



GLOBAL ANALYSIS 2024/25



Cover image: Sammi Deen Baloch, a prominent WHRD from Pakistan's Balochistan region and winner of Front Line Defenders' 2024 Award for human rights defenders at risk, addresses a crowd.

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FOREWORD

"WE MUST STAND TOGETHER"

Thirteen years ago, when my father was forcibly disappeared, it felt as if our world had been plunged into darkness. We lived in constant uncertainty.

It was a cold December day in 2009 when my father was forcefully disappeared from Karachi, Pakistan's southern port city. He had previously been arrested in 2006 and 2007 on terrorism charges, but was later released by the court as the charges could not be proven against him. He had travelled to Karachi from Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan, to seek medical treatment for my ailing mother because there were no proper hospitals in Balochistan.

That day marked the beginning of the darkest chapter of our lives. My mother was ill, far from home for treatment, and my father vanished without a trace. We turned to the courts and the police for help, to no avail. He had been disappeared twice before, but this time, deep down, we feared the worst.

We couldn't stop thinking about what he went through in his torture cell. After his first arrest in 2006, he told us about how he was hung upside down, deprived of sleep for weeks, given only one meal a day and was forced to relieve himself in the same bottle he was given for drinking water.

Then, one summer day in July 2011, a year and a half after his disappearance, the news came. A bullet-riddled body had been found 50 kilometres outside Karachi. During those days, enforced disappearances always ended in extrajudicial killings. Whenever we heard of an unidentified body, my family would rush to the hospital, bracing for the worst. Every time, it was someone else. But on that unfortunate day, our worst nightmare became reality. The dumped body was my father's.



Dr. Mahrang Baloch is a leading figure in Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) a network documenting and advocating for human rights in Balochistan.

© Dr. Mahrang Baloch

For my siblings and I, our world ended that day. But losing our father was only the beginning of our struggles. I never imagined I would one day find the strength to fight for the disappeared. But the injustice we suffered became my purpose.

Almost a decade later, in December 2017, my brother was also forcibly disappeared, opening up sore wounds from the past. But this time, I refused to remain silent. I protested. I faced the cameras. I shouted until my voice was hoarse. And after months of tireless struggle, in 2018, he was released. That moment gave me hope that speaking up, and resisting, could make a difference.

Unfortunately, today Balochistan is even more volatile, especially for human rights defenders. It is representative of many other contexts, where dissidence is strongly punished, the police use excessive violence against us, and authorities arbitrarily arrest us frequently. Yet, despite the dangers, like so many other HRDs around the world, I refuse to remain silent.

And for that, we are punished every single day.

Beyond my own struggle, I see the suffering of women across the world, facing wars, genocide, and highly restrictive spaces.

In Afghanistan, women are sold like cattle. In Gaza, mothers are slaughtered before the eyes of their children – a 65-year-old woman crushed under an Israeli tank as her son watched in horror. In South Sudan, women face prolonged, brutal gang rapes, while their families are made to witness their pain. Rohingya women, already displaced, are raped in refugee camps by those meant to protect them, giving birth to children conceived in violence. In Iran, women are thrown into jail every day for daring to exercise their freedom of choice. All over the world, women face unique intersectional struggles and, above managing the expectations, and burdens, of being a woman in their various societies, they find the strength and energy to advance the cause for human rights.

I feel sometimes that the world is unravelling. The rise of the far right has never been more prominent and threatening than it is now, and resistance comes at a high cost. Laws are being weaponized to strangle human rights, silence dissent, and suppress the free flow of information. Pakistan's *Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Bill 2025* is just one example of governments criminalising activism in the digital space. Across the globe, the space for resistance is shrinking rapidly. Governments, with all their power, are trying to crush those who dare to speak out.

In many contexts, human rights defenders are facing higher risks than ever. My own experiences mirror the struggles of countless others around the world. From losing a father to watching my brother vanish, to now being declared a criminal in my own homeland. I face over a dozen police cases under Pakistan's anti-terrorism law. My name was placed on the Fourth Schedule, a domestic terror watchlist once reserved for the most dangerous criminals and terrorists. My bank accounts are frozen. My passport and national identity card are blocked. I am trapped within the borders of a country that has done everything to silence me.

Globally, fellow HRDs are increasingly being likened to terrorists, with our governments using anti-terror legislation to unjustly criminalise us. With the shrinking space for human rights globally, more HRDs have had to consider fleeing for their own protection. They face the hard choice of staying in their homeland, facing constant danger, or leaving and facing new struggles such as possible deportation and refoulement.

And yet, the attacks do not stop there. The use of online spaces and digital surveillance to harass HRDs has become an increasing threat. Every day, a new campaign is launched against me. Deepfake images, fabricated videos and unfounded rumours flood social media, with the aim of humiliating and discrediting me. I live under constant surveillance, and I know I am not alone in this. This is the reality I wake up to every day. All this is done carefully and organically to break me.

But they have failed.

Because what keeps me going is the support, resilience, and strength of my people, fellow human rights defenders and activists, and those who stand with us in solidarity. The children who run to me at protests and hug me, their small arms wrapped around me like armour. The ailing mothers who hold my hands, kiss them with trembling lips, and whisper through their tears that I am their last hope. And they represent everything we are fighting for.

On the night of 7 October, 2024, when I was stopped by Pakistani authorities from travelling to New York for an event to mark my recognition in the Time100 2024 list, it was Front Line Defenders who stayed awake all night, fighting for me. I screamed alone that night not in despair, but in gratitude. Because I knew I was not alone.

As I sit here in detention, not knowing my fate, I am reminded that true strength is not just physical; it is mental and ideological. Strengthen yourselves mentally and ideologically. Be each other's support. Never allow yourselves to break.

We must continue to resist. Because human rights defenders are the ones standing on the frontlines, risking everything so that others may find their missing loved ones, so that everyone can go to school, so that the silenced can speak, so that women raped in refugee camps can find justice, so that those fighting alone in their homes, their villages, their cities can know they are not alone.

We must stand with them, and we must stand together. Not for a nation. Not for a religion. Not for a race. But for humanity.

Because if we do not, who will?

Dr Mahrang Baloch

Dr. Mahrang Baloch is a woman human rights defender and vocal campaigner for the rights of the Baloch community in Pakistan. She has consistently spoken out against ongoing violations by the Pakistani police, military and intelligence agencies. She is a leading figure in the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) a network documenting and advocating for human rights in Balochistan. In November 2023, she led the Baloch Long March against extra judicial killings and enforced disappearances. In July 2024, she was part of the Baloch National Gathering in Gwadar, Balochistan, which was brutally suppressed by security forces and police. She has faced numerous threats to her safety and has been targeted with false criminal cases, travel bans and measures under the anti-terror law as punishment for her work.

At the time of writing, Dr Mahrang Baloch was in detention. On 22 March 2025, she was arrested by Balochistan Police during a peaceful sit-in to protest police violence against protesters from the previous day, as well as the arrest of Baloch human rights defenders, including Bebarg Zehri and his brother on 20 March 2025. Despite her own suffering, Dr Mahrang found the strength to reflect and uplift fellow defenders globally—writing words of encouragement and solidarity from detention, a profound act of selflessness.



At least **324 human rights defenders** from **32 different countries** were killed in 2024 in an attempt to silence them and their work. The Human Rights Defenders Memorial pays tribute to all of them:

Bangladesh

Abu Taher Md Turab
Hasan Mehedi
Swapan Kumar Bhadra

Brazil

Ademir Ferreira Ribeiro, "Baiano"
Alana de Jesus
Algimiro Escarlante, "Rezador
Algimiro"
Arlindo Firmino de Brito
Cícero Rodrigues Lima
Haniel Paliano
Iracema Correia dos Santos, "Dona
Iracema"
José Roberto da Rocha
Lucas Cruz de Jesus, "Duduka"
Maria de Fátima Muniz de Andrade,
"Nêga Pataxó"
Melquisedeque Gomes da Silva,
"Melk do Mutirão"
Neri Ramos da Silva
Raimundo Bertoldo, "Bracinho"
Sidiney Oliveira Silva
Zaqueu Fernandez Baileiro

Cambodia

Chhoeung Chheung

China

Ibrahim Dawut (*forcibly disappeared
in 2019, killing confirmed in 2024*)

Colombia

Abelardo Quintero Duque
Alba Rocío Riaño Nossa
Aldinebin Ramos Buitrago
Alexander Pilcué Tenorio
Alfredo Alonso Osorio Gallego
Álvaro Javier Morales Flor
Alveiro Caicedo Barragán

Andrés Erazo
Ángel Miguel Sarmiento Reyes
Antonio Montañez Villanza
Argemiro Mayo García
Beyanid González Rojas
Billy Smith Salgado Camargo
Brayan Camilo Sevillano Guanga
Bruno Pambelé Moreno
Camilo Fernando Sánchez Calderón
Carlos Alberto Aristizábal Morales
Carlos Andrés Ascué Tumbo
Carlos César Camacho Valencia
Carlos Eduardo Cerquera
Carlos Jeison Jiménez Gutiérrez
Carmelina Yule Pavi
Clarivet Ocampo Fernández
Claudia Esther Ocampo Camacho
Cristian Alberto Castrillón Chicaiza
Dairo Yovani Aquite
Daniel Nolavita
Dario de Jesús Hernández
Darwin Falla Teteyé
Deivi Enrique Junco Hernández
Dideison Espinosa
Didier Alexander Vargas Guerrero
Didier Yesid Vélez Ogari
Diego Tulande Acosta
Dino Ul Musicue
Diomira Cifuentes Alegría
Donaldo Silva Pedrozo
Edgar Eduardo Victoria Segura
Elider Antonio Díaz Arias
Elio Arley Quiñones Verdugo
Emerson David Silva Martínez
Emilio Campo Dagua
Erney Noa Papa
Ever Albeiro Espí Hernández
Eyber Danilo Poto Pazú
Eywar Yamid Morán Campo
Fabián Castaño Serna
Fabio Alex Ortega Acero

Fernando Pérez Beltrán
Fernando Romero Fierro
Ferney Aponte
Fidel Antonio Hernández Correa
Franklin Villafañez
Geovanny Luna Cárdenas
Gercy Cáceres Flórez
Germán Ríos Cifuentes
Graciela Mendoza Valencia
Gustavo Antonio Lozada Zambrano
Gustavo Taquinás
Heber Rivera Méndez
Hernán Henríquez Mora
Higinio Bastos Marín
Hilton Eduardo Barrios Jara
Isidoro Bautista Ortiz
Israel Romero Rojas
Jackson Emilio Romaña Cuesta
Jaime Alexander Betancur Cárdenas
Jaime Alonso Vásquez Giraldo
Jaime Ernesto Páez Devia
Jaime Vargas Roncancio, "Calabazo"
Jairo José Rodríguez Rueda
James Alberto Arboleda
Javier Conda Cárdenas
Jeison Buenaños Pinilla
Jermín Luis Padilla Valdez
Jhon Freddy Gil Franco
Jhon Fredy Muchavisoy
Jhon Fredy Pérez
Jhon Jairo Forastero Machuca
Jimmy Alejandro Rosero Chávez
Johana Patricia Sepúlveda
John Fredy Ramírez
Jorge Antonio Méndez Pardo
Jorge Luis Ávila Jiménez
José Alirio Chocué Molano
José Alirio Piraban Cataño
José Antonio Lozano Puentes
José Elver Giraldo Villada
José Emanuel Oca Cuspián

José Enrique Roa Cruz
José Gregorio Hernández Isaza
José Joaquín Aguilar Nadjar
José Lenoir Guerrero Tovar
José Luis Hernández
José Rafael Meza Rivera
José Ricardo Calderón Núñez
José Urbano Chávez Hurtado
Joselito Acosta León
Josué Castellanos Pérez
Juan de Dios Graciano Tuberquia
Juan Diego Cubides
Julio Alberto Zapata Osorio
Julio Zalabata Luque
Karis Saldarriaga
Lelis Armando Santana Quenza
León Eugenio García Jiménez
Lida Katherin Rojas Torres
Lirnedý Soto
Lisímaco Zamudio Vanegas
Lorenzo Pascal Guanga
Ludivia Galíndez Jiménez
Luis Alberto Vivas
Luis Alfredo Leones Álvarez
Luis Eduardo Vaca León
Luis Fernando Osorio
Luis Obdulio Ramón
Luis Oswaldo Yule Palco
Luz Berilia Chalá Córdoba
Manuel Moya Villarreal
Manuel Salvador Sánchez Canónico
Marcial Díaz
Mardonio Mejía Mendoza
María Camila Ospitia León
María Teresa Peña Rodríguez
Marián Rodríguez Camelo
Martín Emilio Rodríguez
Mary Emilse Bailarín Domicó
Mauricio Collazos Collazos
Narciso Beleño
Nelson Javier Pérez Vargas
Oscar Javier Bernal Guerrero
Ovéimar Yivan Ramos Fernández
Rafael Arcángel Ramírez
Ramón Arturo Montejo Peinado
Rodolfo Enrique Rivera Tarazona
Roxenda Sangíneo Aguilar
Ruben Antonio Jaramillo Cadavid
Sandra Lorena Anacona
Segundo Virgilio Imbachí Noguera
Steven Andrés Fajardo Monroy
Tiberio Domicó Bailarín

Uber Noguera España
Victor Alfonso Yule Medina
Victor Manuel Vargas
Wilfrido Segundo Izquierdo Arroyo
William Molina
William Ramírez Muñoz
Willis Guillermo Robinson Sánchez
Yarlinton Robledo Rentería
Yeimer Rodolfo Acero Pineda
Yeri Edwin Gaitán
Yirleana Lorena Moreno Cuesta
Yofri Heraldo Vázquez Medina
Yoiner Gómez Burbano
Yoli Áchito Rojas
Yoli María Toloza Cardoza
Zayra Yurley Enciso Gómez

Cuba

Manuel de Jesús Guillén Esplugas

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Alexandre Munyaruhango Nzanye
Nyiramudasumba Aimé
Sikujwa Mapenzi

Ecuador

Alberto Quiñóñez
Alejandro Lapo
Didson de la Cruz Quiñóñez

El Salvador

Rosa Elvira Flores Martínez

Guatemala

Alex Ernan Morales Escamilla
Álvaro Isidro Gudiel Recinos
Anastacio Tzib Caal
Anonymous
Anonymous
Anonymous
Dancy Nohemy De la Cruz
Diego Francisco Jacinto
Dilan De Rosa
Edith del Rosario Cifuentes López
Edy Amílcar Caal
Felipe Xo Quib
Félix Orozco Huinil
Francisco Cuteres
Francisco Pop Ico
José Domingo Montejo

Juan Antonio Botello García
Kendal Gonzáles Torres
Luis Emilio Vásquez de León
Marcelo Yaxón Pablo
Oswaldo Castro
Ricardo Manuel Fajardo
Samuel Callejas
Santos López Hernández
Selvin Fernando Xuya
Sully González
Valeriano López Méndez
Victor Canel

Honduras

Erlin Asbiel Blandín Álvarez
Juan López
Luis Alonso Teruel Vega
Marvin Dubón
Selvin Noé García Pérez

India

Gokarakonda Naga Saibaba
Shivshankar Jha

Indonesia

Arbaini
Rico Sempurna Pasaribu
Russel

Iran

Sepehr Shirani

Madagascar

Raymond Rakotoarisoa

Mexico

Carmen López Lugo
Ángela Almeras León, "Angelita"
Noé Sandoval Adame
Javier Ochoa Tejeda
José Ángel Pelcastre
Ventura Ojeda
Florentino Castro
Samantha Gómez Fonseca
Antonio Regis Nicolás
Jorge Cortina Vázquez
Alberto Cortina Vázquez
Alberto Verales Tepetitla
Lorenzo Santos Torres
Roberto Figueroa
Daniel Bautista Vásquez
Marcelo Pérez Pérez

Abraham Alejandro Gobel Gómez
Adriana Ortiz García
Virginia Ortiz García
Pablo Gómez Sánchez
Marcos Sánchez Perea
Ignacio López
Isidra Sosme Temich
Rosalinda López
Alfonso López
Teresita de Jesús Arrazate González
Yohari Belén
Dolores Arrazate Córdoba
Jean Cadet Odimba On'etambalako
Wetshokonda
Alejandro Martínez Noguez, "El Hijo
del Llanero Solitario"
Gerardo Cruz Palacios
Mario Hernández Martínez

Mozambique

Albino José Sibia, "Mano Shottas"

Myanmar (formerly Burma)

Pe Maung Same

Nicaragua

Guzmán Ocampo Cruz
Marlon Ocampo Cruz
Roy Dilson Devis Blandón
S.K.T.I

Pakistan

Hazrat Naeem, "Gilaman Wazir"
Kamran Dawar
Khalil Jibran
Khalil Wazir
Muhammad Shiraz
Nasrullah Gadani
Ramazan

Palestine

Abdul Majid Abu Al-Eish
Adnan Al-Bursh
Ahmad Al-Maqadmeh
Ahmad Samour
Ahmed Al-Kahlout
Ahmed Al-Louh
Ayşenur Eygi
Esraa Abu Zaidah
Fares Al-Houdali
Hamza Al-Dahdouh
Hamza Murtaja
Hassan Hamd
Ibrahim Muhareb
Ismail Al-Ghoul
Maher Al-Ajrami
Mohammed Abu Saada
Mohammed Balousha
Mustafa Thuraya
Rami Al-Refee
Sayeed Joudeh
Ziad Abu Hlail
Ziad Mohammed Al-Dalou

Peru

Arturo Cárdenas Fernández
Gerardo Keimari Enrique
Jhony Llaja Fernández
Juan José Mota Silvestre
Julio Alejandro Siancas Chati
Marco Antonio Castilla Flores
Mariano Mucama Isacama Feliciano
Ricardo Kunchikui Shimpujat
Victorio Dariquebe Gerawairey

Philippines

Alberto Cuartero
Bernard Torres Sr.
Dioniso Baloy Baloy
Gregorio Navarette Jr.

Russia

Pavel Kushnir

Somalia

Abdi Mushungli
Abdikarin Ahmed Bulhan
Amun Abdullahi Mohamed
Anonymous
Anonymous
Axmed Xuseen

Sudan

Sagda Abdelmoula

Syria

Anas Alkharboutli
Heba Suhaib Haj Aref
Mazen Al-Hamada
Mustafa Al-Kurdi, "Al-Sarout"

Thailand

Netiporn Sanesangkhom, "Bung"
Roning Dolah

Turkey

Reşit Kibar

Ukraine

Tyhran Halustian

Venezuela

Joaquín Hernández

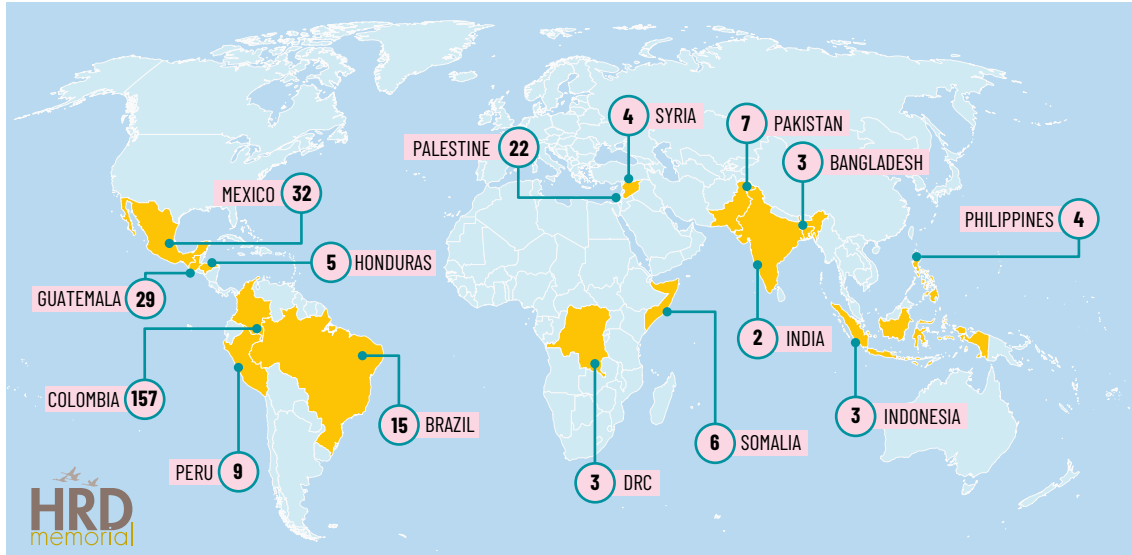
Vietnam

Nguyen Van Dung

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS MEMORIAL



<https://hrdmemorial.org>

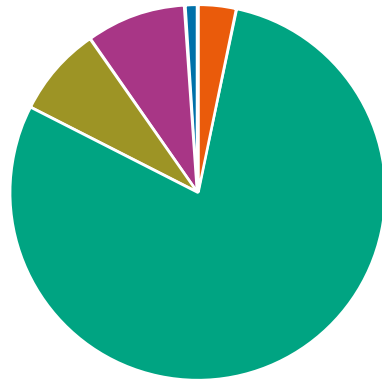


IN 2024, THE HRD MEMORIAL DOCUMENTED THE KILLINGS OF 324 HRDS IN 32 COUNTRIES.

