rights. A wave of mass protests erupted in August and continued for several weeks, calling on the government to respect the land rights of the Oromo and Amhara people. These protests were met with brutal suppression resulting in hundreds of deaths. Journalists, protest leaders and HRDs were followed and threatened because of their role in mobilising civil society. Despite their best efforts to change location quickly and often, some HRDs were arrested without charges and imprisoned

without access to legal representation or family members. On 9 October the government declared a six-month state of emergency which permitted security forces to arrest citizens without a warrant and to imprison them for the duration of the state of emergency.

These actions by states were not limited to clamping down on public protests, but also private events, seminars and workshops. In Angola, in March, 15 HRDs were sentenced to jail terms of between two and eight years in connection with their participation in a conference on the 'Philosophy of peaceful revolution', based on the work of noted non-violent tactician and academic Gene Sharp. Despite the peaceful nature of their gathering, they were charged with 'acts of rebellion and association of criminals'. Three months after their sentencing and jailing, all 15 HRDs were ordered by the Supreme Court to be placed under house arrest.

The ongoing **civil war** in South Sudan presented major challenges to HRDs and resulted in many of them being forced to flee the country. Human rights journalists were particularly targeted by the government and were portrayed as working for rebel groups, which led to their detentions, abductions and sometimes deaths.

It had seemed that the year would end on a positive note in The Gambia when President Yahya Jammeh initially accepted defeat in the 1 December presidential elections. Within a week he had done a volte-face and despite entreaties from the presidents of Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, he deployed the military and resisted attempts to remove him from office. During his 22 years of iron-fist rule Jammeh crushed HRDs, independent journalists, opposition politicians and dissenting voices, who were threatened, jailed and disappeared.

ISSUE IN FOCUS: CONSTITUTIONAL COUPS

In 2016 African leaders continued to politically manoeuvre and tamper with their countries' constitutions in order to maintain their holds on power. This phenomenon was among the most serious human rights concerns on the continent because of the social conflict that arose as a result. These 'constitutional coups' have led to severe political turmoil, and in the most extreme cases, such as in Burundi – where President Nkurunziza's push for power has kept the country on a knife-edge for over a year – hundreds of people were killed and thousands became internally displaced. In Rwanda, President Paul Kagame succeeded in staying in power without causing turmoil, winning a referendum to drop term limits with 98% of the votes – which does not show popular support but the lack of freedom in a country where peaceful critics have been jailed, exiled or killed.

What is often overlooked in the reporting of these issues is the extent to which the political turmoil has affected the human rights movement. Burundi is a case in point. HRDs who played an active role in opposing the constitutional coup were portrayed as criminals and, in some instances, terrorists. A large number of HRDs were forced to flee Burundi because of threats and attacks; over a year after the height of the crisis it remained impossible for most of them to return. Those who stayed in the country saw their organisations banned and their bank accounts frozen. With so many HRDs having been compelled to leave the country, civil society has been severely weakened and is even less well equipped to defend the rights of the vulnerable and hold the government to account.

In the DRC, mass protests erupted in response to President Joseph Kabila's attempts to extend his 15 years in office by delaying the expected presidential elections. Some of the protests turned violent and in September alone, approximately 50 protesters were reported to have been killed when police used live ammunition to disperse demonstrations. HRDs leading the protest movement, in particular members of the citizen movements Filimbi and Lutte pour le Changement (Lucha), were threatened, detained and put on trial.

When a majority of African countries embraced constitutional reforms in the 1990s, as many as 33 states sought to enshrine term limits for the office of the president in their new constitutions. We are now witnessing a trend in the opposite direction: in the last three years attempts to remove term limits were made in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Republic of Congo, DRC and Rwanda – in most cases accompanied by efforts to silence those advocating against them. The African Union has succeeded in discouraging military coups, which it now sees as a red line issue. It is time that it takes determined action against the civilian equivalent.

americas

Defending human rights in the Americas remained an extremely dangerous occupation in 2016. Front Line Defenders received reports on the **killing** of 217 HRDs in the region, representing more than three-quarters of the total number of killings reported to the organisation worldwide. 143 of these killings happened in Colombia and Brazil (85 and 58 respectively), with the remainder occurring in Honduras (33), Mexico (26), Guatemala (12), El Salvador (1), Peru (1) and Venezuela (1).

Environmental, indigenous peoples' and land rights defenders

remained the most affected. This was especially true in Brazil, where this group of HRDs accounted for 74% of the killings reported there in 2016. Judicial harassment, physical attacks, threats, intimidation, and smear campaigns were also used as strategies against them by both state and non-state actors, particularly in the context of development projects. In the aftermath of the killing of Berta Cáceres in March, and despite intense international and domestic pressure to seek justice for her murder, repression against her organisation, the *Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras* (COPINH), increased. The lawyers representing her family were harassed, their offices broken into and case files were stolen. In addition, following Cáceres' murder, two other members of COPINH, Nelson García and Lesbia Yaneth Urquia Urquia, were killed and another two barely survived assassination attempts. Six suspects were arrested in connection with Berta Cáceres' murder. However, authorities have not identified the intellectual author of the crime and the investigation has been marred with irregularities. There has been no progress in the investigation into her colleagues' subsequent murders.

In Colombia, the progression of the **peace process** and the establishment of a definitive ceasefire between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), along with the beginning of peace talks with the National Liberation Army (ELN), was met by an increase in the level of violence experienced by HRDs. After the peace agreement was unveiled on 26 August, 13 HRDs were assassinated in less than three weeks in Antioquia, César, Cauca and Nariño. Local organisations reported that these and other attacks were carried out by groups who sought to derail or postpone the peace process. A national plebiscite on the peace settlement was rejected on 2 October and, in spite of the parliamentary adoption of a revised peace agreement in November, the killing of HRDs continued to year-end.

HRDs continued to be **criminalised**, particularly in the context of social protest and public demonstrations, with serious charges being brought against them to legitimise indefinite and arbitrary detention. In Ecuador, the Ombudsman decided against *Frente de Mujeres Defensoras de la Pachamama*, in a complaint the NGO submitted after members were beaten and arbitrarily detained by police during a peaceful demonstration against a mining project in 2015. Instead of condemning the attack, the decision praised the behaviour of the police.

Throughout the region, police or army officers resorted to **excessive force** to disperse demonstrations, with few investigations taking place to assess whether the level of force used was appropriate. In the United States, the Black Lives Matter movement, founded in response to the killings of a number of young black males by police, continued to mobilise communities across the country to object to police brutality. In July hundreds of protesters were arrested in various cities in the space of a single weekend after dozens of demonstrations took place following a fatal shooting in New Orleans. Members of the Standing Rock Sioux and their supporters also faced repression while protesting against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline in their territories. Tear gas, pepper spray, mace, tasers and water cannon – in freezing temperatures – were all used in an effort to disperse protesters, resulting in scores of injuries. Dozens of arrests took place, and journalists and documentary film-makers covering the protests were charged in an attempt to silence media coverage. In Brazil, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela, HRDs reported the use of tear gas and rubber and lead bullets by police against peaceful protesters and observers.

The right to freedom of assembly was also curtailed through the use of **temporary detention**. In Cuba, before the visit of US President Barack Obama, the government attacked and preventively detained dozens of HRDs who had planned demonstrations to mark the occasion. The thawing of relations with the US and limited increased openness towards the

GOOD NEWS

In Guatemala, a coalition of HRDs joined forces to support 15 women survivors of war-time sexual violence. They secured an historic ruling that condemned perpetrators to a total of 360 years of prison and ordered financial reparations to the survivors of Sepur Zarco, a small rural community in Guatemala. The Sepur Zarco judgement is a landmark in international human rights and humanitarian law, as it is the first conviction for sexual slavery as a war crime and a crime against humanity in a domestic court.

international community did not lead to better treatment of HRDs: arbitrary detentions of HRDs and break-ins at their offices saw an increase during 2016.

HRDs working on **anti-corruption and transitional justice** cases in Central and South America were the targets of smear campaigns, threats, surveillance, break-ins and judicial harassment. In Argentina, human rights lawyers César Sivo and Laura Figueroa were targeted as a result of their efforts to seek justice for crimes against humanity committed during the dictatorship. Six men broke into the house of Laura Figueroa in Tucuman and destroyed her belongings. César Sivo received several death threats in the midst of a smear campaign portraying him as a defender of drug dealers. This campaign was led primarily by a local news outlet and it included showing pictures of his home and details of his address.

States in the Americas systematically **failed to adequately implement precautionary measures** ordered by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) for the protection of HRDs, their family members and organisations. Front Line Defenders reported judicial harassment, attacks, assassination attempts and killings of defenders and/or their family members who were beneficiaries of precautionary measures in Chile, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela. Similarly, a number of HRDs targeted in the year had protective measures from domestic protection mechanisms in Brazil, Colombia and Mexico. Their targeting in spite of their inclusion in national protection programmes shows the inadequacy of an approach which focuses solely on 'hard protection' without addressing the causes of the threats or exerting political pressure on those responsible for them.