Colombia:	157	Syria:	4	El Salvador:	1
Mexico:	32	Bangladesh:	3	Iran:	1
Guatemala:	29	Democratic Republic		Madagascar:	1
Palestine:	22	of Congo (DRC):	3	Mozambique:	1
Brazil:	15	Ecuador:	3	Myanmar (formerly Burma):	1
Peru:	9	Indonesia:	3	Russia:	1
Pakistan:	7	India:	2	Sudan:	1
Somalia:	6	Thailand:	2	Turkey:	1
Honduras:	5	Cambodia:	1	Ukraine:	1
Nicaragua:	4	China:	1	Venezuela:	1
Philippines:	4	Cuba:	1	Vietnam:	1

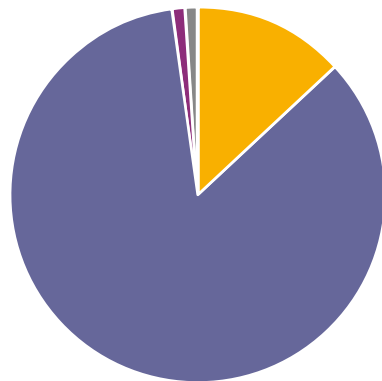
KILLINGS BY REGION

AFRICA:	11	3.4%
AMERICAS:	257	79.3%
ASIA:	25	7.7%
MENA:	28	8.7%
EECA:	3	0.9%



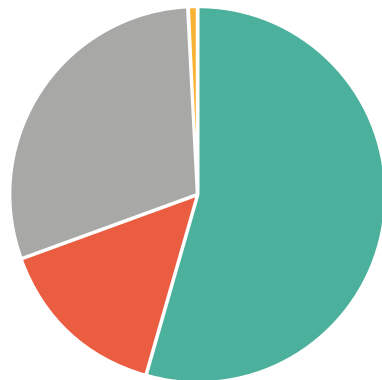
KILLINGS BY GENDER

WOMEN:	43	13.3%
MEN:	274	84.6%
TRANS PEOPLE AND GENDER NON CONFORMING:	4	1.2 %
NOT REPORTED:	3	0.9%



PERPETRATORS OF KILLINGS

ALLEGED NON-STATE ACTOR:	177	54.6%
ALLEGED STATE ACTOR:	49	15.1%
UNKNOWN:	96	29.7%
FAMILY MEMBER:	2	0.6%



In 2024, the HRD Memorial documented the **custodial death** of **8 human rights defenders** in **7 different countries**. Custodial deaths include deaths caused by the denial of medical care to arbitrarily detained human rights defenders, killings through acts of torture and ill-treatment in custody, and hunger strikes resulting in deaths.

The HRD Memorial also documented **2 instances** of **post-custodial deaths** of **human rights defenders** in **2 different countries**, including a suspicious death following detention, and a death upon the release of a HRD who had been subjected to ill-treatment and systematic denial of healthcare while in detention.

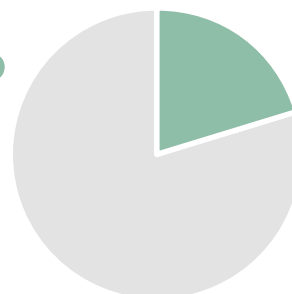
The project was able to verify the **killing** of **59 HRDs** directly or indirectly related to their human rights work challenging business or corporate interests in **16 different countries**.

In at least **9 instances**, **family members and acquaintances of the targeted HRD were also killed in the attack**, including minors. In **36 attacks** that resulted in the killing of HRDs, fellow HRDs, family members and acquaintances, including minors, were injured.

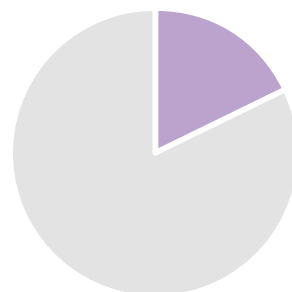
The families and communities of **19 HRDs killed** in 2024 in **10 different countries** were subjected to attacks and repression directly impacting their grieving processes. These include the imposition of restrictions to hold a funeral; denying access to the bodies, including the authorities' withholding of the bodies

HRDS KILLED FOR DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS - THE MOST-TARGETED SECTORS

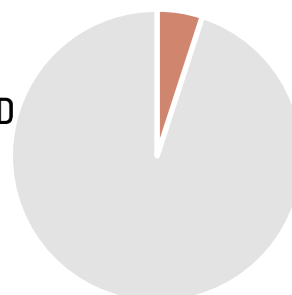
20.4%
OF HRDS
KILLED WERE
LAND RIGHTS
DEFENDERS¹



17.9%
OF HRDS
KILLED WERE
INDIGENOUS
RIGHTS
DEFENDERS²



5.2%
OF HRDS KILLED
DOCUMENTED
HUMAN RIGHTS
VIOLATIONS
IN CONFLICT³



1 In Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru and the Philippines.

2 In Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Venezuela and another country not listed for security reasons.

3 In DRC, Myanmar, Pakistan, Palestine, Somalia and Syria.

of HRDs killed in detention; police violence in the burial of a HRD resulting in the killing of family members; the secret burial of HRDs, including in mass graves; and harassing families into publicly presenting killings of HRDs as suicides.

THE MISSING DATA

In some regions and countries, including **Afghanistan, China, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Iran, Myanmar, Libya, Palestine or Sudan**, the documentation of cases is highly challenging, if not virtually impossible. The lack of data does not reflect the absence of killings of HRDs but rather the multifactorial challenges and repression linked to the documentation of human rights violations.

Documentation challenges include, among others, armed conflicts; killings in remote areas having gone unreported; mass surveillance; self-censorship by and trauma within communities as a result of violence; the deliberate suppression of funding or the imposition of onerous regulations on organisations to receive it; restrictions to the right to freedom of expression, including calculated suppression of information by vested state and non-state interest groups; restrictions to the right to freedom of assembly; and total closure of civic space.

The HRD Memorial data shown here is a presentation of the cases of verified killings of HRDs that have taken place between 1 January – 31 December 2024. It is likely that this dataset is incomplete as partners continue to document and verify cases. At the time of publication, the HRD Memorial continued to research and conduct verifications on the additional killings of **77 people** in **Brazil, Cameroon, DRC, Guinea, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Kenya, Lebanon, Myanmar** (formerly Burma), **Nigeria, Palestine, Tanzania** and **Ukraine**.

Due to mandate limitations, the HRD Memorial dataset above does not include the **killing** of **281 humanitarian workers reported** by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in 2024, the **“deadliest year on record”** for humanitarians according to the agency. This includes the **killings** of **32 Red Crescent and Red Cross staff members and volunteers** killed in 2024 while providing humanitarian assistance to and rescuing populations in crisis situations and areas affected by armed conflicts, including in **Palestine, Sudan, Iran, Algeria, Ethiopia, DRC** and **Syria**.

THE HIGH RISK WORK OF DOCUMENTERS

Human rights documenters, both individuals and organisations, take immense risks to verify and report on killings of HRDs in areas, regions and countries affected by conflicts, genocide, mass displacement, under repressive regimes and dictatorships. They often put their own lives in danger, risking detention, torture and murder, to make sure the truth is

known, justice is achieved, and the legacy of hundreds of human rights defenders killed every year is not forgotten. The HRD Memorial acknowledges and expresses its profound respect to their work.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The HRD Memorial is a joint, global initiative by a network of human rights organisations committed to the protection of human rights defenders and the documentation of killings including: **ACI-Participa** (Honduras); **Amnesty International**; **Comitê Brasileiro de Defensoras e Defensores de Direitos Humanos** (Brazil); **Comité Cerezo** (Mexico); **FIDH**; **Front Line Defenders**; **Global Witness**; **Human Rights Defenders' Alert**– India; **Karapatan** (the Philippines); **OMCT**; **El Programa Somos Defensores** (Colombia); **Red TDT** (Mexico); and **UDEFEGUA** (Guatemala).

GLOBAL STATISTICS

HOW HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ARE TARGETED AROUND THE WORLD

The following statistics are derived from Front Line Defenders' casework and approved grant applications between 1 January and 31 December 2024. **The statistics are based on 2068 reported violations, in 105 countries.** Front Line Defenders often documents multiple violations per case or grant, as this is the reality of the situation for many human rights defenders.

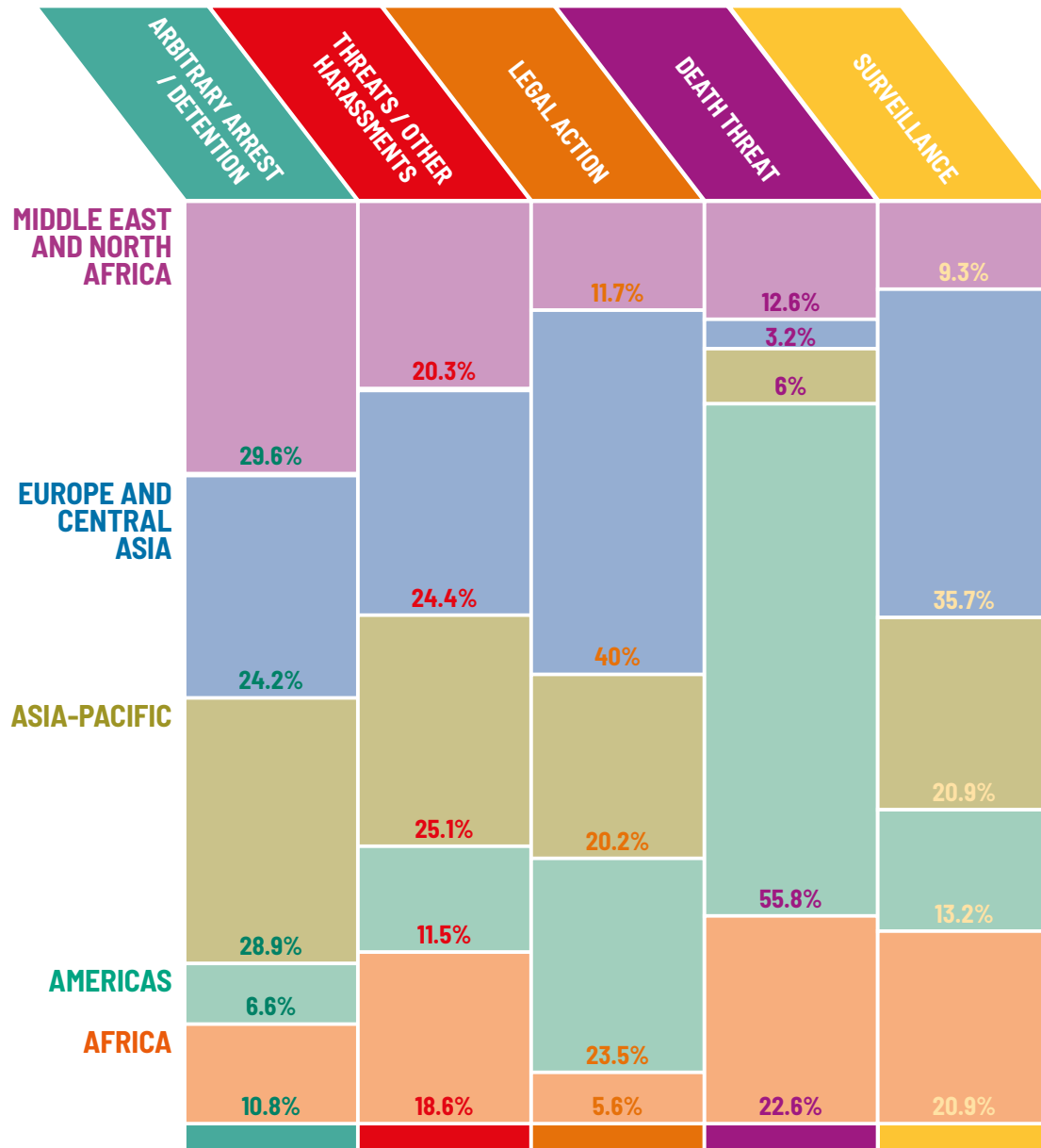
The information Front Line Defenders receives is dependent on HRDs being aware of the organisation and share information about their situation; as such, this data cannot be seen as wholly representative for all HRDs in all countries. This data should serve as an indicator – but not a comprehensive report – of the scope of the violations that human rights defenders face on a daily basis. The data are not exhaustive but reflect key trends reported through FLD's work. Furthermore, incidents of killings have been removed and are addressed in the HRD Memorial data.

The tables below show the breakdown of the most common violations as reported to Front Line Defenders in 2024, as well as the most targeted groups of human rights defenders.



MOST REPORTED VIOLATIONS AGAINST HRDS GLOBALLY

The table reflects the proportion of each region on the most reported violations against defenders globally.*



% OF VIOLATIONS PER REGION

Source: Front Line Defenders (2024)

* For in stance, in 2024, of the violations recorded against HRDs in the Mena region, arbitrary arrest and detention constituted 29.6% of that violation globally.

TRENDS ACROSS THE REGIONS: MOST REPORTED VIOLATIONS BY REGION

The percentages shown reflect the specific violations as a proportion of the total number of violations documented in each region.

AFRICA

THREATS / OTHER HARASSMENT	17.1%
DEATH THREAT	14.3%
ARBITRARY ARREST / DETENTION	14.0%
SURVEILLANCE	12.1%
PHYSICAL ATTACKS	8.3%

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

ARBITRARY ARREST / DETENTION	17.8%
LEGAL ACTION	15.0%
THREATS / OTHER HARASSMENT	13.0%
SURVEILLANCE	11.7%
RAID / BREAK-IN / THEFT	5.6%

AMERICAS

DEATH THREAT	32.5%
LEGAL ACTION	14.6%
THREATS / OTHER HARASSMENT	9.9%
PHYSICAL ATTACKS	8.2%
ARBITRARY ARREST / DETENTION	7.9%

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

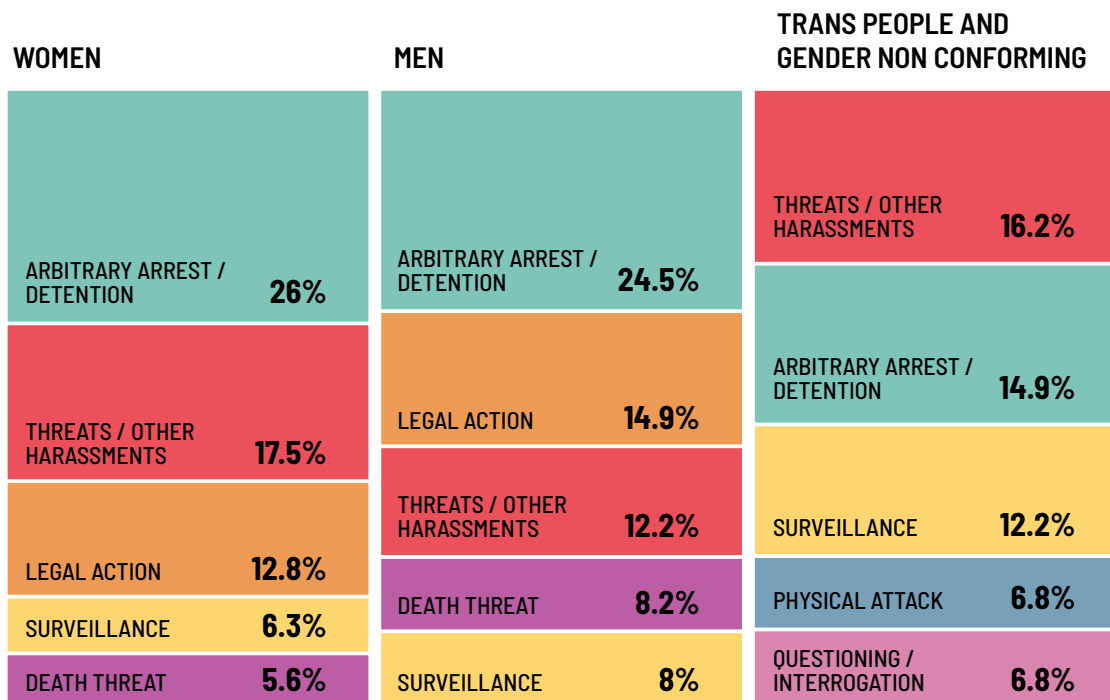
ARBITRARY ARREST / DETENTION	32.9%
THREATS / OTHER HARASSMENT	16.3%
DEATH THREAT	6.8%
LEGAL ACTION	6.8%
PHYSICAL ATTACKS	5.7%

ASIA-PACIFIC

ARBITRARY ARREST / DETENTION	24.2%
THREATS / OTHER HARASSMENT	15.2%
LEGAL ACTION	8.8%
SURVEILLANCE	7.8%
TORTURE / ILL-TREATMENT	6.6%

Source: Front Line Defenders (2024)

MOST REPORTED VIOLATIONS AGAINST HRDS BY GENDER



Source: Front Line Defenders (2024)

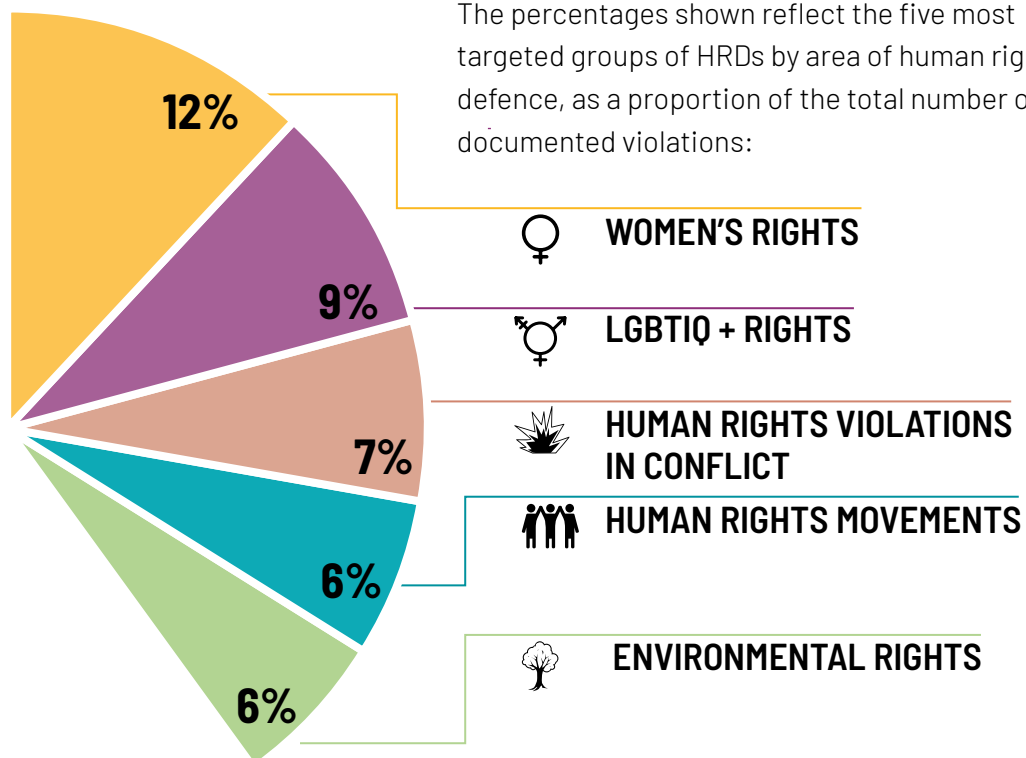
5 MOST COMMONLY CITED LEGAL CHARGES RECORDED AGAINST HRDS, BASED ON 107 CHARGES FILED IN 75 CASES



Source: Front Line Defenders (2024)

AREAS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE

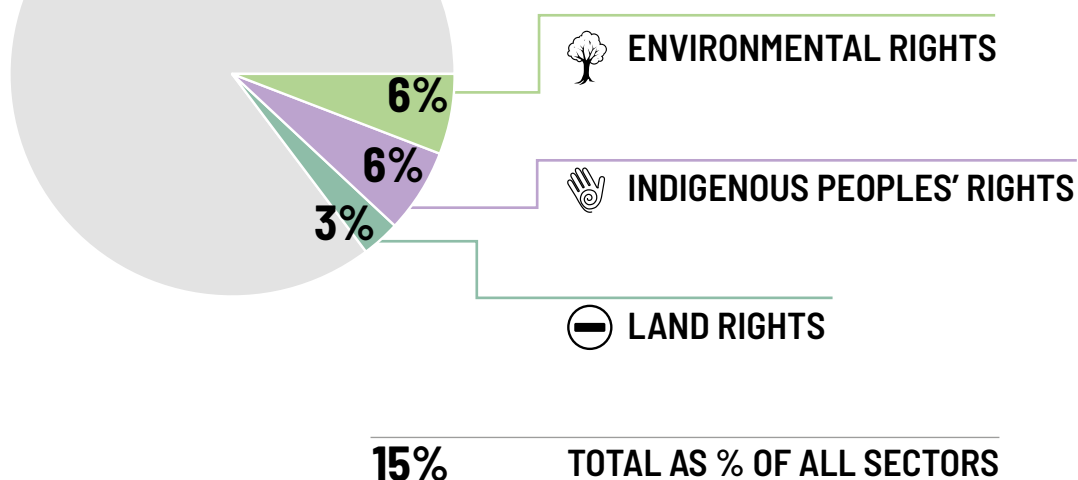
The percentages shown reflect the five most targeted groups of HRDs by area of human rights defence, as a proportion of the total number of documented violations:



Source: Front Line Defenders (2024)

LAND, INDIGENOUS AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS: VIOLATIONS PER SECTOR

The percentages shown reflect land, indigenous and environmental rights defenders as a proportion of the total number of documented violations:



Source: Front Line Defenders (2024)

MOST REPORTED VIOLATIONS AGAINST EACH AREA OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE

The percentages shown reflect the violations experienced as a proportion of the total number of violations to which each group was exposed.