Front Line Defenders frequently received reports of **reprisals** against HRDs resorting to the IACHR and other international bodies. Reprisals occurred in Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Venezuela. They came in the form of smear campaigns led by state officials, initiation of judicial proceedings, refusal of state officials to attend meetings with HRDs, attacks by police, harassment at airports and exclusion at events and meetings.

In Brazil, political instability and social unrest surrounding the **impeachment** process of President Rousseff were accompanied by an escalation of violence against HRDs. One of the first acts of the new government was to abolish the ministry in charge of human rights. Doubts were cast over the government's commitment to the country's Protection Programme for HRDs and its future remains uncertain. After the change of government, civil society saw an escalation of repression against social movements, including judicial processes, excessive use of force to disperse public demonstrations, as well as deliberate use of non-lethal and lethal weapons against peaceful protesters.

ISSUE IN FOCUS: SMEAR CAMPAIGNS AND STIGMATISATION OF WHRDS

Smear campaigns are one of the most common tactics used against defenders but their real impact is often overlooked or dismissed. These campaigns affect the daily life of HRDs, close doors to opportunities outside of their human rights work and can have a long lasting impact on defenders, their families, their communities and their work. Such campaigns are sometimes conducted by high-level state officials, nationalist movements, extremist groups or companies, and can take different forms, including via state-owned or non-state-owned media outlets. The advent of social media has allowed smear campaigns to spread much more quickly and to a much wider audience than was reached by traditional media. These campaigns question HRDs' credibility as individuals as well as the legitimacy of their human rights work in a highly visible and public way. Aside from disseminating false information or misinterpreting events, these messages are often loaded with hate speech that incites – either directly or indirectly – attacks against HRDs by a broader community. This was the case in Brazil, Dominican Republic and Venezuela, where HRDs were targeted by family members, neighbours, teachers, close friends and random members of the public.

WHRDs are singled out specifically for highly gendered and discriminatory campaigns. There were examples of these campaigns in Mexico and El Salvador in 2016 where attempts were made to undermine the credibility of two WHRDs by suggesting promiscuity in sexually conservative societies. In Oaxaca, Mexico, a photomontage began circulating on social media showing two women and a man sitting in their underwear on a bed. Pictures of indigenous and education rights defender Rubí Jazmín Cortés Salazar and her mother had been pasted onto the heads of the women in the picture and in place of the man's head, a picture of the municipal president of her place of residence had been pasted. The doctored image was captioned in a way that suggested the defender and her mother had been intimate with the public official. In El Salvador, human rights lawyer Bertha de León was the target of a similar campaign, which suggested that she had a sexual relationship with a judge who had ruled favourably in a case in which she was involved. Pictures of the lawyer, her one-year-old daughter and the judge were circulated on social media implying that the judge was the child's real father.

asia and the pacific

In many countries in Asia, HRDs were portrayed as enemies of the state. Governments used all means at their disposal, including killings, disappearances, physical attacks, judicial harassment and arbitrary detention to hinder their work. Surveillance, intimidation, threats and smear campaigns remained widespread. HRDs were also targeted through repressive legislation including anti-terrorism laws and national security laws.

In the Philippines at least 31 HRDs were murdered in 2016. By calling for the extra-judicial **killings** of those involved in the drug trade, President Duterte has helped create an environment where murder is being promoted as an acceptable method of dealing with certain problems. During a public speech in November, he went as far as threatening to kill HRDs because of their criticism of allegedly drug-related extra-judicial killings. This is liable to have a profound impact on the security of HRDs who are already at grave risk. Many attacks targeted indigenous or environmental rights HRDs who objected to extractive or polluting industries. In January, indigenous peoples' rights defender Teresita Navacilla was shot dead by two unidentified armed men in Southern Mindanao. The attack was alleged to have been perpetrated by soldiers assigned to secure a mining project that the WHRD campaigned against on environmental grounds. There was no progress in the investigation into her murder.

Killings were also reported in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Pakistan. In Pakistan, Khurram Zaki, who campaigned for the rights of religious minorities and peace among religious groups, was shot dead by two assailants in Karachi. In the same country, members of the Trans Action Alliance, a group which works for the promotion and protection of the rights of the transgender community in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, faced death threats, intimidation and an arson attack on one member's home. In May, after repeated attempts to seek help from local police, their Peshawar Coordinator, Aleshia, was killed; she was the fifth member of the organisation to be violently attacked in 2016.

Judicial harassment and **arbitrary detention** were the most common form of targeting HRDs. Cases were reported in Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand and Vietnam. In Thailand in July, HRDs Pornpen Khongkachonkiet, Anchana Heemmina and Somchai Homlaor were charged with defamation and spreading false information for compiling a report that details 54 cases of alleged torture by the army between 2004 and 2015 in Thailand's conflict-affected southern region. They face up to seven years in prison. The situation for HRDs in Thailand is unlikely to improve in the near future: with the death of King Bhumibol, military rule will most likely remain in place in order to ensure a smooth transition to the new King. Vietnam witnessed the violent dispersal of large-scale protests organised after the discharge of toxic waste into the sea by a Taiwanese-owned steel plant resulted in the death of millions of fish. It is estimated that over 500 protesters – including HRDs – were arrested. In October WHRD Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh was arrested on charges of 'conducting anti-state propaganda' after police found in her possession a cardboard sign calling for the prosecution of the Taiwanese company responsible for the discharge.

Following the 2015 attack on the legal profession in **China**, 2016 saw the sentencing of some of those HRDs who had been detained the previous year. Law firm director and lawyer Zhou Shifeng, was sentenced to seven years in prison after being found guilty of 'subversion of state power'. He was held incommunicado for a year before his trial, during which time a televised confession, widely believed to be coerced, was broadcast on state media. A fellow HRD, Hu Shigen, received a seven and a half year prison sentence while two others were handed down suspended sentences. At least a dozen other defenders remained in detention pending trial.

Physical attacks were reported in Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. Some of these attacks took place in response to specific actions in which HRDs were engaged, as was the case with two Cambodian defenders who were beaten while participating in a march to celebrate World Habitat Day in October in Phnom Penh. Other attacks were more sinister in nature and clearly designed to intimidate HRDs into stopping their work. In India in February, indigenous peoples' rights defender Soni Sori was attacked by three men as she travelled to her home in the state of Chhattisgarh. The perpetrators threw a black substance on her face, resulting in intense burning.

GOOD NEWS

In Sri Lanka, there were encouraging developments, most notably the strengthening of the Human Rights Commission's independent role following the appointment of new members in late 2015. Furthermore, following a damning UN report on the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the government committed to repeal and reform the law, which had allowed for long detention without charges and which was used against HRDs.

Working on good governance and the **electoral process** remained sensitive in Malaysia. Bersih activists, Maria Chin Abdullah, Mandeep Singh and Ambiga Sreenevasan, who advocate for reforms of the electoral system, received death threats from the Islamic State in Malaysia in October. Despite filing complaints with the police, none of these cases have resulted in arrests of the perpetrators. In November, Maria Chin Abdullah was detained by police for 10 days following a raid on the Bersih offices.

Enforced disappearance continued to represent a significant risk to HRDs in Pakistan and for the Baloch community in particular. Abdul Wahid Baloch, who called for justice for the Baloch people and organised campaigns and protests against human rights violations in Balochistan, was disappeared for four months in July. He reappeared in December but refused to comment on the circumstances of his ordeal. Disappearances were also reported in China and Thailand.

Travel bans were used in China, India, Pakistan and Vietnam. Up to three dozen Chinese defenders were informed by local authorities that they were not permitted to travel or were stopped at the border when they attempted to leave the country. In many of these cases the individual was informed that their travelling could 'endanger state security'. In India in September, Khurram Parvez of the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society was prevented from travelling to Geneva to attend the 33rd session of the UN Human Rights Council, following an order from the Intelligence Bureau. He was subsequently detained for 11 weeks.

The adoption of **restrictive legislation** remained a matter of great concern. In China, a restrictive Foreign NGO Management Law was passed. International NGOs deemed to be engaged in work promoting 'subversion of state power' or 'separatism' will be placed on a blacklist and barred from entering the country. The law makes the support (financial or otherwise) of NGOs not registered in China to individuals or organisations within the country illegal. This is likely to have a severe impact on domestic groups who work on so-called 'sensitive' issues, such as HIV/AIDS advocacy, human rights, workers' rights or gender issues. Bangladesh enacted the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act 2016 in October. According to the Act, any foreign-funded NGO which engages in activities deemed to be 'anti-state' or extremist, or which makes "derogatory comments about the Constitution and constitutional institutions" will be liable for prosecution. In India, the government continued the practice of not renewing registration to NGOs critical of the government under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, thus preventing them from receiving international funding.

ISSUE IN FOCUS: RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

Religious fundamentalism is on the rise in several Asian countries. HRDs are bearing the brunt of religious-based, nationalist politics which promotes an extreme version of one type of religion and discriminates against all others. In Bangladesh online activists promoting secularism and demanding that religion be separated from politics were the subject of threats and killings by Islamic extremist groups.