WOMEN'S RIGHTS

THREATS / OTHER HARASSMENT	21.4%
ARBITRARY ARREST / DETENTION	19.5%
LEGAL ACTION	7.6%
QUESTIONING / INTERROGATION	6.5%
OTHER GENDER-RELATED THREATS	5.3%



HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENTS

ARBITRARY ARREST / DETENTION	21.5%
THREATS / OTHER HARASSMENT	17.4%
SURVEILLANCE	14.0%
LEGAL ACTION	5.8%
TARGETING OF A FAMILY MEMBER	5.8%



LGBTIQ+ RIGHTS

THREATS / OTHER HARASSMENT	23.0%
SURVEILLANCE	11.8%
ARBITRARY ARREST / DETENTION	9.1%
SMEAR CAMPAIGN	7.0%
OTHER GENDER RELATED THREATS	7.0%



ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS

ARBITRARY ARREST / DETENTION	22.4%
LEGAL ACTION	20.8%
THREATS / OTHER HARASSMENT	13.6%
SURVEILLANCE	8.0%
DEATH THREAT	7.2%



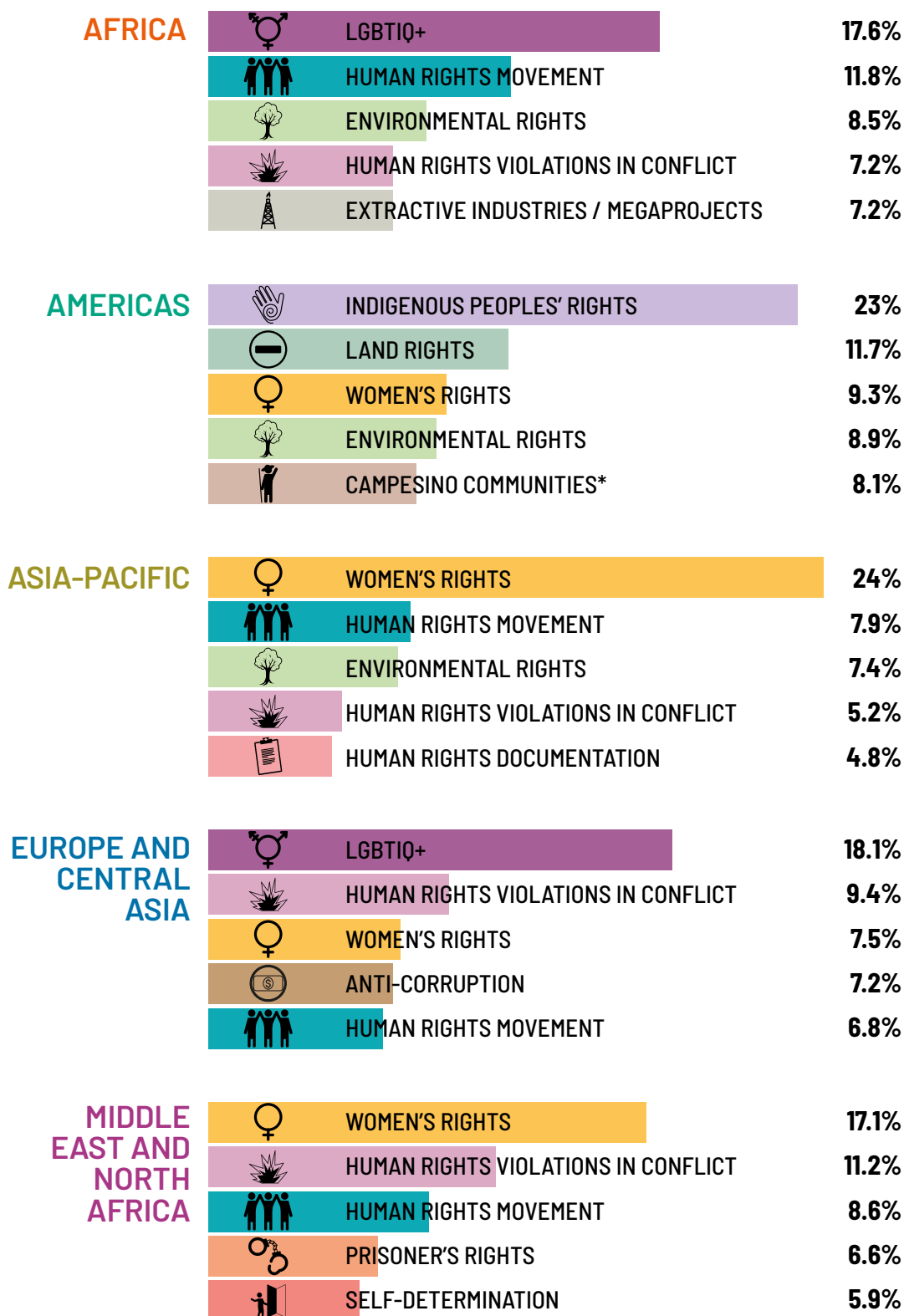
HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN CONFLICT

ARBITRARY ARREST / DETENTION	17.8%
THREATS / OTHER HARASSMENT	16.4%
DEATH THREAT	11.6%
RAID / BREAK-IN / THEFT	8.2%
TRAVEL BAN	6.2%

Source: Front Line Defenders (2024)

TRENDS ACROSS THE REGIONS

FIVE MOST TARGETED AREAS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE BY REGION



Source: Front Line Defenders (2024)

* Peasant

GLOBAL OVERVIEW

2024 was a year of elections, and with voting taking place in over 80 states, the outcome of these elections highlighted the scale of public dissatisfaction around the world. In one country after another, governing parties [lost](#) large shares of their vote or were ejected from power. In some countries, including **Kenya** and **Bangladesh**, changes were forced by the streets, and incumbents had to shift direction or leave power in response to massive protests. Electoral change, however, did not necessarily mean a better situation for human rights defenders (HRDs), who witnessed the deepening cracks in the post-World War II rules-based international order designed to maintain peace and security, and to protect human rights.

United States President Donald Trump's victory in the November elections presaged a dramatic change in the US government's approach to the world, its international commitments and its support for an international order which, in theory at least, prioritises human rights. His campaign pledges to place US financial interests over values, however imperfect, laid the groundwork for a US retreat from multilateralism. This impacted on the safety and security of HRDs in a number of ways, including in the cutting of billions of dollars worth of funding to humanitarian and human rights causes, the cosyng up to autocrats and the further support to an Israeli government committing war crimes. Shortly after taking power, the Trump administration removed human rights protections and weakened accountability frameworks, as the new President attempted to embed a system that favours corporate interests, the wealthy and the most powerful at home and abroad, all the while giving voice to the worst excesses of far-right ideology.

Given the US's previous role as the world's largest humanitarian donor, and leaving aside arguments about how such a system of unequal power came about, the impact of the funding cuts on human rights is [profound](#). At the time of writing, these drastic funding cuts are resulting in the dismantling of human rights organizations and [projects](#), increasing the vulnerability of HRDs to threats and attacks. At the same time, and as described

below, we are seeing an intensifying crackdown on human rights and further restrictions on civic space, driving a surge in urgent support requests from HRDs. With the upheaval in the funding landscape, there is an opportunity for civil society and political actors, including from the Global South, to step up and assert their leadership on human rights and in support of human rights defenders, including proposing more sustainable and less politically-exposed resourcing models. For states, this would involve adopting a principled, values-based stance which grounds policy in international human rights law and which protects and enables the work of HRDs.

The cases included in this report demonstrate how HRDs continue to take risks every day because they believe in the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the possibility of an existence rooted in dignity, respect and empathy. In doing this, they face innumerable challenges in every region of the world, in democracies and autocracies, in cities and in the countryside, in conflict and in peace. Amidst so much flux, they are holding the line and in a world where many issues compete for attention, they deserve greater focus, greater support, and greater protection.

CONFLICT, POST-CONFLICT AND CRISIS SITUATIONS

In a year [characterised](#) by UNICEF as “one of the worst years in history for children in conflict”, HRDs working in conflict and post-conflict areas were pushed to the limit by both conflict-related violations and a lack of support. HRDs working in wars and crisis situations including in **Sudan, Ukraine, Myanmar, Ethiopia, DRC, Kashmir, Afghanistan, Colombia, Mexico, Occupied Palestinian Territory** and **Syria** faced immense challenges, including threats to their safety, restricted access to populations in need and heightened risks of systemic violence.

In **Sudan**, defenders have played a crucial role in staffing [Emergency Response Rooms](#) (ERRs), grassroots initiatives which provide humanitarian support to their communities. Over 700 ERRs have been established throughout the country to meet some of the needs of the population, which is no longer being served by the states as it is disintegrating. Yet defenders involved in the ERRs face grave risks; one such HRD had his house raided three times by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) before he moved to another town to join another ERR, only for his new home to be raided by the RSF, during which he was told he would be killed if he did not stop his work. A WHRD working with internally displaced persons as part of her role volunteering in an ERR was arrested by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). On her release, she felt compelled to move to a part of the country with a weaker military presence. WHRDs specifically working on the rights of women have been targeted in great numbers by both sides in the conflict, and have been physically and sexually attacked, threatened with death and detained. With no institutions or mechanisms able to provide protection to these defenders, temporary relocation to another part of Sudan or to a neighboring country was often the only option to preserve HRDs’ lives and comprised the vast majority of requests that Front Line Defenders received from HRDs in the country.

Communities were largely left on their own in eastern **DRC** as the **Rwanda-backed** M23 rebels deepened their incursion into the country. The brutal violence of the conflict was reflected in the number of requests to Front Line Defenders from HRDs seeking medical or psychosocial support following physical attacks or torture at the hands of either armed groups or the Congolese army. HRDs who documented some of the appalling abuses were labelled as agents of the other side, threatened with death, attacked and abducted. Yet they continued to step into the breach and help their fellow citizens realise their rights. A bounty was placed on the head of two defenders who conducted an investigation into the disappearance of 11 young community members by the M23. Another defender who helped a victim of torture file a complaint against military officers was subjected to attempted abduction.

A common trend no matter where conflicts occurred was that HRDs who monitored human rights violations, gathered evidence, exposed wrongdoing or sought accountability were deliberately targeted, as various groups and parties continued to struggle over control of the narrative. HRDs documenting violations were often the targets of death threats, travel bans, digital surveillance, reprisals and killings from armed groups and authorities, and arbitrary arrest and detention.

HRDs investigating and reporting on abuses in **Myanmar** were at severe risk as the military increased its use of violence in response to its loss of territory during the year. As reported by OHCHR in a year-end [report](#), two journalists were sentenced to life and 20 years in prison by a military court in August. In the same month, a defender and documentary-maker died after being tortured in the notorious Insein Prison. Other cases Front Line Defenders is aware of include a group of journalists whose media organisation was declared illegal and for whom arrest warrants were issued. They, along with other defenders, were at risk of being forcibly conscripted into the army, following the [implementation](#) by the military in February of the 2010 People's Military Service Law. Defenders frequently requested assistance for relocation to opposition territory or into neighbouring countries as their work remained vital to gather information regarding atrocity crimes carried out by the military and armed groups given the networks they had developed throughout Myanmar, despite the steep risks they incur by remaining in the country and region.

Palestinian HRDs in **Gaza** continued to carry out remarkable work, successfully keeping the world informed of the ongoing slaughter during the year despite the Israeli government's attempts to kill their message, and often also the messenger. According to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, the ban on international journalists entering Gaza served to further "suffocate the truth." Yet that truth was delivered by Palestinian journalists, so many of whom were killed or injured. With the borders so tightly controlled and everywhere in Gaza "a potential killing zone," relocation to safer parts of the territory or abroad was not an option for most Gazan HRDs. In this context, human rights defenders and frontline responders—including doctors, health workers, community kitchen leaders

and others—played a key role in providing lifesaving support to their communities and advocating for the enforcement of international human rights laws and norms. By the end of 2024, only 16 of Gaza’s 36 hospitals remained [partially operational](#), “offering just 1,822 beds.” It is estimated that over 1,000 health workers were killed in Gaza in 2024. At the time of publication, the HRD Memorial verified the killing of at least seven doctors and medical workers while on duty in Gaza’s besieged hospitals and medical centers. Others, like prominent surgeon and head of the orthopaedic department at Al-Shifa hospital [Adnan Al Bursh](#), were arrested by the Israel Defence Forces and subsequently died in custody, allegedly under torture. Adnan Al Bursh’s body was still under Israel’s custody by the end of 2024. Defenders continued to document and report on the situation as family members and friends were killed around them. This was reflected in requests Front Line Defenders received from HRDs for information and communications technology (ICT) equipment to replace those that were destroyed or confiscated by the Israeli Defence Forces. Instances of extraordinary resilience emerged in the work of defenders, including in the decision of a WHRD to take over leadership of a small media organisation documenting the impact of the war after her husband, who had been its head, was killed.

CRIMINALISATION: THE MOST REPORTED VIOLATION AGAINST HRDS

In every region, governments and non-state actors turned to judicial systems to disrupt, tie up, stigmatize, bankrupt and imprison HRDs, regardless of the human rights they were defending. Laws designed to keep the public safe were weaponised to keep governments safe instead. This was blatantly exemplified in Zimbabwe in the lead-up to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Summit in August when over 160 HRDs, activists, opposition politicians and students were arbitrarily and pre-emptively detained to prevent any protests highlighting human rights violations during the meeting. Among them were [Namatai Kwekweza](#) and [Robson Chere](#), two HRDs charged with “disorderly conduct in a public place” relating to a gathering neither of them attended. Revealing the nakedly political nature of their detentions and the ruling party’s control over the judicial system, a spokesperson for Zanu-PF [stated](#) at the conclusion of the Summit: “There’s no reason to keep them at the state’s expense in jail, there’s nothing to disturb anymore. There’s nobody to watch them, and no foreigners to watch them, we will release them because they are an expense to the state.” These comments reveal that governments continue to care about how they are perceived internationally and reinforce the value of scrutiny by peer states, the media and regional and international mechanisms, and the vital role HRDs play in keeping the world informed.

The [Russian](#) authorities made widespread use of state security laws to silence Ukrainian HRDs working in Russian-occupied territories as well as Russian HRDs objecting to the country’s continued illegal invasion of [Ukraine](#). WHRD [Iryna Horobtsova](#) was sentenced to ten and half years in prison following a four month closed-door trial in occupied Crimea. The Ukrainian defender was found guilty of espionage under Article 276 of the Criminal

Code. She had been abducted in May 2022 by Russian military forces in Kherson, where she was targeted for her humanitarian work and public support for Ukraine during the city's occupation. Iryna Horobtsova's case highlights the broader pattern of persecution faced by Ukrainian human rights defenders and civilians in Russian-occupied and controlled territories, many of whom have been abducted, tortured, or unlawfully imprisoned on state security charges.

A particularly disturbing trend of criminalisation of indigenous people's rights defenders working to protect their rights, communities and ancestral territories, remained evident in **Mexico**, where such HRDs were subjected to arbitrary arrest, lengthy pre-trial detention and prison terms so severe that they could qualify as informal life imprisonment. Criminalisation processes in Mexico and throughout Latin America are deeply connected to business operations. Instead of protecting the rights of communities, governments align themselves with powerful corporations and criminalise HRDs who denounce corporate malpractices to protect corporate interests, aiming at silencing and preventing them from continuing their human rights work.

In addition to evidencing the role often played by states in defending private interests, this treatment highlights the issue of systemic racism against indigenous peoples permeating the criminal justice system through processes which lack an intercultural approach. It not only limits the right of indigenous peoples to defend their interests and collective rights, but also violates their identity and unity by removing members from the land and placing them in prisons often far removed from their communities. In January, a HRD of the Maya Tzotzil people, **Versain Velasco Garcia**, was sentenced to 58 years in prison on fabricated charges of homicide. Prior to his arrest, he had denounced numerous human rights abuses committed by both security forces and organised crime in the Nueva Palestina community, Chiapas.

Counter-terror legislation was abused by governments everywhere, as they equated human rights promotion with terrorism. **Saudi Arabia** maintained its recent trend of handing down long prison sentences on terrorism charges to WHRDs who voice their support for women's rights online. In January, **Manahel al-Otaibi** was [sentenced](#) to 11 years in prison on such charges. She was detained in 2022 after posting photos of herself online without an abaya and for social media posts in support of liberal dress codes for women and the abolition of male guardianship laws. In recent years, a number of other Saudi WHRDs have been [jailed](#) for decades by anti-terrorism courts for posting online. In **Turkey**, 11 leading figures in the [Istanbul Bar Association](#) were charged with "terrorist propaganda" for publishing a statement in December calling for an investigation into the [killing](#) of two Turkish journalists in Syria by Turkish army drones.

Frequently, counter-terror charges were filed against HRDs where governments intentionally conflated the promotion and protection of human rights of minority communities with the actions of armed groups. Perhaps nowhere was this more evident

than in **India** where authorities continued to detain HRDs under its infamous anti-terror legislation, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). As in many countries, defenders serving prison time in India are forced to do so stripped of their dignity and often without adequate medical care. A defender of minority rights, **G.N Saibaba**, was released after nearly ten years' imprisonment when he was finally acquitted of terrorism charges in March. He had been falsely accused of having links with banned Maoist organisations on account of his work on behalf of Dalit and indigenous communities. Saibaba, who suffered from multiple serious medical conditions including 90% permanent physical disability, saw his health deteriorate severely during his decade in prison due to repeated lack of medical care and appropriate specialised treatment. On his release, G.N. Saibaba [told](#) journalists: "the inhuman treatment meted out to me during the imprisonment, which amounted to torture, put my life at risk. I was denied medical care on several occasions. It has left me a physical wreck. Today, I am alive before you but my organs are failing me." Five months later, he [died](#).

Terrorism allegations were also levelled against environmental, indigenous peoples and land rights defenders who opposed projects impacting their communities without their prior consultation or consideration of the environmental or human rights impacts. In **Romania**, NGOs objecting to energy projects on environmental grounds were [reportedly](#) the subject of a criminal investigation initiated by the Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT), following a complaint filed by the Minister of Energy. The targeted organisations are reported to include Greenpeace Romania and Agent Green, an NGO founded and led by the environmental rights defender **Gabriel Paun**. Meanwhile in **Cambodia**, 10 HRDs from the environmental organisation **Mother Nature Cambodia** were jailed for between six and eight years in July. The Cambodian government had previously [asserted](#) that the organisation was in receipt of "terrorist-sources" funds and that it aimed to "terrorize Cambodia's peace."

In **Ecuador** in the territory of Palo Quemado, in the province of Cotopaxi, the Prosecutor's Office filed charges of "terrorism" against more than 70 community members and HRDs. This followed their protests over a lack of meaningful consultation in relation to the La Plata project to mine gold, silver, copper and zinc on their territory by the Canadian Atico Mining Corp (ATY). In an already highly militarised area, the Ministry of the Environment attempted to carry out a public 'consultation' enforced by hundreds of police officers in March in what was seen by local HRDs as an effort to pressure the community into consenting to the project. Reports from local organizations [indicated](#) that at least 15 *campesinos* were injured by police use of rubber bullets, pellets, and tear gas canisters.

RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION

Governments continued to pay lip service to human rights on the international stage while at the same time narrowing the avenues through which HRDs could realise those rights without being prosecuted. **Foreign Agent Laws**, which stigmatise or penalise organisations and individuals who receive funding from foreign entities, were drafted or introduced in a number of countries, including **Georgia** and **Serbia**. At a time when traditional funders of human rights reduce their funding or turn away from providing aid altogether, these laws further weaken the capacity of defenders to organise and deliver on the promise of human rights in their countries. **Chinese** authorities introduced stifling new legislation in Hong Kong with the National Security Law, which is clearly designed to obliterate human rights activism. The provisions of this law are so broad and vague that even interactions with the United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms are potentially criminalised.

Draft NGO laws were also introduced or passed in a number of countries including in **Rwanda**, **Zambia**, **Paraguay**, **Venezuela** and **Tunisia**. Though differing in detail, these laws generally impose excessive reporting requirements, extensive government oversight, burdensome registration requirements and opaque criteria allowing for denial of registration or suspension of activities. Some drafts contain a laundry list of acts which NGOs are not permitted to engage in, though these are rarely concretely defined. One such sample is contained in the draft law [Governing Non-Governmental Organisations](#) in Rwanda, which passed its first reading in parliament last year. Article 6 of the bill asserts that registration of NGOs may be refused if there is “evidence indicating that the applicant organisation is harming or intends to harm the security, peace, health, unity of Rwandans, public order, good morals or the rights and freedoms of others.”