Extremists from the Sunni Islamic sect in Pakistan continued their fatal attacks on Shia, Ahmadis and Christians. HRDs from other religious minority communities and defenders who promote the rights of such minorities were also targeted. Extremist groups were similarly active in Maldives, Indonesia and Malaysia. In India, Hindu nationalists perpetrated attacks on HRDs who criticised policies promoting extreme Hindu nationalism, including a ban on eating beef, and discrimination against religious minorities. Buddhists groups like Ma Ba Tha in Myanmar and Badhu Bala Sena (BBS) in Sri Lanka promoted Buddhist nationalism in politics while attempting to marginalise other religions. Hundreds of Buddhist monks and their supporters protested the visit of Kofi Annan and an advisory panel in September when they arrived in Myanmar to assist in finding a solution to the long-running violence and discrimination towards the Rohingya community in northwestern Rakhine State. The demonstrators objected to the presence of 'foreigners' on the panel.

States across the region have tended to tolerate these groups as they fear that taking a stand against their firebrand populism may result in political losses. Governments have also established relationships with some such groups in order to solidify their power or to disguise certain policy failings. Extremist groups can then take advantage of this relationship to pressure the state to enforce anti-human rights policies, be it through new laws or arbitrary actions against HRDs, whom they view as enemies because of their promotion of the universality of human rights.

europa and central asia

In Europe, **anti-immigrant sentiment** festered, leading to increased scrutiny and harassment of organisations assisting refugees in Hungary, Poland, Greece and Turkey. In Greece, human rights lawyers were targeted by the police for assisting Syrian children. In Hungary, 22 NGOs who issued a statement calling for the invalidation of the referendum on refugee quotas due to low turnout, were threatened by the authorities with “full screening” of their activities.

France and Turkey reacted to **terrorist attacks** by restricting civil liberties: in France, the state of emergency declared in response to the attacks of November 2015 in Paris was extended until January 2017. It restricted the right of peaceful assembly and several HRDs received orders banning them from demonstrating against the reform of the Labour Law in May. In the aftermath of multiple terrorist attacks in Turkey, the authorities issued a temporary broadcast ban and blocked access to Twitter, cutting off a vital platform and source of information for HRDs in the country. Since the July 2015 breakdown of the peace process to end the decades-long conflict with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), violence and armed clashes in the southeast region have escalated. During security operations between August 2015 and December 2016, authorities imposed over one hundred curfews on towns and neighbourhoods, which prevented NGOs, journalists and lawyers from monitoring military operations or any resulting abuses by security forces or armed groups. Those who criticised human rights violations committed by the army were labelled ‘PKK supporters’ by state officials.

In the months following the attempted **coup d’etat** on 15 July, Turkish authorities jailed thousands of people suspected of involvement, often with no basis in fact. At least 131 media outlets were shut down, and an estimated 116 journalists were jailed pending criminal investigations. In November, 375 NGOs, including human rights groups, were closed down by the authorities because of alleged ties to the PKK, the Gulenist Movement, the Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party/Front or the so-called Islamic State. In such a frenzied environment, the ability of HRDs to work was severely restricted and those who had not already been detained were at risk of being declared anti-state if they attempted to document human rights abuses.

At the end of 2016, four years after the adoption of the **‘Foreign Agent Law’**, 149 Russian civil society organisations⁵ were listed as “foreign agents”. 126 administrative cases were open due to the absence of voluntary registration and there were an additional 49 administrative cases for not labelling material as published by a group “recognised as a foreign agent”. These cases resulted in fines totalling more than 30 million rubles (€442,000). 27 organisations ceased their activities. In June, the first criminal case under the Foreign Agent Law was initiated against Valentina Cherevatenko, head of the NGO Women of the Don, which works on women’s and children’s rights.

Similar laws are now being proposed in countries that are members of the **European Union**. In Hungary in October Szilárd Németh, vice chairperson of the governing party Fidesz and vice chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on National Security, announced that he had proposed to the Committee to investigate civil society organisations “cooperating with the (George) Soros network”. In Poland, a campaign by pro-government media portrayed human rights NGOs as anti-patriotic due to their receipt of international funding and their criticism of the government. In May, the Polish government abolished the State Council for combating racism and stopped funding Poland’s Women Rights Centre on the pretext that it “helps only women”.

The jaundiced view of international involvement with domestic human rights situations extended to Kyrgyzstan where two HRDs who took part in an **OSCE** human rights meeting in September were subjected to a sustained smear campaign. Tolekan Ismailova and Aziza Abdyrasulova, both working on political and social rights, were depicted in the national press as **traitors** and **anti-state**. Earlier in the year, the same two HRDs were publicly denounced by the President of Kyrgyzstan as agitators working to forcefully overthrow the government with the support of foreign secret services.