A third clear trend from 2024 in relation to restrictive legislation was the **reduction in scope of the right to peaceful assembly** by a number of governments. In **Peru**, the Congress passed a law imposing severe penalties on individuals organising or participating in unauthorised protests, while expanding police powers to disperse demonstrations. The **Pakistani** government introduced the [Peaceful Assembly and Public Order Act 2024](#), which empowers the authorities to limit demonstrations in Islamabad on broad grounds including “disruption of daily activities” and increases punishments for taking part in “unlawful assemblies” from six months to three years imprisonment. In July, an anti-protest law came into effect in Slovakia which bans protests at government buildings, the presidential palace and a number of other traditional sites of demonstration. The Crimes of Vandalism Law in **Angola** was enacted which, among other elements, prescribes prison sentences for anyone who “disturbs or frustrates, even temporarily, the provision of a public service”. These draconian provisions could allow, for example, the jailing of peaceful protesters engaged in temporary road blockages or non-violent occupations of universities or other public buildings.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

The window of mainstream public discourse on permissible forms of protest is being dragged further and further away from what is permissible under international human rights law. In its [General Comment No.37](#), the UN Human Rights Committee reasserted that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) protects peaceful assemblies “wherever they take place: outdoors, indoors and online; in public and private spaces, or a combination thereof.” The Committee further stated that “spontaneous assemblies” were also protected under Article 21 of the ICCPR and that if an assembly remains peaceful, even if domestic legal requirements relating to gatherings are not met, the right to peaceful assembly remains protected under Article 21.

Yet HRDs engaging in peaceful protest were subjected to most frequently to arbitrary arrest and detention, but also numerous other rights violations, including physical violence, harassment, travel bans, house raids, and legal action. Such treatment occurred in countries in every region, including in **Bangladesh**, **El Salvador**, **Uganda** and **Iran**. The crackdown on peaceful anti-war protests in the **US** and **Germany** highlighted the great distance in terms of policy that authorities in both countries had travelled from previously championing international human rights standards on freedom of assembly.

Across the **United States**, students calling for an end to the Israeli war on **Gaza**, divestment of university assets linked to **Israel** and an end to academic ties with Israeli institutions saw their encampments broken up by the police, who had been [called in](#) by the university authorities. This reportedly resulted in instances of police repression, including the use of tear gas and stun guns in the arrested and reported physical violence against peaceful students protesters and faculty members. In an April raid on the encampment in Columbia University, at least 108 students were [arrested](#) by the New York Police Department, which [stated](#) that protesters were “peaceful, offered no resistance whatsoever, and were saying what they wanted to say in a peaceful manner.” The student movement reported multiple threats from their universities, including suspensions, restrictions on taking exams, rescinding of their campus residency and/or having their degrees withheld. Some universities’ students and faculty staff also faced attacks by pro-Israel counter-protesters.

Meanwhile, the UN Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention [published](#) a position paper in February expressing grave concerns about the growing tendency of states to repress, rather than to enable and protect, peaceful environmental protests. He highlighted recent legislative changes in **Germany**, **Italy** and the **UK** which “introduced severe restrictions on, harsher sentences for, or have prohibited entirely, certain forms of protest.” In August, he [condemned](#) the four year sentence handed down in the UK to environmental protester **Daniel Shaw** on a charge of “conspiracy to cause a public nuisance.” The charge related to Shaw’s participation in a Zoom call in which participants planned to disrupt traffic by having protesters climb onto the gantries over the M25 motorway in London in order to draw attention to the climate crisis.

LAND, INDIGENOUS AND ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS DEFENDERS

In late 2024 and early 2025, a host of businesses, corporations and institutions in the US announced a significant weakening of their environmental commitments. In early 2025, the European Commission, heavily influenced by corporate lobbying, proposed the further weakening of the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, allegedly aiming at simplifying reporting processes for companies and reducing bureaucratic burdens. If approved, the proposed changes will scrap many business obligations on human rights and the environment. HRDs had hoped that the Directive would reduce the levels of violence they faced by obliging businesses in the EU to account for environmental and social harms throughout their value chains. The European Commission's proposed changes were presented without any justification for their necessity, consultation, or impact assessments, risks undermining key aspects of a law meant to ensure human rights and environmental protection. Cuts include the drastic limitation of risk assessment obligations, reduction of supply chain transparency for smaller businesses, and removal of the obligation for companies to have credible transition plans. The proposal also narrows stakeholder engagement, removes civil liability and the duty to terminate business relationships – meaning abuses can continue indefinitely even if identified – and restricts EU member states' ability to introduce more stringent protections for human rights and the environment in their national transposition of the Directive.

As states and businesses continued to squabble at the cost of real change it was left to defenders and communities working on environmental, indigenous people's rights and land rights – which are often interconnected – to uphold environmental and human rights commitments, and seek corporate accountability for wrongdoings. And for this, they continued to be killed and harmed in great numbers. In 2024, the HRD Memorial was able to verify the killing of 59 HRDs directly or indirectly related to their human rights work challenging business or corporate interests. They exposed violations without the support of governments who, under international law, have a duty to protect them from harm as a consequence of the exercise of their rights. States also have an obligation to carry out proper oversight of businesses activities, to ensure companies respect human rights in their operations, and provide access to effective remedy whenever violations occur. They are unequivocally failing in fulfilling these duties of as the vast majority of attacks against these defenders enjoy total impunity.

Environmental defender and reporter for *Kampuchea Aphiwat* news website in **Cambodia** Chhoeung Chheung died in hospital three days after he was shot in the abdomen as he was investigating illegal logging in the protected forest of Boeung Per Wildlife Sanctuary in Siem Reap province. In 2014, fellow journalists [Suon Chan](#) and [Taing Try](#) were likewise murdered in Cambodia in two separate incidents. Both of them reported on and investigated environmental damages produced as a result of illegal business activities.

This was also exemplified in a case from **Honduras** where environmental defender **Juan Lopez** was shot dead in September as he sat in his car after a church service in Tocoa, department of Colon. Lopez had been coordinator of the Comité Municipal de Bienes Comunes y Públicos (CMDBCP) in Tocoa. He was a vocal advocate for the protection of the Guapinol and San Pedro Rivers, as well as the Montana de Botaderos “Carlos Escaleras Mejia” National Park from the detrimental impact of mining and extractive projects on their ecosystems. His peaceful protests made him a target for death threats, harassment and criminalisation. In 2023, he was granted precautionary measures by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in recognition of the risks he faced. The Honduran state, however, did not effectively enforce these measures. In fact, five days after his murder, a criminal case was reopened against him and other CMDBCP members on fabricated charges of aggravated arson and unjustified deprivation of liberty due to their work in defence of the Guapinol river.

According to the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#), meaningful consultation with communities whose lives, livelihoods and local environments are impacted by projects and business operations should be a basis on which decisions are made about whether and how a proposed business activity advances. Instead of ensuring companies comply with this, states are relying on a model of militarisation to push projects forward, and use criminalisation and violence to respond to any opposition. This lack of meaningful consultation often creates the conditions for conflicts to further develop and in which HRDs are harmed. In one community in **Indonesia**, several defenders were arrested without warrant in the middle of the night and beaten while in detention for objecting to the presence of a paper and pulping company which threatens their way of life.

Non-state actors, including businesses, paramilitary groups and organised crime, also presented grave risks to HRDs working on land, environmental or indigenous people’s rights. These risks tended to occur in the context of non-state actors wanting to occupy, use or be present in territories where HRDs or their communities were living. In **Brazil**, rural, quilombola and indigenous communities faced violence and threats, exacerbated by a lack of legal guarantees relating to their lands. Armed militias, often composed of landowners and local rural groups, intensified attacks against communities including against the Guarani-Kaiowa and Ava Guarani indigenous people in Parana, resulting in physical violence and fatalities. In August, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders [highlighted](#) the increased risk faced by the Ava Guarani indigenous people in Parana if the government removed the National Force from their territory due to violent attacks carried out by local landowners’ private security. The impunity enjoyed by these groups perpetuates the insecurity and conflict in indigenous areas.

FRONTLINE WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

WHRDs remained at the forefront of social movements claiming rights in 2024. This was especially notable in **Bangladesh** where young women actively participated in, organised and led the protest movement which overthrew the repressive government of Sheikh Hasina. In a country which ranks 131 out of 162 in the UN Gender Inequality Index, the leading role and mass participation of women in the demonstrations was a hugely significant moment and speaks to the evolving role of WHRDs in the country's social and political landscape. The vigilante Bangladeshi Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of the then-ruling party and responsible for much of the protest violence, attacked both male and female students with equal violence in a move designed to scare students into staying in their dormitories. Violence, or the threat or fear of violence, is often used as a way of excluding WHRDs from the public sphere, pushing them to stay within the confines of patriarchal culture. The opposite happened in this case, however, and women came out in even greater numbers to join the protesters. **Mariah Namla**, an organiser at Jahangirnagar University, later told journalists: "It's because of women that this movement became a people's revolution. Without them, it would not have become one so quickly." Mothers also played a role in acting as 'human shields' to protect students from state violence, distributing water and first aid to the injured, and ferrying them to hospital.

WHRDs continued to [pay with their lives](#) for working outside the home instead of staying within the private sphere as dictated by patriarchal norms; for going to school or university; for 'daring' to live their sexuality openly. Furthermore women were targeted as a way to threaten their relatives who were engaged in human rights work, and as documented in previous years, the targeting of family members is a violation that often goes under-reported.

In the context of criminalisation of social movements and protest, repression against women activists engaged in struggles often takes the form of sexual violence. Furthermore, discrimination against women is compounded by the intersection of different modes of oppression: they are discriminated against for being women, but also because of their skin colour, language, race, ethnicity, class (and financial situation), religion and sexuality.

According to Front Line Defenders' data from 2024, it was defenders working specifically on women's rights who were among the most targeted and most in need of support. In the context of a global backlash against women's rights, WHRDs who persisted in their advocacy were on the frontlines. In **Iran**, **Atefeh Rangriz** was sentenced to seven years in prison, including two for creating a Telegram group where she published her Farsi translation of the work of the Argentine feminist Veronica Gago, one of a number of works on feminism she had translated to bring to a wider audience.

Sexual and physical abuse were also used against WHRDs to punish them for their work. In **Guatemala**, indigenous women have traditionally been at the forefront of the struggle for

rights in the country, and the risks they face are layered on top of those already faced by their indigenous male colleagues. In April, over 40 women from the indigenous community of Chirrix Tzul, including eight WHRDs, were evicted from their homes. In the process, they reported being physically and sexually assaulted by armed groups allegedly linked to land-grabbers seeking to take over the community's land. The following month, a consortium of business leaders also looking to take over the land attempted to criminalise the women by accusing them of land usurpation and aggravated theft.

WHRDs continued to absorb the burden of the various crises that their communities are experiencing. In **Myanmar, Ukraine, Palestine, and Sudan**, women and in particular WHRDs are responsible for looking after basic needs, shouldering the double burden of sustaining their families *and* the social fabric of their communities. Alongside this and despite systemic targeting, they continued to advocate for justice, gender equality and peace often at great personal risk. They played a critical role in documenting abuses and mobilising communities.

SAFER PASSAGE, BETTER PROTECTION

The ability of HRDs to move inside and outside their countries remained a vital protection pathway for them at times of increased or urgent risk. This was evident in the number of such requests Front Line Defenders received from HRDs who were being targeted for their work. Where safe to do so, in-country relocation is the preferred first option. However, in many cases, this is not possible, and in such situations, relocation within the region was the second option for many defenders. Traditionally **Costa Rica, Kenya, South Africa, Tunisia, Lebanon, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia** and **Thailand** have all been popular places for HRDs to relocate regionally when the risks they faced at home became too severe. In recent years, however, the options for regional relocation have become more limited with host states collaborating with the governments of hostile states, placing HRDs at risk of refoulement. There has also been a weakening of commitment to the principle of non-refoulement as states increasingly consider returning HRDs to countries where they will clearly be at risk.

In July, Vietnamese HRD **Y Quynh Bdap** was arrested in Bangkok for “overstaying his visa,” putting him at risk of deportation to Vietnam despite his UNHCR refugee status. He was detained at the Bangkok Remand Prison pending an extradition trial requested by the Vietnamese government. The HRD is co-founder of Montagnards Stand for Justice, a group promoting the rights of indigenous peoples in Vietnam's Central Highlands. He was convicted in absentia of terrorist offences by the Vietnamese authorities and sentenced to ten years in prison. At year-end, Y Quynh Bdap's lawyers were preparing to submit an appeal against the decision of the Bangkok Criminal Court in September to extradite him.

In June, a number of Special Procedures Mandate Holders wrote to the governments of **Kenya** and **Rwanda** regarding the alleged abduction, enforced disappearance and

extraordinary rendition from Nairobi to Rwanda of HRD **Yusuf Ahmed Gasana**. Yusuf Ahmed Gasana had been vocal on the rights of refugees in Kenya and had opposed the involuntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees who had fled the country prior to 31 December 1998. It is believed he was abducted by Kenyan State agents in May 2023 before being handed over to Rwandan State agents. At the time of writing, Yusuf Ahmed Gasana's whereabouts are unknown.

In the European Union, **Bulgaria** was considering deporting **Abdulrahman Al-Khalidi** to Saudi Arabia, a country which he fled in 2013 after engaging in extensive campaigns in support of democratic reform. In October 2021, he relocated from Turkey to Bulgaria, where he was arrested for not being in possession of a valid visa. His application for asylum was rejected. At the time of writing, he was challenging a deportation order in the courts.

Even for defenders not looking to permanently relocate, visas remain a tool both for protection and for empowerment. Regrettably, obtaining visas for temporary respite, to attend networking or training events or to participate at UN sessions in Geneva or New York and other advocacy spaces has remained extremely difficult. Even when invited by United Nations entities, HRDs face multiple hurdles in obtaining visas, ranging from the financial cost to bureaucratic requirements, including providing a "clean" police record, which for HRDs facing criminalization is not always a possibility. Opaque, lengthy, expensive and discriminatory visa procedures often particularly impact HRDs from historically marginalized communities, and from certain demographics. The additional costs, resources and stress all add to the pressures already faced by HRDs. Concerns around the externalization of visa procedures to national contractors by embassies can be an additional security consideration.

The revision of the European Union Visa Code Handbook, adopted in June, represented a positive step, promising a more nuanced approach to HRDs looking to enter the bloc for short periods of time. The reviewed text includes specific provisions designed to address the unique needs and risks faced by HRDs. The new provisions include guidance for consular services to, among other things: allow HRDs facing severe risks in their home countries to apply for visas at consulates in other countries; consider HRDs "bona fide" candidates, allowing for relaxed documentation requirements; issue long-validity, multiple-entry visas for HRDs; consider waiving or reducing visa fees; and implement fast-track procedures for HRDs at risk.

PRIDE AND EQUALITY: FIGHTING FOR LGBTIQ+ RIGHTS

The struggle for the equal treatment of LGBTIQ+ persons remained hard fought in many countries. Rays of hope for the legalisation of same-sex marriage in **Thailand**, **Estonia** and **Greece**, and of same-sex civil unions in **Czechia**, were overshadowed by negative developments elsewhere. The **Ugandan** Constitutional Court upheld the dehumanising 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act while **Liberia** introduced a similarly regressive law, the Anti-Homosexuality Law of Liberia 2024 Bill, to parliament in July. The Constitutional Court in **Malawi** rejected a challenge to sections of the penal code which criminalise homosexual relationships and in **Ghana**, the Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Act was passed in parliament in February. In addition to criminalising same-sex sexual activity, the Act provides for the imprisonment of up to three years for anyone who “holds out” as an LGBTIQ+ person. The Act is awaiting presidential assent.

Legislation targeting same-sex ‘propaganda’ in schools was introduced in **Bulgaria**, while in **Georgia** the Law on Family Values and Protection of Minors was adopted in September. In addition to re-stating the ban on same-sex marriage, the law also prohibits LGBTIQ+ persons from adopting or fostering children and bars trans persons from undergoing gender reassignment surgery. Furthermore, the law bans the portrayal of LGBTIQ+ issues in a “positive and/or exemplary” way “from the perspective of an objective observer.” This last provision in particular strikes at the heart of the work of many LGBTIQ+ defenders in the country. In April, the Iraqi parliament voted to ban same-sex relationships, allowing for jail terms of up to 15 years.

On the streets, LGBTIQ+ defenders held their ground but were frequently attacked for it. While few defenders wanted to publicise the risks they faced for fear of prompting further reprisals, Front Line Defenders’ data show the volume of requests for support from LGBTIQ+ defenders was equaled only by requests from HRDs working on women’s rights. What is also notable about the risks faced by LGBTIQ+ defenders is the variety of ways in which they are targeted, ranging from arrest, attempted killing, death threats and disappearances to physical attack, break-ins, smear campaigns and other gender-related threats. The Belgrade Pride Info Centre in Serbia was physically attacked for the 19th time since the Centre opened in 2017, with not one of the perpetrators ever facing justice. In **Tunisia**, trans woman human rights defender **Mira Ben Salah** was one of a number of LGBTIQ+ defenders summoned by the police without justification in September. This followed an extensive anti-LGBTIQ+ digital campaign which started on social media, and was replicated in traditional media, that called for the arrest and punishment of LGBTIQ+ defenders in Tunisia.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE DIGITAL SPACE

Digital platforms and technologies are important tools for human rights defenders to communicate and coordinate work, document violations, research, raise public awareness and advocate. The ability to easily interact and stay connected has expanded civil society networks, increased awareness and allowed for defenders in different parts of the world to share experiences and learn from each other.

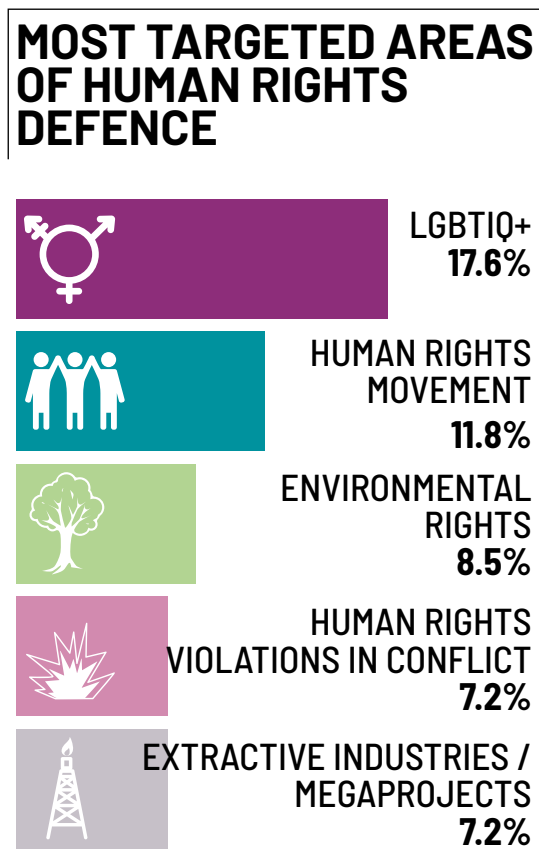
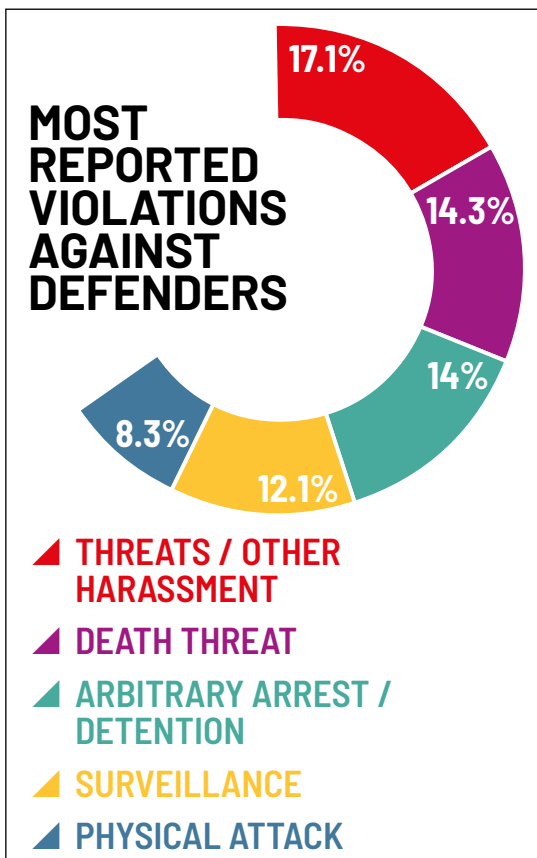
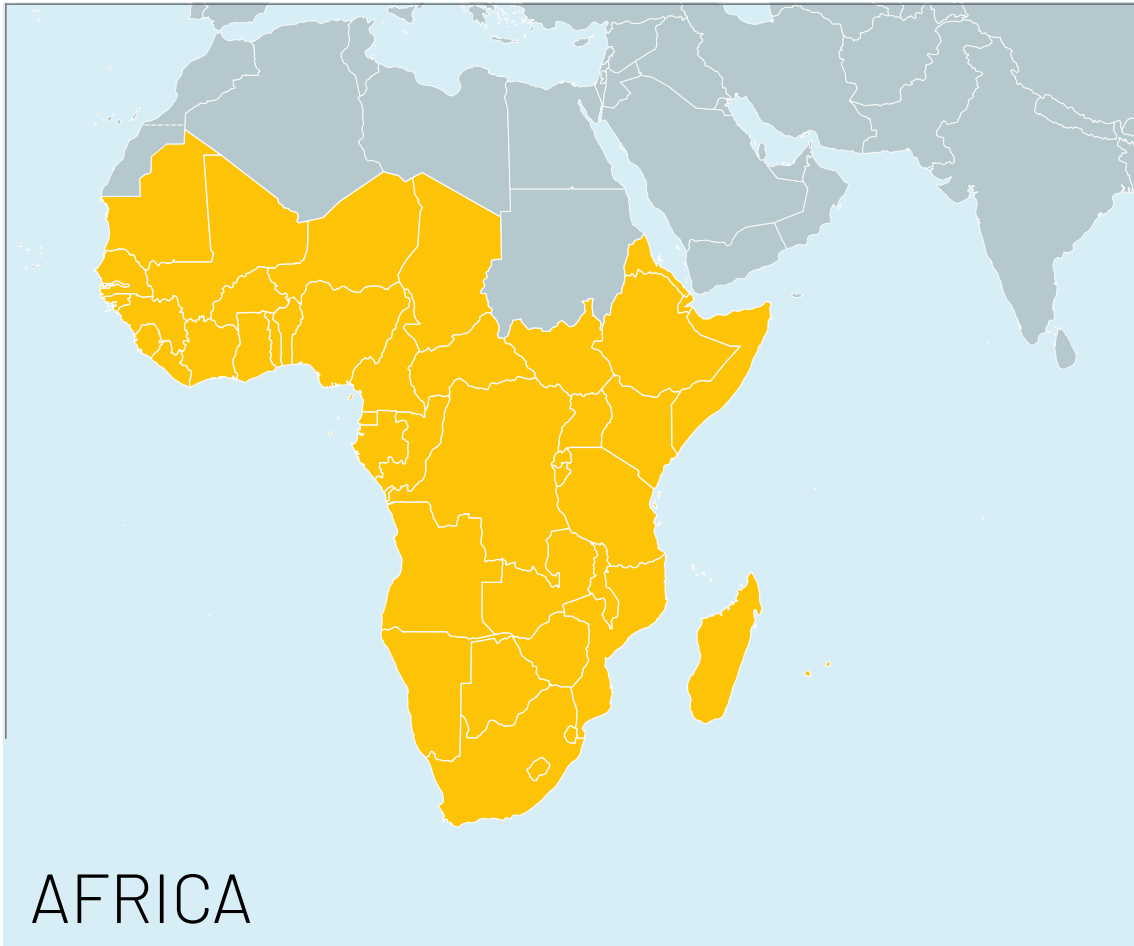
Despite the usefulness of technologies to HRDs such tools were also used to target defenders. They were used for arbitrary or unlawful digital surveillance, censorship, harassment, and smear campaigns. Attacks against HRDs have a chilling effect, leading to self-censorship, discouraging public participation and directly impacting their work. Online attacks also paved the way for physical attacks, including killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention and harassment, as exemplified in the case of Mira Ben Salah mentioned above.