In March, the UN Human Rights Committee found that Kyrgyz authorities had violated the rights of imprisoned HRD **Azimjan Askarov** by subjecting him to torture and not providing him with a fair trial, and recommended his immediate

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In Azerbaijan, a number of HRDs who were jailed in 2014 were released, including Leyla Yunus and her husband Arif Yunus, Rasul Jafarov, Hilal Mamedov and Anar Mammadli. Human rights lawyer Intigam Aliyev was released with a suspended sentence and a travel ban. Human rights journalist Khadija Ismayilova was released on probation with a two-year ban on professional activity. However, the charges were not dropped and the reputations of the HRDs remained damaged.

release. Askarov was falsely accused of instigating mass riots and complicity in the killing of a policeman during ethnic violence that took place in 2010, and he was sentenced to life imprisonment. At an appeal hearing in July, the Supreme Court failed to order the release of Askarov in accordance with the Committee's ruling and the case was sent to a regional court for new consideration in October. At the time of writing, he remained imprisoned and in failing health.

The region-wide shrinking space for debate and intolerance of alternative ideologies and beliefs was most evident in Russia, where the number of attacks by **far-right groups** against HRDs increased. While these groups, which sometimes appeared to have links to public officials, initially mainly targeted LGBTI rights defenders and individuals, they began to target any group or initiative deemed 'liberal', including human rights events. Assaults by members of the pro-government National Movement of Liberation took place against staff at the Sakharov Center, a cultural centre in Moscow dedicated to the protection of human rights. In North Ossetia, families and journalists seeking justice for the victims of the Beslan school siege in 2004 who questioned the role of the Russian military in the assault were attacked by young men as police looked on.

LGBTI rights defenders were also targeted in Ukraine, where the Equality Festival in Lviv was attacked by far-right masked thugs who surrounded a hotel in which participants had gathered for their own safety. While police did assist in shepherding the activists onto a waiting coach, they did not take any action against groups of men dressed in black who threw stones at the bus. In Turkey, members of Pembe Hayat, an organisation fighting transphobia, were physically attacked on numerous occasions. In Poland, several organisations including Lambda Association, Campaign Against Homophobia, Klamra Foundation and the HejtStop project were assaulted in March.

Cyberattacks remained prevalent. Scores of phishing attempts on the accounts of HRDs were made in Russia and in what is a typical example from Kazakhstan, several social media accounts of HRDs were hacked and obscene content – mostly pornography – was posted on their profiles. In a handful of cases, recording devices were discovered on the personal computers of HRDs. In October, dozens of Russian HRDs received warnings from Google that there had been "government-backed" attempts to hack into their accounts. In November, Google issued similar warnings to defenders in Kazakhstan.

International travel for HRDs was hindered by authorities in some countries who saw blocking the defenders as another way in which to isolate the domestic human rights community from international supporters. In Turkmenistan and in Uzbekistan, HRDs continued to require 'exit visas' to travel abroad, while in Azerbaijan and Turkey several were prevented from travelling. In Russia, when HRDs passed through border control as they prepared to leave the country, administrative fines suddenly appeared on their records when their passports were scanned by immigration officials, who then prevented them from leaving the country.

ISSUE IN FOCUS: FROZEN CONFLICTS

A number of so-called frozen conflicts exist in the region, including in Crimea, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria. The contested political status of these territories has resulted in the isolation of HRDs working there. Defenders working on refugee integration, the protection of ethnic minorities, the rights of prisoners and the whereabouts of the disappeared – all considered politically sensitive topics – were harassed by authorities in each of the regions. A Moldovan NGO monitoring abuses in Transnistria was forced to halt its activities in 2015 after the Transnistrian Committee for State Security initiated criminal proceedings against it for 'endangering state security'.

International attention on Crimea – forcibly annexed by the Russian Federation in 2014 – focused on the political dimension of the annexation and eventually shifted to the related conflict in eastern Ukraine. Very little attention and support has been offered to local HRDs. There have been reports of abductions, intentional road accidents, searches in the homes of HRDs, surveillance, questioning by security officials, unlawful detention, criminal prosecution and forced psychiatric examination as well as threats to family members. Particularly at risk are local journalists and those working to defend the rights of Crimean Tatars. A journalist who had his computer tampered with when having it repaired was subsequently charged in connection with articles about the annexation which were found on his computer. The security services appear to target people who have a Ukrainian passport. Crimean Tatar activists have faced charges of extremism and terrorism, including in relation to their participation in demonstrations against the annexation. These groups continue their work with extremely limited means and outside support. HRDs documenting cases of violations told Front Line Defenders that they are sometimes unable to investigate as they had no means to travel to the area of the alleged violation.

middle east and north africa

Authoritarian governments in Egypt, member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council⁶, Algeria, Iran and Sudan continued to pursue a policy of silencing HRDs. Morocco and Lebanon witnessed setbacks and defenders in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and Western Sahara were systematically repressed.

In Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen the disintegration of the central state and all out war, combined with the spread of sectarianism and the growing power of extremist Islamist groups, increased the risks facing HRDs. Their physical integrity remained a major concern in these countries, where killings, disappearances and torture were reported. In Deir Al-Zour in Syria, five journalists and observers affiliated with the Development Interaction Network were executed by the so-called Islamic State in June. In August, Iraqi journalist Wedad Hussein Ali was found dead hours after being abducted in Kurdistan by unidentified men. His body showed evidence that he had been tortured. In the days prior to his abduction, the 28 year-old had been summoned several times by Kurdish security forces for interrogation. Disappearances were also reported in Egypt.

Judicial harassment was commonly used against defenders across the region. HRDs were summoned for interrogation, detained, charged or convicted in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, Iran, Israel/OPT, Kuwait, Oman, Sudan and Western Sahara. In Algeria, Slimane Bouhafs was sentenced to five years' imprisonment in August on charges of insulting the religion of the state. A freedom of expression activist, Bouhafs also defended minority rights and freedom of religion. His sentence was reduced to three years on appeal in September.

In Lebanon, Syrian HRDs who documented crimes committed by the Syrian regime and other warring parties and who provided support for Syrian refugees were repeatedly intimidated by Lebanese authorities. Also facing intimidation and harassment were HRDs defending the rights of Christians in Egypt, the Amazigh people in Morocco and Algeria and the Bidoon in Kuwait. They were subjected to interrogation, prosecution, pre-trial detention, and imprisonment. Advocates for the Yazidi religious community in Iraq and Syria continued to face the risk of being killed or abducted.

Restrictions on foreign funding remained a critical issue and the actions taken against HRDs accused of receiving overseas support were extremely worrying. In Egypt, an investigation of 37 human rights NGOs on suspicion of illegal foreign funding and working without registration remained pending. The authorities summoned a number of directors and members of these NGOs for interrogation, imposed travel bans on leading human rights figures and froze the assets of four NGOs and six HRDs, including groups working on women's rights. In Morocco, seven HRDs continued to face trial over charges of 'receiving foreign funds to threaten the internal security of the state' for publishing reports and conducting training on freedom of expression.

The **right to freedom of association** was severely restricted in most countries in the region. In November, the Egyptian Parliament adopted a new NGO law which placed further restrictions on organisations, specifically in relation to foreign funding and cooperation with international NGOs. It provides a penalty of up to five years' imprisonment for violation of the law. Moroccan authorities continued to deny the registration of human rights NGOs *Comité de Protection de la Liberté de la Presse et d'Expression au Maroc* (Freedom Now), *Association des Droits Numériques* and *Association Marocaine pour le Journalisme d'Investigation*. Lebanese authorities refused to permit certain types of NGOs, especially those working on the rights of domestic workers or LGBTI issues, to register. In Yemen, warring factions threatened human rights NGOs with closure.

Stigmatisation of HRDs was common in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, OPT and intensified in Israel, where NGOs B'tselem and Breaking the Silence were subjected to smear campaigns by the state and settlers. These campaigns coincided with the approval of a new law on 'Transparency Requirements for Parties Supported by Foreign State Entities', which stigmatises rights groups. It requires NGOs that receive more than half their funding, directly or indirectly, from foreign governments to prominently display this fact in all of their publications, daily communications with the public and government officials and before their participation in parliamentary hearings.

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In October, the Lebanese Parliament established a National Human Rights Institute. The Institute will monitor the human rights situation, consider complaints of violations, review legislation and issue recommendations. It will also act as national preventive mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and investigate the use of torture and ill-treatment in all places of detention.

Authorities in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq and Sudan used restrictive laws to **curtail peaceful assemblies** and disperse protests by force. Non-violent demonstrations in the OPT were broken up by the Israeli occupation authorities and on some occasions by security forces of the Palestinian Authority. In Sudan, student supporters of the ruling National Congress Party, backed up by the Sudanese security forces, attacked a peaceful protest organised in April by Nubian Sudanese students in Omdurman. Student activist Mohamed Sadiq died from gunshot wounds after members of the National Intelligence and Security Services opened fire on the demonstrators, who had gathered to protest the killing of another student activist, Abu Bakr Hashim, by security forces the previous week.