The silencing of defenders online was rampant, particularly in moments of political turmoil or conflict situations. HRDs who played a vital role in documenting and exposing human rights violations at great personal risk increasingly found themselves targeted by digital censorship practices including shadow-banning, content removal, account suspensions and deletions.

The shadow-banning of HRDs by online platforms posed a significant threat to their freedom of expression and restricted their ability to exercise their fundamental human rights work. Different to open censorship, shadow banning – where a platform restricts content visibility without notifying the user – effectively silences HRD voices while maintaining the appearance of neutrality. These practices directly impacted HRDs by eroding their credibility, undermining their protection and exposing them to greater risks.

The testimonies collected from HRDs focusing on the **Occupied Palestinian Territory** revealed a concerning pattern in Meta's content moderation practices that disproportionately affect marginalized and politically sensitive voices. Shadow banning contributed to the erosion of the reach and visibility of defenders documenting violations from Israel's bombardment of civilians in Gaza, impacting their ability to engage with audiences, share critical information, and mobilise support. Defenders reported drastic reductions in their engagement, including lost followers and reduced discoverability of their accounts, which in turn significantly hinders their ability to raise awareness about human rights violations.

Just as physical protection can help HRDs' survival, digital protections can help with their visibility, their influence, and their ability to continue their critical work without fear of erasure. As tech companies increasingly rely on opaque algorithms and content moderation policies, there is an urgent need for transparency, accountability, and mechanisms that safeguard the online presence of those advocating for human rights.



Source: Front Line Defenders (2024)

AFRICA

Local and regional HRD networks played a vital role in Sub-Saharan Africa as the first point of contact for HRDs at risk and as sources of information for regional and international protection mechanisms. This was particularly the case in **Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, South Sudan, Somalia, Angola, Mozambique, Swaziland** and **Malawi** where strong HRD networks continued to develop. Authorities abused national security and counterterrorism laws to target defenders by restricting civic space and threatened the right to defend rights. The situation of LGBTIQ+ rights defenders in **Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Malawi, Tanzania, Liberia, and Uganda** remained precarious as further restrictive measures on LGBTIQ+ persons were introduced. The security situation of many LGBTIQ+ defenders was compromised and some were forced to temporarily relocate to places of safety, while others closed their offices and halted their human rights work.

RESTRICTED CIVIC SPACE

HRDs reported being subjected to systemic restrictions and crackdowns, including in **Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Angola, Guinea, Eswatini** and **Burkina Faso**. State authorities interfered with the operations and activities of human rights organisations and defenders through the use of detention and acts of intimidation, harassment and criminalisation. This has contributed to feelings of insecurity among the human rights community and disgruntlement at the failure of international mechanisms to protect them.

In **Ethiopia**, following years of ever-increasing threats against HRDs, security and intelligence forces moved overtly against a number of high profile and influential human rights organisations, and stopped registering new human rights groups. In the last quarter of 2024, the Authority for Civil Society Organizations (ACSO) stopped the work of multiple prominent and well-established NGOs. Between 14 and 22 November, three such organisations had their activities suspended by the ACSO without prior warning and with immediate effect: Center for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD), the Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE) and Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR). The three organisations entered into negotiations with the ACSO which culminated in the lifting of the ban on CARD and LHR on 11 December. However, the ban on these



ARTUZ members appear in court on baseless disorderly conduct charges linked to their arbitrary detention in July 2024 in the run-up to a Southern African Development Community (SADC) meeting in Zimbabwe.

© Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe, ARTUZ

two organisations was reinstated on 17 December, with the Authority citing their failure “to learn from the past mistakes and do course correction” and “comply with the Authority’s regulations” as reasons for the re-suspension. The organisations were targeted on the basis that, according to the ASCO, their activities undermine the interests of the public and the State. On 23 and 25 December respectively, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), the oldest independent human rights organisation in the country, and the Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center (EHRDC) both received suspension notifications from the ASCO. While these institutions were targeted, leaders and members were forced to relocate outside the country for fear of arrest, further

contributing to the shrinking of the civic space in the country.⁴

In a brazenly transparent attack on civil society, the **Zimbabwean** government cracked down on HRDs in the run up to a Southern African Development Community (SADC) meeting in the country on 17 August. In total, over 160 HRDs, activists, political party members and student union activists in Zimbabwe were arbitrarily detained in the run-up to the meeting in order to prevent any protests which would highlight human rights violations during the summit. Some of those who were arbitrarily arrested reported being subjected to torture and sustaining injuries. Another HRD, **Obert Masaraure**, was convicted of “obstructing justice” for posting a solidarity message on X demanding the release of his colleague, **Robson Chere**. Obert Masaraure is the National President of ARTUZ, a registered trade union defending the right to education in rural areas of Zimbabwe and labour rights. ARTUZ was the winner of the 2022 Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk for Africa.

A spokesperson for the ruling Zanu-PF party acknowledged the party’s control over the judicial system when speaking to journalists about the detained activists after the conclusion of the Summit: “I’m sure there will be a good reason to free them now that there is no show to disturb. There’s no reason to keep them at the state’s expense in jail after failing. We will reward their failure by giving them their freedom. There’s nothing to disturb anymore. There’s nobody to watch them, and no foreigners to watch them, we will release them because they are an expense to the state.”

4. The suspensions were lifted on 3 March 2025.

In **Angola**, HRDs were targeted by authorities who harassed and arbitrarily detained them for their human rights work. On 5 January, three agents from the national police and two plain clothes agents unlawfully placed human rights lawyer and defender **Zola Ferreira Bambi** under house arrest. Zola Ferreira Bambi supports communities whose rights have been violated and is the president of Angola's Observatory of Social Cohesion and Justice. The agents chained the gate to his house with a padlock, detained him, and raided his residence without a court order. They then brought the HRD to a police station where he remained for approximately seven hours. This incident followed a number of previous incidents of threats, harassment, physical assault, detention and surveillance of HRDs in the country.



A protester in Nairobi, Kenya, holds a Kenyan flag during a nationwide demonstration on 25 June 2024.

© Sipa USA/Alamy Live News

Ahead of the 2025 elections in **Malawi**, HRDs promoting good governance, transparency, accountability and exposing corruption all received increased scrutiny. This manifested in intimidation, attacks on homes and offices during electricity black-outs. An HRD who is a member of a coalition of groups focusing on political accountability had his car and the locks on his house tampered with.

Defenders working on civilian participation and democratic reform in **Eswatini** faced harassment, surveillance, interrogation and arbitrary detention. A number of HRDs relocated to South Africa during the year for their safety, and the offices of an organisation offering pro-bono legal support to HRDs were broken into, and IT equipment damaged. A HRD affiliated with a student union was detained following a series of threatening calls because of their work calling for democratic changes in higher education institutions. Meanwhile, there was no progress in the investigation into the murder of human rights lawyer Thulani Rudolf Maseko in 2023.

In **Somalia**, at least six HRDs working on a wide range of human rights issues, including women's rights, peace building, human rights documentation and anti-corruption, were killed in 2024. No investigation was launched in at least four of them and in five instances the HRDs' communities were intimidated and prevented from holding funerals the manner they wished for the killed HRDs.

THE COUP BELT

HRDs continue to fight for civic space in the six sub-Saharan African states where military coups have taken place since 2020, including in **Guinea**, **Burkina Faso** and **Mali**. Defenders protesting ongoing military rule in **Guinea** were subjected to enforced disappearance, incommunicado detention and torture. On the night of 9 July, Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah were taken from their homes in Conakry by a heavily armed military group wearing balaclavas. Following their abduction, the HRDs were taken to a special forces detention centre on the island of Kassa and subjected to ill-treatment and torture. They were not informed of any charges brought against them, and have not had access to their lawyers. [Mamadou Billo Bah](#) and [Oumar Sylla](#), who is also known as Foniké Menguè, are members of the “Front National pour la Défense de la Constitution” (National Front for the Defence of the Constitution-FNDC), a citizen-led movement dedicated to upholding the constitution of Guinea and all of the rights and freedoms enacted within it. Their arbitrary arrest followed a call for a protest denouncing censorship and the deterioration in the living conditions of Guineans.

In **Burkina Faso**, which is also under military rule, defenders who led protection networks, facilitated civil society coordination and highlighted the issue of enforced disappearances were placed under surveillance. HRDs working on the promotion of good governance and democracy experienced online harassment campaigns. On 13 June, a wanted notice was anonymously published on Facebook for ten persons, six of whom were HRDs and journalists focusing on such issues. The notice stated that the Burkinabe security services were searching for HRDs [Touré Naïm](#), [Inoussa Ouédraogo](#), [Yacouba Ladji Bama](#), [Issaka Lingani](#) and [Barry Ahmed Newton](#) for “complicity with terrorist groups, treason, and complicity with mercenary groups to destabilise Burkina Faso.” It stated that any individual or group who contributed to apprehending or neutralizing the defenders would receive 20 million francs (about 30,000 euro) per person.

Following the military coups in 2020 and 2021 which overthrew the democratically elected government in **Mali**, fresh elections promised by the military leadership have been repeatedly postponed including in last February 2024. In this context, HRDs working on democratic participation, good governance and rule of law continue to be targets of the military junta. This was particularly evident in cases where defenders spoke publicly about human rights violations conducted by the military and resulted in threats against them, physical attack and detentions. In one such case, a defender was targeted because he published a video in which a soldier unwittingly confesses to human rights violations conducted by the Malian armed forces. A number of HRDs have been forced to leave the country on account of the risks they faced.

CRUSHING COURAGE AND DEFYING FEAR: LGBTIQ+ RIGHTS DEFENDERS RESIST

The environment for LGBTIQ+ persons remained hostile in the region, with authorities introducing or passing anti-LGBTIQ+ legislation and criminalising HRDs working on LGBTIQ+ rights. The situation continued to be particularly challenging in **Côte d'Ivoire**, **Cameroon**, **Tanzania**, **Liberia**, and **Uganda**. In addition to the dangerous context created by anti-LGBTIQ+ laws, HRDs working on these rights continued to be subjected to violence and harassment by their communities, law enforcement agencies and various actors online. Despite the political and legal repression faced by LGBTIQ+ rights defenders in the region, they continued to mobilise and support communities by championing LGBTIQ+ rights protection, creating safe-spaces to support wellbeing and challenging discriminatory behaviours.

In **Uganda**, the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA) was upheld by the Constitutional Court on 3 April. LGBTIQ+ rights defenders told Front Line Defenders that the AHA is “now a fact of life” for LGBTIQ+ people in the country. Under the legislation, LGBTIQ+ persons are restricted from accessing healthcare or renting premises. Violence against LGBTIQ+ people has become pervasive and is rarely, if ever, investigated. A trans youth pastor who had been running a shelter for LGBTIQ+ individuals and a queer-friendly faith group was evicted from her office following the passage of the Act. Another defender who worked at a clinic offering free services to LGBTIQ+ persons was physically attacked following a campaign of threats, stigmatisation and intimidation. With the increased focus in the media and from politicians on homosexuality, LGBTIQ+ HRDs have also become increasingly ostracized from their families: LGBTIQ+ defenders have been publicly outed by their



Nicholas Opiyo, journalist and HRD, speaks to journalists outside the Constitutional Court in Kampala, Uganda, on 3 April 2024 after Uganda's Constitutional Court upheld the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA).

© AP Photo/Hajarah Nalwadda

families, cut off from family support or attacked by their partners because of their work. Those who have more public profiles as defenders of LGBTIQ+ rights have been arrested.

Front Line Defenders also received reports of threatening phone calls, smearing campaigns of HRDs supporting LGBTIQ+ communities in **Malawi**. The Constitutional Court dismissed an application challenging the constitutionality of sections 153, 154, and 156 of the [Penal Code](#) which criminalize anyone who has “carnal knowledge” of any person “against the order of nature,” attempts to commit an “unnatural offence” or undertakes “indecent practices.” The case was opposed by segments of Malawian society including religious groups and leaders who protested arguing that the court application encouraged same-sex marriages in Malawi.

In **Liberia**, an “[Anti-Homosexuality Law of Liberia 2024 Bill](#)”, which has similar repressive provisions to the laws in Uganda, was introduced to the House of Representatives in July. The Bill [criminalises](#) same-sex sexual activity and introduces harsh penalties, including life imprisonment. In September, UN Special Procedures Mandate holders [noted](#) that the proposed restrictions on the “promotion of homosexuality”, which carry a prison sentence of up to 20 years, would criminalise the work of HRDs and associations advocating for human rights without discrimination, including based on sexual orientation.

In **Ghana**, the Supreme Court upheld an old colonial-era law, the Criminal Offences Act 1960 (Act 29), which criminalises adult consensual same sex conduct. The court’s decision was influenced by provisions in the [Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Act, 2024](#), which was passed in Parliament in February 2024 and awaits President John Mahama’s signature. The Bill, amongst other repressive provisions, proscribes LGBTIQ+ and related activities, and prohibits propaganda of, advocacy for, or promotion of “LGBTIQ+ and related” activities. It criminalises same-sex sexual conduct between adults, same-sex marriage and any form of relationship between sexual and gender minorities in Ghana, with a sentence of up to three years imprisonment. The Bill further [criminalises](#) LGBTIQ+ identities, stating that “any person who holds out as a lesbian, gay, transgender, transsexual, queer, pansexual or non-binary” is guilty of an offence and subject to imprisonment of up to three years.

In an unusual but very welcome move, the Ghanaian Finance Minister, the Bank of Ghana and the Ghana Revenue Authority all urged the President to refrain from signing the Bill, at least until the Supreme Court had considered its constitutionality. In an example of how human rights clauses in funding agreements can be effective, the Finance Ministry expressed concern that the World Bank may suspend funding if the Bill is passed, following its suspension of new loans to Uganda in 2023 after the enacting of the Anti-Homosexuality Act. In a leaked memo, the Ministry of Finance detailed how Ghana could lose out on up to US\$3.8 billion of World Bank funding if the Bill is signed. By year-end, the Bill remained unsigned.

The so-called 'anti-woubi' movement in **Côte d'Ivoire** brought significant risk to LGBTIQ+ rights defenders.⁵ Homophobic violence increased in August when homophobic groups established online presences on Tik Tok, X, Telegram, Facebook and WhatsApp to target LGBTIQ+ persons. In one such case, a WhatsApp group called "Papo des woubies" was created to organise meetings and plan violence against LGBTIQ+ people from the cities of Bouake, Bassam and Adjame. No legal action has been taken against any of those behind the groups. Such acts of harassment and violence take place against a backdrop of a wider [repressive legislative ordinance](#) that was introduced by the authorities in June. The ordinance is vaguely worded, restricts the operations of civil society organisations and gives the state discretionary powers to dissolve them. For example, article 3 of the ordinance states that "CSOs based on a cause or having an illicit object, contrary to the law or morality, are null and void."

Anti-LGBTIQ+ sentiments grew generally across West African countries and aggressive online movements were active in **Mali**, **Burkina Faso**, **Senegal** and **Cameroon**. Many LGBTIQ+ rights defenders in these countries were forced to stop working, as they closed their offices for fear of violence and harassment. Some defenders were targeted by their families and communities, leaving them without housing and offices following forced evictions.

DEFENDERS WORKING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL, INDIGENOUS AND LAND RIGHTS

In a number of countries in the region, human rights defenders protecting the environment, defending their access to land or advocating for indigenous people's rights faced risks. These often occurred in the context of activities by private companies that took place on indigenous lands, that degraded the local environment or that led to the forced removal of communities from their lands without their free, prior and informed consent.

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, indigenous people's rights defenders were targeted for calling for the Turkana County Government to return diverted funds intended to compensate indigenous peoples affected by the mining activities of a Chinese company. Front Line Defenders is aware of other such defenders who faced threats for their work, including one who was forced to resign from the organisation for which he was working, by the board of directors because the chairman of the board was promised a high-level job in the county government in exchange for the HRD leaving the organisation. Indigenous people's rights defenders were also targeted in the **DRC** (see below), while in **Namibia** indigenous people's rights defenders working with the Ovazemba community were at risk. A defender was arrested on his way to meet with the community for a capacity building training. He

5. "Woubi" is a local slang term for LGBTIQ+ people.

was wrongfully charged with reckless driving and the HRD reported being placed under surveillance and subsequently fearing for his safety.

In **Tanzania**, 500 villagers including five indigenous rights defenders of Imala Upina, Kapanga village, Katuma ward, Tanganyika District, Katavi region in Tanzania were illegally and forcefully evicted from their land by the government. They were subjected to torture, houses were demolished, crops were destroyed, their packed food was burnt and the police officers slaughtered their domestic animals. The HRDs reported these violations along with incidents of sexual violence. Cases of missing persons were also recorded. As a result of the violence, the HRDs were forced to flee the region which was gridlocked by authorities in an effort to prevent the publicisation of the situation.

In **Madagascar**, environmental rights defender and vice-president of the community conservation association VOI Manampisoa, **Raymond Rakotoarisoa**, was found dead in a forest in Ankazondandy Beparasy. This is the same area where environmental rights defender Henri Rakotoarisoa was killed in 2022. Raymond Rakotoarisoa protected the forests of Beparasy from the illegal extraction of its natural resources. According to local HRDs, his body was stabbed ten times, leading to his death.

An NGO working on various issues including indigenous people's rights in **Uganda** came under scrutiny due to its campaigning efforts for the protection of Bugoma forest. Five HRDs who were members of the NGO were arrested while petitioning the Parliament on the issue. The HRDs were refused bail and have not yet been charged, in a case which is illustrative of the continued risks faced by environmental defenders in Uganda. Defenders advocating for the preservation of the Lwera wetlands along the Kampala to Masaka highway to prevent the expansion of rice fields by a Chinese company were subjected to arrest, denied bail and remanded in a maximum security prison.

An HRD campaigning against the clearing of the West African Upper Guinea forest in Liberia by an Oil Palm Company faced threats, and serious risks to his life and that of his family. While the HRD was forced into exile for a period, he returned to Liberia where he is pursuing several legal actions and advocacy campaigns on behalf of indigenous communities.

Despite the threats, intimidation and harassment faced by environmental rights, indigenous rights and/or land rights defenders, they remained persistent in challenging human rights violations being perpetrated against their communities.

SILENCING JUSTICE AND NEW RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION

Across the region, laws restricting fundamental freedoms continued to be introduced. Such legislation was characterised as necessary on national security grounds and designed to address money laundering and terrorism. However, the laws are invariably vague, overly broad and non-compliant with international human rights standards. They typically grant governments sweeping powers to control the operations of NGOs, including the ability to suspend or cancel the registration of organisations deemed to be ‘acting against national interest’, but where the national interest is not clearly defined.

In **Zimbabwe**, the continued existence of many civil society organisations was threatened by the resumption of the parliamentary consultation in June on the proposed [Private Voluntary Organisation \(PVO\) Amendment Bill \(‘NGO Bill’\)](#).⁶ The Bill was roundly condemned by HRDs who highlighted its detrimental effects on human rights protection in the country, but their contributions were not accepted during public consultations. Defenders were undermined and attacked by some of those who supported the Bill. Such attacks were believed to have been carried out by state sponsored actors who claimed that the Bill was being opposed by pro-homosexuality NGOs. Front Line Defenders supported numerous cases of HRDs who were forced to go into temporary relocation due to threats levelled against them for opposing the Bill.