Governments obstructed the work of HRDs through **legal restrictions on freedom of expression** including the use of laws targeting ‘cybercrime’, which impacted on HRDs who use the Internet for their work. Defamation laws were used against HRDs in Iraq and Lebanon who scrutinise the performance of politicians and public servants. Blasphemy laws were employed against defenders in Algeria and in Kuwait against WHRDs who were outspoken about discrimination against women. Certain punitive measures such as banning newspapers, blocking websites, referring journalists to trial, and imposing heavy fines and prison sentences were taken against media organisations, journalists and bloggers in Algeria, Bahrain, Oman and Sudan for speaking out against corruption in public institutions.

There was the welcome adoption of a new Media and Press Law in Morocco in August which replaced prison sentences for media offences with fines. The new law dictates that only a court can withdraw and seize publications and suspend the activities of media outlets. However, restrictions on freedom of expression remained in place: the Penal Code provides for detention for expression-related offences and journalists and private media outlets were ordered to pay heavy fines for publishing reports critical of the monarchy and other public officials. Ali Anouzla, editor of online newspaper Lakome, was charged in May with “undermining national territorial integrity” in connection with comments he made during an interview on Western Sahara with German newspaper Bild. He spoke about limitations on freedom of expression in Morocco as well as corruption and human rights violations including torture.

Across the region HRDs faced restrictions on their **freedom of movement**. Authorities increased their use of travel bans against HRDs, especially in Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and UAE. In Yemen, the Houthi authorities banned HRDs from travelling and confiscated their passports. In many cases, travel bans were used for the purpose of retaliation against HRDs who cooperated with UN human rights mechanisms.

ISSUE IN FOCUS: LGBTI RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Public discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity continue to be taboo in most MENA countries. In spite of this, the movement for LGBTI rights has grown. LGBTI rights defenders have developed legal and practical tactics to maintain their personal security and to cope with the hostile and restrictive environment in which they work. Homosexuality is criminalised in most MENA countries and can be punishable by death in Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Yemen. The killing of persons accused of homosexuality occurred in 2016 in areas of Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen which are under the de facto control of extremist Islamists or militias. Homosexuality is not illegal in the West Bank but it is criminalised by Hamas in the Gaza strip.

Most of the groups which work on sexual orientation and gender identity issues avoid applying for registration or explicitly referring to the rights of LGBTI people in their statutes. Some LGBTI NGOs, however, have chosen a public strategy for their struggle. In Lebanon, which hosts a vibrant LGBTI rights movement, Helem Association has failed so far to achieve registration under the NGO law, although it is allowed to operate openly. Litigation allowed Lebanese LGBTI defenders to obtain significant judicial precedents in 2009, 2014 and 2016 against the criminalisation of homosexuality. After several attempts in Tunisia, Shams Association was granted official registration by the Interior Ministry in May 2015. However, it has since faced numerous administrative obstacles from the authorities.

Tunisian LGBTI defenders who worked openly were subjected to death threats and physical violence. Bouhdid Belhedi, member of the Executive Bureau of Shams, was physically assaulted in April and again in August by men who were reported to have used homophobic slurs during the attacks. Homophobic violence against LGBTI defenders was also recorded in Algeria and well-known LGBTI defenders have been the subject of regular police harassment in Morocco. These risks are exacerbated by public incitement to discrimination and violence, including by religious figures. Although avoiding visibility, LGBTI defenders in other countries in the region do maintain contacts with regional and international groups while quietly working to combat prejudice and build a network to fight for their rights.

Endnotes

1. This figure represents the number of individuals working peacefully to defend the human rights of others who were killed in 2016. It does not include individuals who worked on issues which – as commendable and positive as they may be – are not recognised as human rights under international law. The figure is based on data available at the time of publication. An updated figure will be published by March 2017.
2. See Front Line Defenders, *Victim Blaming: Bangladesh's Failure to Protect Human Rights Defenders*, November 2016, available at <https://frontlinedefenders.atavist.com/bangladesh-report>.
3. See letter addressed to the President of the World Bank by over 300 organisations, available at <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/open-letter-dr-jim-yong-kim-president-world-bank>.
4. See <https://deibert.citizenlab.org/2016/08/disarming-a-cyber-mercenary-patching-apple-zero-days/>
5. See official website of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation at <http://unro.minjust.ru/NKOForeignAgent.aspx>.
6. Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates.

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