In **Eswatini**, a similar Bill called the Non Profit Organisations (NPOs) Bill, was considered by the Parliament. This Bill purports to address money laundering and financing of terrorism that the government says can arise in the absence of legislation to ensure accountability for funds received by NGOs and churches. HRDs however claim that the Bill would give the government disproportionate and discretionary powers to restrict the independent work of registered NGOs, and could target them with criminal sanctions for administrative errors. The Supreme Court’s decision to uphold the repressive Suppression of Terrorism Act and the [Sedition and Subversive Activities Act Sedition and Subversive Activities Act 46 of 1938](#) further hampered the ability of HRDs to work freely in Eswatini. These national security and counterterrorism laws restrict freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. The hostility of the legislative environment in Eswatini was compounded further still by the repressive Public Order Act which has resulted in a virtual ban on all marches, protests and demonstrations on human rights issues.

A draft law entitled Governing Non-Governmental Organisations passed its first reading in parliament in **Rwanda** in a development which seems likely to further suffocate civil society and HRDs in the country. If approved, NGOs would be required to register in

6. The Bill amends the Private Voluntary Organisations Act. The Bill purports to ensure compliance with the Financial Action Taskforce (FATF) recommendations made to Zimbabwe in the area of the abuse of charities for the financing of criminal and terrorist activity. Further to this, it is meant to streamline administrative procedures for PVOs to allow for efficient regulation and registration of charities in Zimbabwe. In April 2025, President Mnangagwa signed the Bill into law, gazetted as Act No.1 of 2025.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The situation in the DRC continued to deteriorate for defenders in 2024 as the Rwandan-backed M23 rebel group made significant territorial gains in the east of the country. Their advance was accompanied by appalling human rights violations and targeting of HRDs who reported on their abuses. Front Line Defenders provided emergency support to multiple HRDs who were at risk due to their activities. The vast majority of them wished to stay anonymous for fear of further attacks against them.

In one such case, as a result of their work reporting on the violence of armed groups and the illegal trading of minerals, three HRDs received several threatening calls from a rebel group. The HRDs immediately fled to a nearby town, though the risk persisted and escalated to the abduction of one of their relatives. In another case, and in defiance of an M23 ban on their organisation, two HRDs undertook an investigation into the disappearance of 11 young community members. As a result of this work, M23 issued death threats against them and placed a bounty on their heads. Another HRD was abducted by M23 and disappeared because he had reported on the group's acquisition of weapons. In yet another example, an organisation reporting on arson attacks and violence conducted by M23 in a village under the group's control had death threats issued against three of its employees.



Fighters from the Rwandan-backed M23 seen outside the South Kivu province administrative office, at the centre of eastern DRC's second-largest city, Bukavu.

© AP Photo/Janvier Barhahiga

In addition to the fear imposed on communities, the rebel group tried to extract further resources from already impoverished populations. When one WHRD protested in an M23-occupied village about the imposition of 'taxes' and called for a boycott, she was abducted and tortured. Sexual violence was also rampant. Those who tried to assist survivors or draw attention to the scale of it were also targeted, including three WHRDs who were abducted because of their work with survivors of sexual assault.

HRDs monitoring violence by DRC state forces were also subjected to threats and attacks, and in some cases smeared as being members of M23. An HRD who supported victims of torture in filing a complaint against military officers faced death threats, attempted abduction and arrest. After leaving the country fearing for his safety, on his return he continued to receive threats and was facing charges of insult to the state. Another defender had a bounty placed on his head after he published an article reporting on ongoing investigations into the Congolese military selling uniforms to armed groups.

Human rights organisations and defenders who objected to plans by the President to introduce constitutional amendments, which could see a change to presidential term limits, were also targeted. One such organisation which has campaigned against any changes to the constitution faced severe threats. While campaigning in November, four HRDs from the organisation were ambushed by unknown persons who shot at them, resulting in the death of one of the defenders.

Environmental and indigenous people's rights defenders and organisations were targeted when they highlighted illegal activities or tried to claim their rights. One such WHRD was targeted for her work organizing the community against a Chinese company's practice of illegal logging and destruction of indigenous people's fields. In South Kivu, two staff members of an organisation protesting the illegal exploitation of wood from a nearby forest were brutally arrested without warrant. They continued to face intimidation after their release: their offices, in which they were developing an anti-logging campaign, were shot at as they worked inside.

In March, the government lifted the moratorium on the death penalty that had been imposed in 2003. According to the Ministry of Justice, the resumption of executions is [aimed](#) at ridding the country of traitors and reducing acts of terrorism and urban criminality, which have resulted in the loss of human life. HRDs fear that this decision will encourage the summary and extrajudicial executions of government critics. The number of death sentences imposed by military courts escalated rapidly following the decision to lift the moratorium. HRDs in the country risk being targeted under the law as they defend various human rights in a challenging and dangerous crisis situation where grave human rights violations have been committed by both the M23 rebel forces and the army. Defenders who criticised the re-introduction of the death penalty have been subjected to intimidation and threats amid a deteriorating security situation in some parts of the country. One HRD who appeared on a radio show to advocate for the abolition of the death penalty was physically attacked shortly thereafter. Following the attack and as his radio interview circulated online, he continued to receive threats, including phone calls and visits from armed strangers at his home.

order to work but the grounds for refusal of registration are broad and vague. Article 7 asserts that registration may be refused if there is “evidence indicating that the applicant organisation is harming or intends to harm the security, peace, health, unity of Rwandans, public order, good morals or the rights and freedoms of others”. Furthermore, NGOs would be prohibited from engaging in activities that “jeopardise the unity of Rwandans, peace and security, public order and health, good morals, good conduct, freedom and fundamental rights of other or political activities”, yet no definition is offered as to what would constitute these acts. As UN Special Procedures mandate holders highlighted, the “law indicates that activities of international Non-Governmental Organisations can be suspended on broad grounds such as ‘unforeseen events’ without providing time limits for the suspension”. The draft would also give power to regulators to interfere with NGO management, including by firing them.

In August, President of **Angola** João Lourenço signed into law a National Security Bill which increases government control over civil society and the media. Among other concerning elements, the Bill allows for the arbitrary suspension of internet and other telecommunications services and for the searches of “establishments or other public places or places open to the public” without a court order. The same day, the President also enacted the Crimes of Vandalism Law which criminalises the recording of public security measures. It also prescribes prison sentences for anyone who “disturbs or frustrates, even temporarily, the provision of a public service”, which could lead to the jailing, for example, of peaceful protesters engaged in temporary road blockages or non-violent occupations of universities or other public buildings.

Finally, an NGO Bill in **Zambia** was proposed which would introduce stricter regulation on the operation of NGOs in the country. Registration would be required every five years and extensive reporting requirements would be imposed on organisations, regardless of their size. WHRD **Laura Miti** described to media outlets how these measures would impact both human rights defenders and the communities they serve: “Placing the same onerous registration requirement on small Community Based Organisations in the provinces as their national well-resourced counterparts shows very weak understanding of the NGO landscape in Zambia. These requirements would wipe out scores of organisations who carry out vital grassroots work”.

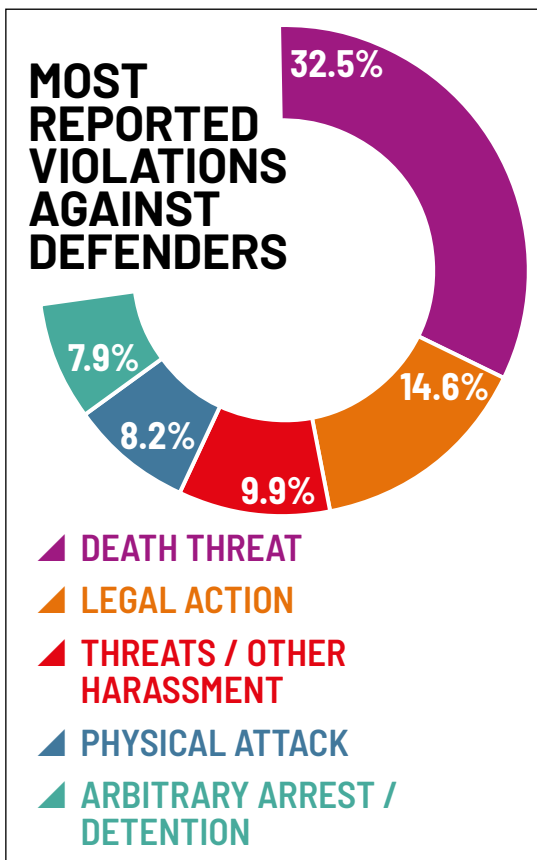
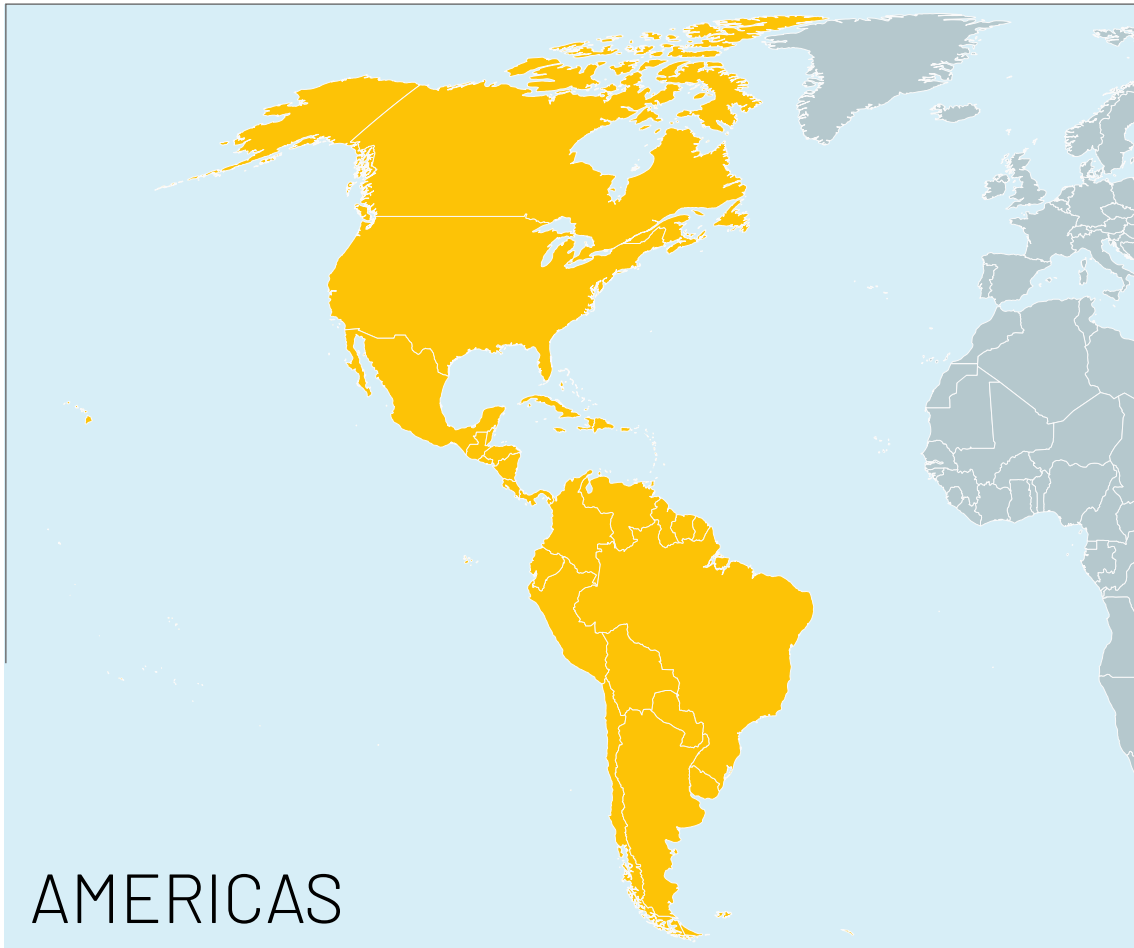
POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

SHELTERS INITIATIVE

Karibu, hosted by the movement Y'en a mare in **Senegal**, was launched in 2024 as a site of shelter for HRDs and activists on the Africa continent. The program offers short-, medium- and long-term accommodation to activists in danger, covering their travel and living costs. During their stay, the shelter offers human rights defenders psychosocial support, mobility and citizen learning programmes. The latest cohort brought together nine nationalities for 10 days in Karibu. These sessions enabled the defenders to share their experiences and raise awareness among other young activists of the situation in their respective countries.

VICTORIES FOR LGBTIQ+ RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN KENYA AND NAMIBIA

As anti-LGBTIQ+ sentiment increased in the region, rare victories were achieved in **Kenya** and **Namibia**. In Kenya the High Court in Mombasa [issued](#) a temporary order restraining anti-LGBTIQ+ rights groups and politicians from inciting violence against the LGBTIQ+ community and organisations serving them. In June, the Namibian High Court [overturned](#) a law criminalising same-sex relationships, finding that it was discriminatory and unconstitutional.



Source: Front Line Defenders (2024)

AMERICAS

2024 was another challenging year for human rights defenders in the Americas, with violent state responses to territorial conflicts, repression of protests and increased militarisation of regions within countries. The overwhelming majority of cases Front Line Defenders documented, supported and monitored related to violations against HRDs working to defend the integrity of their land, territories or the environment. Women and men, indigenous and non-indigenous defenders and local communities in north, central and south America were subjected to the misuse of the judicial system to limit the effectiveness of their work, to challenge their resistance to injustice and to disrupt the cohesion of their communities. In addition to the arrests, attacks, defamation campaigns and repression that HRDs faced, when such events did occur, they were rarely covered by national media, leaving it up to local and alternative media platforms to provide visibility to the events, though these platforms were themselves often repressed alongside civil society movements. Fighting often unpopular battles, human rights defenders are paving the way for transformation. In 2024, they have shown enormous strength and pointed to horizons of hope.

CRISIS OF CRIMINALISATION

Criminal and civil cases were brought against HRDs in multiple countries, with charges ranging from damage to private property and land invasion, to illegal association, death threats and kidnapping. Although the charges differed, similar patterns were clear across countries. Targeted HRDs tended to be those helping their communities claim their rights while also exposing human rights and environmental violations, often with no response from the State. National and international businesses working in the extractive sector, along with other economic powers, including agribusinesses companies and both large and local landowners, were implicated in many cases. These entities either directly accused human rights defenders of crimes in retaliation for their human rights activities or supported authorities and private citizens in filing criminal charges against defenders.

In **Ecuador**, HRDs have expressed concern over the pervasive use of judicial harassment and have linked it to the government's courtship of extractive industry actors. While the

government continues to seek mining investment to boost national economic growth and, allegedly, fuel the transition to green energy using its mineral deposits communities across the country have voiced their concern and opposition. In response to the argument about economic growth, they highlight that rural, indigenous, and afro-descendant communities have historically been able to sustain sufficiently strong local economies in a manner aligned with their territories and nature. They also emphasise that the social and environmental impacts of extractive projects threaten their livelihoods and ways of life, and that many projects have progressed without meaningful community participation, often lacking consultation or adequate information about the impacts on their territories and populations, thereby violating their right to free, prior and informed consent. Numerous peaceful protests have been met with violent responses by the State, which has included brutal repression by police forces and in some cases, military intervention.

The State of Emergency declared by President Daniel Noboa, which was renewed in January, April and May 2024 in response to ‘internal armed conflict’, increased the presence of the military in several regions in the country, including in territories where local communities are objecting to the imposition of extractive projects, especially mining. In some cases, the army was used as private security for mining companies and State environmental agencies to forcibly hold ‘consultations’ with communities. These companies were then considered by the environmental authorities to have fulfilled their duties in relation to mandatory consultations to be granted an environmental license.

In the territory of Palo Quemado, in the province of Cotopaxi, the La Plata project to mine gold, silver, copper and zinc by the Canadian Atico Mining Corp (ATY) has sparked a series of protests from impacted communities who claim they were not properly consulted. In March, the Ministry of the Environment attempted to carry out a public consultation mediated by hundreds of police officers which was seen by local HRDs as an effort to pressure the community into consenting to the project. Reports from local organisations indicated that at least 15 *campesinos* were injured by police use of rubber bullets, pellets, and tear gas canisters. The Prosecutor’s Office has initiated “terrorism” charges against over 70 community members.

In addition to violent repression, the State and private companies also noticeably used judicial persecution to target community leaders. For example in May, six HRDs in the province of Las Naves were sentenced to three years of imprisonment and a \$600 fine payable to the Canadian multinational mining company Curimining S.A. The defenders were found guilty of charges of illicit association. The accusations, made in 2021, were levelled by the Ecuadorian Prosecutor’s Office with Curimining acting as a private complainant. The six defenders were accused of conspiring to damage machinery and infrastructure at the Curipamba – El Domo project. In reality, their actions involved peaceful participation in marches and protests where they carried banners with slogans defending water and nature. To date, Front Line Defenders has documented 19 judicial cases against HRDs in connection with the Curipamba – El Domo project.

Indigenous peoples' rights defenders in **Mexico** continued to be routinely subjected to arbitrary arrest, lengthy pretrial detention and prison terms so severe that they could qualify as "informal life imprisonment". This treatment highlights the issue of systemic racism permeating the criminal justice system through processes which lack an intercultural approach. It not only limits the right of indigenous peoples to defend their interests and collective rights, but also violates their identity and unity by removing members from their land and placing them in penitentiary centres often far removed from their communities.

In 2010, Zapoteco indigenous defender **Pablo López Alavez** was arbitrarily detained. Fourteen years later, his case remained at the investigation stage. The Zapoteco leader faces fabricated charges as a reprisal for his community leadership and for defending the water and environmental rights of the San Isidro Aloápam community in Oaxaca. In January, Otomí indigenous leader, builder and human rights defender **Tomás Martínez Mandujano**, from the Llano Grande Azcapotzaltongo community, was sentenced to 43 years and 9 months in prison for a murder he did not commit. He was imprisoned in response to his work defending the community's lands, of which they have ancestral ownership, from private interests of property companies that aim to exploit it for its easy access to water resources. Also in January, human rights defender of the Maya Tzotzil people, **Versaín Velasco García**, was sentenced to 58 years in prison for 'homicide'. Versaín Velasco García had denounced numerous human rights abuses committed by both security forces and organised crime in the Nueva Palestina community, Chiapas. Since 2022, the lawyer and Amuzga indigenous woman human rights defender **Kenia Hernández Montalván** has been serving a sentence of **21 years and 9 months** in prison after being sentenced twice in less than a month for the fabricated crime of "robbery with violence". Kenia was the coordinator of the Zapata Vive Libertarian Collective, where she promoted land rights and indigenous people's collective rights threatened by development projects led by the Mexican State.

In **Chile**, the Mapuche continued to be criminalised over their territorial demands. Sisters **Gricel and Nora Ñancul**, indigenous women and HRDs advocating for the rights of the Mapuche people in the *Comunidad Autónoma Likankura*, have been targeted as a result of their struggle to regain their people's territory in Mulchén, Biobío region. In May, the community denounced an incursion by the forestry company Mininco onto their ancestral lands without prior dialogue, further heightening tensions in the area,⁷ and Nora Ñancul was temporarily detained in August.⁸ This case exemplifies the broader pattern of state-led persecution against indigenous communities in Chile. Instead of fostering meaningful dialogue and addressing historical injustices, the government continues to prioritise

7. https://www.resumenlatinoamericano.org/2024/05/07/nacion-mapuche-la-lucha-de-la-comunidad-autonoma-likankura-en-la-voz-de-pu-werken-gricel-y-nora-nancul/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

8. <https://x.com/FLDAmericas/status/1824636941997945148>

militarisation and criminalisation, deepening the conflict rather than seeking a just and peaceful resolution.

The criminalisation of entire communities in **Guatemala** for their peaceful defence of land and territorial rights has had wide-ranging and profound impacts on human rights defenders. Over 300 arrest warrants have been issued in the community of Dos Fuentes, and in the Verapaces alone, more than 1,000 such warrants have been issued. As a result of these arrest warrants and given the limited capacity of lawyers and human rights organisations to support these cases, communities have, in effect, been placed under siege by the state. The impact has been devastating, and highlights how such measures specifically target indigenous peoples as community members cannot leave the territories to look for work for fear of arrest, nor do they register births or deaths, all of which leads to their further impoverishment, marginalisation and stigmatisation.

Risks faced by indigenous WHRDs, who have traditionally been at the forefront of the struggle for rights in **Guatemala**, are layered on top of those already faced by indigenous defenders. In April over 40 women from the indigenous community of Chirrix Tzul, including eight WHRDs, were evicted from their homes. In the process, they reported being physically and sexually abused by armed groups reportedly linked to land-grabbers seeking to take over the community's land. The following month, a group of businessmen interested in the land attempted to criminalise the defenders by accusing them of land usurpation and aggravated theft.

Criminalisation remains the backbone of repression and the first response of the State and companies to human rights defenders denounces. **Rigoberto Juárez**, ancestral authority, environmental and human rights defender, and general coordinator of the Plurinational Ancestral Government of the Original Nations Mayas Akateka, Chuj, Q'anjob'al y Popti' has continued to be criminalised and judicially harassed in a process that was launched against him in 2015. He has been a key figure in the indigenous Maya community's opposition to poorly implemented hydroelectric projects by Energía y Renovación S.A., financed by BID Invest, the private sector arm of the Inter-American Development Bank Group. The projects' extractive economic activities have impacted the rights of indigenous peoples, including livelihoods of the community. The community was not adequately consulted prior to the projects' commencement, nor did they give their free, prior and informed consent. Rigoberto Juárez faces fabricated criminal charges and has been subjected to a judicial process which does not accommodate his indigenous traditions, culture, customs or language nor respect his role as an ancestral authority. This role involved him acting as a mediator, at the community's request, in the very tense interactions with the company. Local communities believe that these actions against Rigoberto Juárez are largely due to a complaint about human rights violations linked to the project that he submitted to the Independent Consultation and Investigation Mechanism (MICI) of the Inter-American Development Bank. They point to many overlaps between stages of the criminalisation process and steps taken in filing the complaint.



Environmental activists from El Salvador and Guatemala cross Lake Güija during a protest against mining projects and the Cerro Blanco open pit mine. With placards they demanded the release of local HRDs from Santa Marta.

© Camilo Freedman/dpa

Defenders objecting to the mining of metals in **El Salvador**, which the country had banned in a historic first in 2017, braced themselves for further repression from the authorities after President Nayib Bukele called the ban ‘absurd’ in November and Congress voted to overturn it the following month. Those who had been protesting against the return of gold mining because of contamination of water, soil and biodiversity, were already in the crosshairs of the state. In January 2023, five spokespersons for the prohibition of mining were detained by state agents in connection with their alleged involvement in the murder of a woman in 1989. The five HRDs – **Alejandro Laínez García**, **Miguel Ángel Gámez**, **Pedro Rivas Laínez**, **Antonio Pacheco** and **Saúl Rivas Ortega** – remained under house arrest for over a year before a preliminary hearing concluded in April 2024 that the case against them would proceed. On 18 October, the Sentencing Court of Sensuntepeque acquitted all five when the plaintiff failed to present any evidence. This decision was promptly reversed on 22 November when the Criminal Chamber of Cojutepeque admitted an appeal without legal grounds and ordered a retrial in another court, as requested by the Attorney General’s Office of the Republic.

Criminalisation was also a favoured tactic of governments which saw HRDs as threats to their political power, as was witnessed in **Venezuela** last year. In February, **Rocío San Miguel**, a renowned WHRD and president of the NGO Control Ciudadano, was detained and [held incommunicado](#) for ten days. She remains in detention, accused of taking part in a plan to kill the president. The organisation which she leads, Contro Ciudadano, provides civilian oversight and monitoring of government actions related to national security, armed forces, and defence.

Following presidential elections in July, there was a surge in government repression. Nicolás Maduro's government declared victory, while the opposition, led by Edmundo González, alleged electoral fraud. The resulting protests were met with force, with over 1,900 people detained, including human rights defenders and protesters. In November, **Óscar Murillo**, a journalist, university professor, and General Coordinator of PROVEA (Venezuelan Education-Action Program on Human Rights), received a summons from CICPC (Scientific, Criminal, and Criminalistic Investigations Corps) to appear before its Counter-Terrorism Division under a supposed investigation related to the Law Against Hatred for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance. President Maduro had made public statements defaming and delegitimising PROVEA's human rights work, paving the way for harassment and other risks for its staff.

Peaceful anti-war protesters on university campuses across the **USA** calling for an end to the Israeli war on Gaza, divestment of university assets linked to Israel and an end to academic ties with Israeli institutions saw their encampments broken up by police, who had been called in by university authorities. This reportedly resulted in instances of police repression, including the use of tear gas and stun guns, and in the arrest and reported physical violence against peaceful students protestors and faculty members. In an April raid on the encampment in Columbia University, at least 108 students were arrested by the New York Police Department, which stated that protesters were "peaceful, offered no resistance whatsoever, and were saying what they wanted to say in a peaceful manner." The student movement reported multiple threats from their universities including suspensions, restrictions on taking exams, rescinding of their campus residency, and/or having their degrees withheld. In some universities, students and faculty staff have also faced attacks by Pro-Israel counter-protesters.

VIOLENCE AND LACK OF STATE PROTECTION

Complex dynamics involving state and non-state actors and organised crime meant the environment for HRDs remained extremely dangerous in a number of countries, including **Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, Ecuador, Mexico, Guatemala** and **Peru**. Armed groups engaging in legal and illegal activities, including logging, mining, drug trafficking, and land grabbing on indigenous territories and lands settled by campesinos and afro-descendants is bringing them into conflict with these groups over control of the land. As a result, HRDs from these communities are all at heightened risk. State authorities often turn a blind eye to illicit operations, fail to enforce laws which would protect the HRDs, engage in corruption, or directly support actors involved in territorial disputes. In these contexts, HRDs and their communities are threatened, harassed, displaced and forcibly disappeared as well as subjected to other means of violence. National and local authorities' failure to hold perpetrators accountable endangers HRDs even further, as impunity makes them more vulnerable. The hostile climate not only endangers the lives of HRDs but also erodes their ability to advocate effectively, silencing voices which are critical for the defence of human rights, achieving environmental justice and claiming territorial sovereignty.

In **Colombia**, the difficulty of negotiating with the numerous armed groups has hindered the implementation of the peace agreements. The terms of the agreements were broken by dissident groups during the year which led to a dramatic increase in violence, impacting communities in different regions of the country, especially in Magdalena Medio, Cauca and other areas in the south-west of the country. Based on HRD Memorial partner Programa Somos Defensores' documentation, 157 social leaders and HRDs were killed in 2024.

Against this backdrop of increased violence, community leaders and HRDs faced risks in participating in peacebuilding initiatives due to a lack of measures to guarantee their safe participation and a lack of confidence that such initiatives can result in concrete measures bringing security to their communities. While the Colombian government announced a Public Policy on Guarantees that would protect the work of human rights defenders, social movements and civil society organisations have [argued](#) that for these Guarantees to take effect, other advances are necessary, including the expansion of the scope of collective protection through compliance with Decree 660 of 2018. HRDs have also called for more nuanced protection approaches which can better respond to the risks, needs and experiences of WHRDs and indigenous defenders, among others.

In **Brazil**, rural, quilombola and indigenous communities have faced violence and threats, exacerbated by a lack of legal guarantees relating to their lands. Armed militias, often composed of landowners and local rural groups, have intensified attacks against communities including against the Guarani-Kaiowá and Ava Guarani indigenous people in the state of Paraná, resulting in physical violence and fatalities. In August, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders expressed concern that the Ava Guarani indigenous people in Paraná may be at heightened risk of experiencing violence by farmers who have organized to expel them if the government removes the National



The Quilombo Onça community in Maranhão, Brazil, where HRD and quilombola Antonio Alves, 73, was the victim of attempted murder.

© Antonio Alves

Force from their territory. The impunity enjoyed by these groups perpetuates insecurity and conflict in indigenous areas. The “time frame” law, which restricts indigenous land claims to those occupied since the 1988 Constitution, is a significant source of tension. This legislation has led to increased violence, as communities often face opposition from farmers and other private actors as they attempt to assert their rights over their ancestral territories.

In May, HRD and quilombola [Antonio Alves](#), 73, was the victim of attempted murder. The defender advocates for titles to traditional lands of the Quilombo Onça community, which are being invaded and deforested by ranchers to raise beef cattle. He was attacked and beaten with the back of a rifle by two men on the way from his community to the town of Santa Ines, in Maranhão. The men fired shots, which did not hit Antonio Alves nor the other quilombola who was accompanying him. They also made death threats against the HRD, and three other leaders from Quilombo Onça – [Antonio Jean](#), [Valdivino Lopes](#) and [Reginaldo da Conceição](#) – whom they warned would be killed next. The Coordenação Nacional de Articulação das Comunidades Negras Rurais Quilomboas (National Coalition of Black Rural Quilombola Communities) – CONAQ, has highlighted that Maranhão is one of the states with the highest murder rate of quilombola defenders in the country, with 12 leaders killed in the last four years. [According to](#) the Quilombola Movement of Maranhão



Residents take part in a funeral procession for slain Catholic priest and human rights defender Marcelo Pérez Pérez, in San Andrés Larráinzar, Chiapas state, Mexico, on 22 October 2024.

© AP Photo/Isabel Mateos

(MOQUIBOM), “attacks like this, as well as threats and murders against the quilombola population of Maranhão, have been constant in recent decades, and worry families and the human rights defenders protecting the territories.”

In September, environmental activist **Juan López** was shot dead in **Honduras** as he sat in his car after a church service in Tocoa, department of Colón. Juan López had been coordinator of the Comité Municipal de Bienes Comunes y Públicos (CMDBCP) in Tocoa. He was a vocal advocate for the protection of the Guapinol and San Pedro Rivers, as well as the Montaña de Botaderos “Carlos Escaleras Mejía” National Park, from the detrimental impact of mining and extractive projects on their ecosystems. His peaceful protests against the extractive megaprojects of EMCO Holdings/Los Pinares/Ecotek made him a target for death threats, harassment, and criminalisation. In 2023, he was granted precautionary measures by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in recognition of the risks he faced. Five days after his death, a criminal case was reopened against the defender and other CMDBCP members on fabricated charges of aggravated arson and unjust deprivation of liberty due to their work in defence of the Guapinol river.

In **Guatemala**, at least 29 HRDs were killed in 2024, the highest number of killings ever recorded by HRD Memorial partner UDEFEGUA since they started their documentation.

The majority of HRDs killed, 21, worked for the protection of the land, the environment and indigenous rights. Four indigenous rights defenders were killed in **Nicaragua** and three HRDs were killed in **Ecuador**, two were indigenous rights defenders.

In **Peru**, violence against indigenous defenders, especially in the Amazon region, persisted, with at least four leaders murdered while protecting their ancestral lands and territories. In October, **Gerardo Keimari Enrique**, a Matsigenka leader struggling for his community's land rights amid threats from illegal mining and drug trafficking, was found dead in the Madre de Dios River. Earlier, in July, Kakataibo leader **Mariano Isacama** was shot dead near Aguaytia, highlighting the growing infiltration of drug traffickers into indigenous territories. Mariano had been missing for weeks and despite the alarm being raised by the Kakataibo and reiterated by human rights organisations, state responses were weak; members of Mariano's own community were forced to lead the search for him.

Since 2014, at least **36 indigenous leaders** have been murdered in Peru according to AIDSESP (Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana), with the majority of these killings occurring in the past four years, underscoring an alarming escalation in violence in the country. Despite the establishment of a State inter-ministerial initiative to protect HRDs, its limited resources and lack of effective implementation have left many indigenous HRDs vulnerable.

Organised crime groups also targeted defenders in **Mexico**. In October, indigenous Tzotzil priest **Marcelo Pérez Pérez** was killed after celebrating mass in the neighbourhood Cuxtitali, city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, State of Chiapas. For more than a decade he had received death threats for protecting the rights of indigenous peoples of Chiapas and reporting the presence of organised criminals that had the support of economic and political groups in Simojovel. A drug dealer was arrested for his murder. Those working to defend the human rights of migrants were also at risk of experiencing violence from crime gangs. HRDs who expose human trafficking, highlight abuses and monitor the welfare of migrants were all at risk from violent non-state actors who continued to exercise social, economic, political and territorial control.

HRDs working on migrant rights were also targeted for their work in the **Dominican Republic**, alongside the communities they work on behalf of. Between September and October, several HRDs working on migrants' rights and the rights of Dominicans of Haitian descent were subject to intimidation and violence, including through xenophobic speeches and threats of mass deportation, both physically and online. This included Haitian defenders working in the country. Most of the attacks were perpetrated by people in close proximity to the defenders, such as their neighbours, and often through the use of social media. HRDs also reported arbitrary arrests based on racial profiling, leading to the detention of Dominican defenders on the grounds that they are Haitian, based on the colour of their skin.



Reconoci.do is one of several human rights organisations and HRDs working on migrants' rights and the rights of Dominicans of Haitian descent, who are subjected to intimidation and violence.

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On 5 September, a Dominican media outlet published an article about [Wendy Osirus](#) with a photo of police leading away a person whom the outlet incorrectly identified as the HRD. Local organisations believe this was published with the intention of portraying a negative image of those who work for the defence of the rights of the migrant population. Wendy Osirus is the founder of several civil society organisations in both Haiti and Dominican Republic, including the Movement for Human Rights Peace and Global Justice (MONDHA) which works to improve the living conditions of communities that are in a vulnerable situation, with an emphasis on programs for women and youth from communities of Haitian descent.

The following month, members of MOSCTHA, the Socio-Cultural Movement for Haitian Workers, were verbally harassed by a group outside their office, who shouted anti-Haitian insults. MOSCTHA is a well-established non-profit organisation founded in 1985, and its work consists of human rights programs and projects which benefit people in vulnerable situations, particularly Haitian migrants and their families, including women and girls from Bateyana communities.

RESTRICTIVE AND RESTRICTING LEGISLATION

Human rights defenders in **Peru** were further impacted by the introduction of restrictive legislation. Protests in the country that began in late 2022 and extended into 2023 saw violent crackdowns. These demonstrations, largely led by rural and indigenous communities, emerged in response to demands for structural reforms and gained strength through popular fury at the state's violent response to the demonstrations. The government's heavy-handed reaction led to significant casualties. In February 2024, the Peruvian Congress passed a law imposing [severe penalties](#) on individuals organising or participating in unauthorised protests. The legislation also expanded police authority to disperse demonstrations, granted immunity to security forces for actions taken during crowd control, and imposed heavy fines and prison sentences on protest leaders. Furthermore, new regulations imposed further restrictions on the registration and operation of civil society organisations. These included enhanced scrutiny of funding sources and limitations on public gatherings. HRDs denounced these measures as efforts to suppress opposition voices and undermine grassroots mobilisation and the ability of defenders to operate. In addition to these measures, in July, the approval of Law 32.017 in Peru sparked criticism due to its potential to guarantee impunity for crimes against humanity committed before 2002. HRDs fear the law will jeopardise progress in relation to justice and reparations for victims of human rights violations in the country's past.

The National Congress in **Paraguay** approved the "Control, Transparency, and Accountability of Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs)" Bill, referred to as "anti-NGO" law by HRDs. This legislation imposes excessive governmental oversight on civil society organisations (CSOs), potentially undermining their autonomy and hindering their human rights advocacy efforts. The Bill is vague and broad, giving authorities significant discretion to arbitrarily restrict or even dissolve organisations. At the time of writing, the Bill was awaiting presidential assent.

In **Venezuela**, the government enacted a series of legislative measures that further restricted human rights and civil liberties. Among the most notable was the "Law on Supervision and Regulation of Non-Profit Social Organizations", known as the "Anti-Society Law". This law imposes [stringent](#) requirements on non-governmental organizations, including a new registration requirement, financial disclosures, and compliance with vague criteria to avoid suspension or dissolution. This legislation followed the earlier "Law against Fascism, Neofascism, and Similar Expressions," introduced in April, which targeted groups and individuals deemed fascist by the government, with broad and subjective definitions that could suppress political opposition and dissent.

Additionally, the "Anti-Society Law" and the government's post-election campaign, "Operation Tun Tun," led to widespread arrests of HRDs and protesters, including minors, with reports of torture and forced confessions. These measures, combined with the new NGO restrictions, have intensified Venezuela's human rights crisis and drawn condemnation from international organisations.

Under President Milei in **Argentina**, human rights policies have been systematically decimated. His government has moved to dismantle key initiatives and institutions established to address the country's history of state violence and protect vulnerable communities. These actions had undermined decades of progress in pursuit of justice and accountability for crimes committed during the military dictatorship. Milei's government has also dismantled polices focused on land recognition, cultural protections, and environmental safeguards, which have resulted in more threats to and violence against indigenous groups. On Human Rights Day in December, Milei [repealed](#) the Indigenous Territorial Emergency Law, which had suspended evictions of indigenous communities from their ancestral lands. This repeal has led to increased tensions and conflicts over land rights, especially affecting the Mapuche people in Patagonia. The Justice Ministry [invalidated](#) agreements that had granted control of lands in Nahuel Huapi National Park to Mapuche groups, exacerbating disputes over territorial claims.

On 21 November, the House of Representatives in the **USA** passed the Stop Terror-Financing and Tax Penalties on American Hostages Act (H.R. 9495), otherwise known as the "NGO killer bill". The [law](#) stands to give undue discretion to the Treasury Secretary, and by extension, the US President, to unilaterally designate an NGO as a "terrorist-supporting organization" and strip them of their 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. The vague language in the bill could allow for organisations working on women's reproductive rights, migrants and refugees rights, environmental rights, indigenous peoples' rights and against war, such as those involved in the anti-war university encampments last year, to be deemed 'terrorists' or 'terrorist-supporting'. If the bill passes, the law would not require officials to explain the reason for designating a group as a 'terrorist-supporting organisation', nor does it require the Treasury Department to provide evidence.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL INITIATIVES TO PROTECT HRDS

Certain developments in Brazil and Colombia may lead to greater protection of HRDs.

In **Brazil**, a group established to develop proposals for a National Protection Plan and a draft a law concerning the National Policy for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Communicators, and Environmentalists, presented its conclusions. Named after **Gabriel Sales Pimenta**, a HRD murdered in 1982, the Grupo de Trabalho Técnico (GTT) Sales Pimenta, was created by Brazil's Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship (MDHC) in response to a 2022 Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruling condemning Brazil for his death.

With representatives from federal government ministries and civil society organisations, the final proposals of the GTT Sales Pimenta to the MDHC highlighted three main areas: state protection, community-based protection, and access to rights and combating impunity. These proposals aim to strengthen the protection of human rights defenders across Brazil. It remains unclear what strategies the Federal Government will adopt to

implement the recommendations of the working group, but it is clear rapid improvement is needed. Front Line Defenders supported a number of cases during the year where defenders, despite being included in the Protection Mechanism, could not depend on it for concrete security support and were left instead to plan and implement their own security measures, with the support of NGOs.

In **Colombia**, the Constitutional Court urged the government to improve the capacity of the National Protection Unit (UNP), as part of its declaration that the persistent threats and violence faced by HRDs is an [“unconstitutional state of affairs.”](#) The Court highlighted the need to address structural and operational shortcomings within the UNP, which have hindered its ability to provide timely and effective protection. During the year, the Colombian National Commission on Security Guarantees (CNGS) put in place a series of measures to better protect HRDs and community leaders working in the context of the peace agreement. On 24 May, [Decree 665 of 2024](#) was issued, adopting a Public Policy and Ongoing Action Plan for dismantling criminal behaviours and organisations, including those of former paramilitaries and their support networks who continue to pose a risk to HRDs.

Despite the government’s adoption of new protection plans, Colombian HRDs remained skeptical of their effectiveness. They noted that the government’s actions often fell short of addressing the persistent, grave, and widespread violations against HRDs, as highlighted by the Constitutional Court’s declaration in December 2023. Human rights organisations noted that despite governmental declarations and the adoption of an emergency plan for protecting HRDs, violence against HRDs continued to increase during 2024.

The 3rd Conference of the Parties (COP3) to the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean – known as the **Escazú Agreement** – was held in Santiago, Chile, from 22-24 April. One of the outcomes was the [adoption](#) of an [Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters](#). This plan aims to enhance protection and support for HRDs across the region. Although there is no clear plan for national implementation, some governments have begun the process. During COP3, Chile announced a new inter-ministerial initiative to protect HRDs. However, HRDs told Front Line Defenders that they were not consulted during the planning stages, raising questions about how effective any eventual policy will be in providing for their protection.

During the 16th United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP16) held in Cali, Colombia, HRDs played a crucial role in advocating for the integration of human rights into biodiversity conservation efforts. Despite the lack of effective participation of HRDs during the conference, the importance of human rights in biodiversity conservation was recognised. Decisions calling for the recognition and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities were adopted, ensuring their active participation in decision-making processes related to biodiversity in the future.

Colombia and Brazil made proposals to recognise the traditional knowledge and sustainable practices of afro- descendant communities, advocating for their inclusion in environmental decision-making processes. The conference called for stronger legal frameworks to protect afro-descendant communities' rights to their lands and resources.

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

COURT FINDS FURUKAWA PLANTACIONES S.A GUILTY OF MODERN SLAVERY



Members of the Furukawa plantation in Esmeraldas Province, Ecuador.
© El Comité de Solidaridad Furukawa Nunca Más

On 14 December, HRD and 2023 Front Line Defenders Award recipient [Segundo Ordóñez](#) and his community celebrated a huge victory as Ecuador's Constitutional Court issued a landmark decision finding that **Furukawa Plantaciones S.A.**, historically linked with Japan's Furukawa Group, had subjected its workers to conditions of modern slavery over six decades. The court found that the company exploited predominantly Afro-Ecuadorian workers, forcing them to live in unsanitary camps within the plantations, lacking access to basic services such as electricity, potable water, healthcare, and education. These workers were compelled to cultivate abacá for Furukawa under exploitative conditions. The court attributed these practices to structural racism, noting that the workers' Afro-Ecuadorian heritage led to their treatment as mere production objects, devoid of human dignity.

The court has ordered Furukawa to provide comprehensive reparations, including public apologies and financial compensation to the victims. This decision sets a significant legal precedent, highlighting the importance of corporate accountability and the need to address systemic racism in labor practices. The court also mandated measures for the government, recognising the lack of action and impunity reinforced by State authorities to the case. The decision also calls for a public apology from the president and the development of public policies to avoid repetition.

This judgement reflects the courage and resilience of the abacaleros and HRDs in the areas of Esmeraldas, Los Rios and Santo Domingo in their quest for justice. For years, the rural workers had tried to reclaim their rights and denounce their working and living conditions to different local and national authorities without proper follow up, all the while facing retaliation, intimidation and attempts at criminalisation by the company. The permanent struggle of the abacaleros is an opportunity for the Ecuadorian State to recognise the important role of HRDs in the implementation of basic human rights guarantees.

ACQUITTAL OF DAVID HERNÁNDEZ SALAZAR

On 14 May, a federal judge in **Mexico** revoked the 46 and a half year sentence imposed against **David Hernández Salazar**, a member of the Assembly of Indigenous Peoples of the Isthmus in Defence of Land and Territory (APIIDTT). The human rights defender received the sentence in February for peacefully protesting against the installation of a “Polo de Desarrollo”⁹ in San Blas on the common use lands known as El Pitayal, as part of the Inter-Oceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (CIIT) project. In addition to his sentence being revoked, the judge also decided to drop criminal proceedings against 17 members of the Binniza Indigenous Community of Puente Madera, who had arrest warrants against them as part of the same legal case.

Members of the Community Assembly of Puente Madera and APIIDTT believe that advocacy and support efforts from local, national and regional organisations were a key factor in the revocation of the sentence and the dropping of criminal proceedings. In a statement published on the webpage of the National Indigenous Congress, they state: “We are deeply grateful to the Congreso Nacional Indígena, the Frente de Organizaciones Oaxaqueñas, RED TDT, Front Line Defenders, Climate Activist Defenders, Mazatecas por la Libertad and the Red de Futuros Indígenas for their accompaniment and support at all times, as well as to all the organizations, collectives and individuals from Oaxaca, Mexico and the world who have collaborated with our community. THANK YOU.” In 2023 Front Line Defenders participated in a Civilian Observation Mission to the region and highlighted various human rights violations occurring in the context of the CIIT project.

9. A “Polo de Desarrollo” is a designated area where industrial activities are promoted to boost regional economic growth.

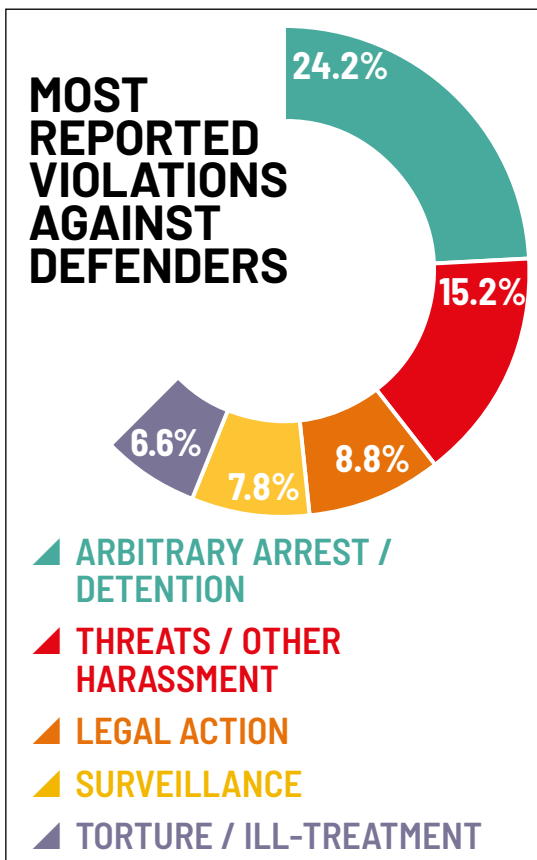
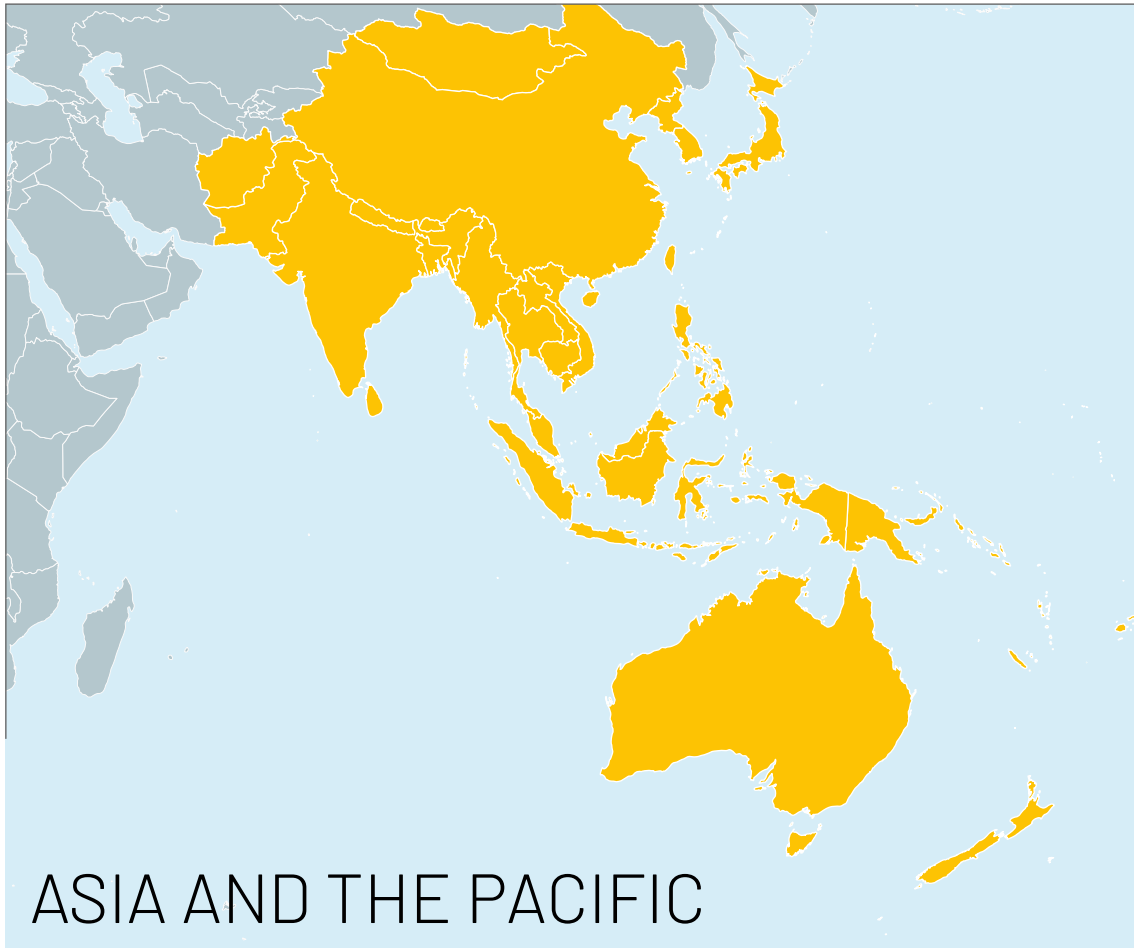
BATTLE AGAINST ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES IN MEXICO

After a long legal battle, **Javier and María del Tránsito**, FLD Award winners in 2022, secured a 35-year sentence last June for the murder of their son, **Francisco Javier Barajas Piña**, who was killed while searching for the disappeared.

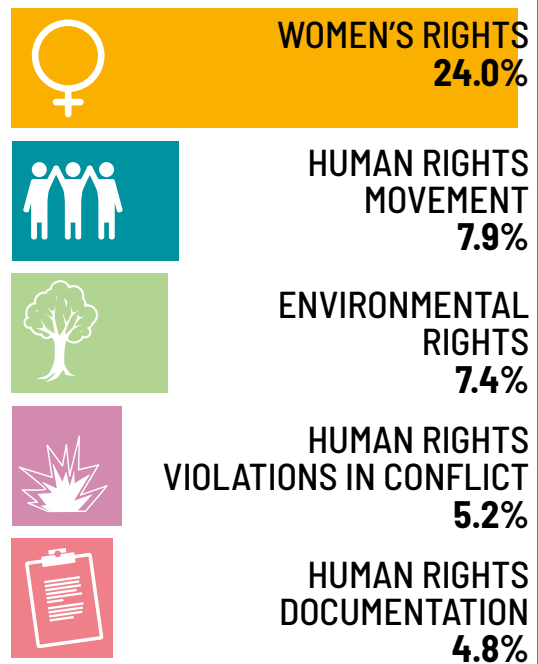
Their daughter, **Guadalupe Barajas Piña**, went missing in 2020. When they began searching, they tragically found her body in 2021. Her enforced disappearance reflects **Mexico's** growing crisis of abductions and killings. Despite their loss, the family continued searching for other disappeared persons along with their collective, with their son, Javier Jr., even joining the State Search Commission. On May 29, 2021, he was murdered by individuals linked to his sister's disappearance, forcing his parents to flee the state for safety.

Convicting Javier Jr.'s murderers is a crucial step toward justice for thousands of missing persons in Mexico. Authorities must hold perpetrators accountable. The trial for Guadalupe Barajas Piña's disappearance began in June against four individuals. Strong evidence established their responsibility, underscoring the crisis. Thanks to her parents' perseverance, Guanajuato's Judiciary has a chance to set a precedent for justice.

Mexico lacks updated sentencing data. Between 2010 and 2021, only 36 federal convictions were reported despite over 116,000 recorded disappearances. Guadalupe's case marks a vital step in addressing this crisis.



MOST TARGETED AREAS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE



Source: Front Line Defenders (2024)

ASIA & THE PACIFIC

In 2024, human rights defenders from, or working on behalf of, traditionally marginalised communities in many countries in Asia and the Pacific persisted in their struggles to claim their rights, and demanded to be treated with dignity. These struggles were grounded in their local contexts, often reaching far back into history, but increasingly conducted using the language of human rights and the tools that come with it. In some countries, movements spearheaded by women or youth gained in prominence while defenders working on land rights or environmental protection often did so as part of a collective resistance that refused to be steamrolled by the State or corporate interests.

A common trend across the region was the targeting of HRDs who exposed human rights violations, including corruption, through journalism or social media. Social media itself remained a double-edged sword, as its value as a platform for HRDs to highlight abuses and network with each other was undermined by threats, intimidation, smear campaigns and lies posted on social media in response to their work.

In addition to States' use of the justice system and/or violence to stop the work of HRDs, defenders were also at risk from non-state actors, including companies, extremist and paramilitary groups, – and for defenders of certain identities or working on certain rights – from their own families and communities.

Yet defenders continued to work and help realise rights in the most difficult of environments, ranging from the Taliban's attempted suffocation of civil society in Afghanistan, to the Indian government's scattergun-style repression of HRDs, to the Myanmar junta's airstrikes on a civilian population; through it all, defenders keep working.

CRIMINALISATION, HARASSMENT AND STATE VIOLENCE

Criminalisation remained a routine risk for HRDs in the region and once again, numerous defenders were targeted through opaque and politicized judicial systems that failed to live up to their own standards. Treatment in detention was often sub-standard, while in some cases, detained defenders were denied access to adequate medical care and subjected to ill-treatment. Violence was frequently used by state authorities alongside arrests.

Authorities in **Thailand** continued to use the royal defamation ‘lèse-majesté’ law as a political tool to silence HRDs and critics of the government. [Netiporn ‘Bung’ Sanesangkhom](#), a 28 year-old WHRD who advocated for reform of the monarchy and the ‘lèse-majesté’ law, died in pre-trial detention on 14 May. She had been arrested on 26 January and was facing a number of separate charges, including two of ‘lèse-majesté’ relating to a 2022 protest in which she held up a banner, questioning whether or not royal motorcades caused inconvenience to the public. After going on hunger strike in protest at a court decision to revoke her bail, Netiporn Sanesangkhom [suffered](#) a cardiac arrest while under the care of the Department of Corrections, raising questions about the quality of treatment she received before being transferred from prison to a hospital. An investigation into the circumstances of her death was ongoing without any significant development at the time of publication.

Multiple arrests and incidents of judicial harassment in **mainland China** highlighted the continued trend of state persecution of HRDs regardless of what human rights they



A portrait of Thai WHRD Netiporn Sanesangkhom, seen during a mourning ceremony outside The Southern Bangkok Criminal Court, 14 May 2024.

© SOPA Images Limited/Alamy Live News

defend. Those who had been arbitrarily detained for extended periods of time were put on trial during the year on state-security charges in processes that were fraught with irregularities. These included [Huang Xueqin](#) and [Wang Jianbing](#), who, in April, were sentenced to five and three and a half years respectively on charges of ‘inciting subversion of state power’ related to private gatherings held in the home of Wang Jianbing. Huang Xueqin had worked to promote women’s rights, and to document and expose sexual harassment against women and girls in the workplace and in educational institutions while Wang Jianbing advocated for the rights of workers with occupational diseases through legal and community support. The pair had been held in pre-trial detention since 2021. Following the verdict, both defenders appealed the decision. In a flagrant example of how the judicial system lacks transparency and fails to follow its own rules, the HRDs’ lawyers only found out that the Huang and Wang’s appeal had been [rejected](#) three days after the appeal hearing was held on 10 September. On 12 September, one of Huang Xueqin’s lawyers telephoned the responsible judge at the Guangdong High Court to request an open hearing to consider the appeal, on the basis that testimonies from new witnesses had been collected and submitted to the court. During the phone call, the judge did not inform the lawyer that a verdict had already been reached on 10 September.

Similar state security charges were laid against human rights lawyer [Yu Wensheng](#) and WHRD [Xu Yan](#), who were sentenced to three years and one year and nine months respectively in October. The couple were detained while travelling to a meeting at the EU Delegation in April 2023.

The authorities in [Hong Kong](#), meanwhile, used the territory’s 2020 National Security Law to jail 45 pro-democracy activists in November, with sentences ranging from four to 10 years. Several of the jailed activists are HRDs who were previously involved in [the Umbrella Movement](#) in the city.

HRDs in [Vietnam](#) continued to be summoned by the police, interrogated, detained and jailed. Imprisoned defenders routinely complained of ill-treatment and poor conditions. In one such instance, jailed environmental rights defender [Dang Dinh Bach](#) embarked on a third hunger-strike in February to protest his treatment, which included being attacked in custody. The HRD, who is a prominent climate change activist, is serving a five year sentence for ‘tax evasion’, a charge increasingly used by the authorities to target HRDs in a manner less likely to directly draw international condemnation. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has found his detention to be arbitrary.

Charges linked to terrorism were routinely used by governments, especially in South Asia, to threaten, harass and undermine HRDs and civil society organisations. In [India](#), multiple HRDs were [criminalised](#) under the widely-abused anti-terror legislation, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). These laws carry with them high thresholds for granting bail, long incarceration without charge, and a reversal of the presumption of innocence, resulting in the burden of proving their innocence being placed on the accused persons.

India's counter-terrorism and national security laws have expanded over time to become increasingly broad and have often overturned basic procedural safeguards for defendants. In June, ahead of the sixth [Financial Action Task Force \(FATF\) Plenary](#) when the FATF Member States, Secretariat and leadership met to review India's Mutual Evaluation Report (MER), Front Line Defenders among others highlighted the fact that the Indian government has been misusing the FATF's standards to target civil society organisations working on human rights. In its report, the FATF called on India to ensure that "measures aimed at preventing the non-profit sector from being abused for terrorist financing are implemented in line with the risk-based approach, including by conducting outreach to non-profit organisations on their terrorist financing risks."

Defenders of minority rights in other parts of the country were similarly targeted in a systemic pattern of reprisal against HRDs working on the protection of oppressed communities. In the mineral-rich states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh, Dalit and indigenous HRDs defending their access to land, their livelihoods, and the environment in the face of extractivist business interests and militarisation were routinely smeared as militants who support the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) (CPI) (M). This targeting occurred in reprisal for their documentation and reporting of violations, and exposure of the conduct of military and state actors in affected communities.

In Chhattisgarh in April, [Surju Tekam](#), an indigenous HRD and mentor to the Bastar Coordination Committee of Mass Movements, was arrested from his residence during a pre-dawn raid. He is being held under the UAPA and the Arms Act, and is accused of having links to the CPI (M). The HRD has worked for over two decades to promote the rights of the Adivasi indigenous people and has been vocal against violations, including extrajudicial killings, in the region. He is also the Vice-President of Sarv Adivasi Samaj—an umbrella organization that brings together Adivasi collectives in Chhattisgarh to support their socio-cultural and civil and political rights.

In June, Chhattisgarh police arrested [Suneeta Pottam](#) from a women's collective in Raipur, Chhattisgarh state. The WHRD has been arrested in multiple cases and is accused of involvement with CPI(M). She is a member of the People's Union for Civil Liberties Chhattisgarh, and has also worked with the Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression since 2015. Along with other Adivasi leaders, Suneeta Pottam founded the Mulvasi Bachao Manch, an Adivasi Youth Forum which documents human rights violations by the State and campaigns peacefully for rights and justice for the local community. She has been at the forefront of ongoing peaceful protests in several districts of Chhattisgarh, demanding the realisation of the constitutionally guaranteed rights of Adivasis and opposing the human rights implications of corporate mining and militarisation in the region. She remained detained at the time of publication.

In October, the Chhattisgarh government banned the Moolvasi Bachao Manch (MBM) under the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act, 2005. This Act gives the government the



power to declare any organisation illegal if it is “of the opinion” it has become so. MBM is a collective of indigenous HRDs which has peacefully mobilized against land dispossession, environmental degradation, and violence perpetuated by militarisation in the name of development. Bastar, a region within Chhattisgarh, is now one of the most militarised areas in India.

In late 2023, indigenous defenders **Lakhma Koram**, **Ranu Podyam**, **Shankar Kashyap**, and **Samlu Koram** in Bastar were arrested under anti-terror legislation on account of their peaceful resistance to mining projects imposed on their communities. The HRDs are involved with Morohnar Jan Andolan and Orcha Jan Andolan, two peaceful protest movements objecting to the impact of iron ore mining on their community and the construction of paramilitary camps in the region. They also advocate for the implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 and the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act 1996, which requires public consultation with the local community before approving mining projects on Adivasi lands.

BANGLADESH

In **Bangladesh**, authorities resorted to excessive force in trying to quell a protest movement that began demanding reform of a system which guaranteed a certain percentage of government jobs to the children and grandchildren of those who fought in the Bangladesh Liberation War. The protests were met with a severe crackdown from the authorities involving ruling party thugs, police and paramilitary forces from the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB). At least 250 people were killed with thousands more injured. In July, local media reported that over 10,000 people, had been arrested, including six coordinators of the Students Against Discrimination Movement, **Nahid Islam**, **Abu Bakar Majumder**, **Asif Mahmud**, **Sarjis Alam**, **Hasnat Abdullah**, and **Nusrat Tabassum**. They were [arbitrarily detained](#) in Dhaka and coerced to announce the halting of their protest actions through a video message sent to the media. Support for the protesters surged in response to the brutal crackdown and the demands expanded to include the resignation of the government.



Bangladeshi students, teachers, human rights defenders, and cultural activists take part in a protest in Dhaka in August 2024 to demand justice after at least 250 people were killed and thousands injured in a violent crackdown.

© Wasiul Bahar

In **Sri Lanka**, Muslim and Tamil defenders, especially those in the war-affected North and East, faced disproportionate targeting, including court orders and legal action to prevent their protests, surveillance, interrogations and administrative barriers to work. Interrogations and moves against HRDs were often led by the Counter Terrorism Investigation Department (CTID), adding to the fear and burden placed on HRDs, their families and communities.

Minority rights defenders in **Pakistan**, including from Baloch, Pashtun and Sindhi communities, who sought accountability for state violence were routinely subjected to harassment, arrest, terror and sedition charges, violence and travel bans.

The Baloch movement for rights and justice – led primarily by women, youth and families of victims – persisted in their efforts to hold the government to account for enforced

disappearances and extrajudicial killings in Balochistan. Multiple WHRDs and others involved in the movement were charged as the state used a combination of violence and criminalisation to dismantle the Baloch Long March between December 2023 and January 2024, which was designed to highlight the severity of human rights violations in Balochistan. The same tactics were used again by the Pakistani authorities in July to prevent the Baloch National Gathering from taking place in Gwadar, Balochistan. The choice of Gwadar, a port city, which has seen high levels of militarization and development-related displacement was significant as the population in the region has experienced systemic human rights violations linked to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. In the days leading up to the national gathering, Pakistani authorities targeted HRDs including through legal cases and actions that prevented participants from safely reaching the venue. The period of the gathering was marked by violence, internet shutdowns, blockades and disproportionate force against peaceful protesters including HRDs. Those impacted include the Front Line Defenders 2024 award winner **Sammi Deen Baloch, Dr. Sabiha Baloch**, and **Sabghatullah Abdul Haq**. HRDs were unable to communicate with those outside Gwadar, or safely exit the location due to repressive measures taken by the Pakistani authorities.

WHRDs and family members of the Voice of Missing Persons of Sindh were treated similarly in March when they gathered peacefully in Larkana to protest against the lack of an effective investigation into the killing of **Hidayat Lohar**. Hidayat Lohar was the father of **Sasui Lohar** and **Sorath Lohar**, two active members of the Voice of Missing Persons of Sindh, who was murdered in February. He was subject to an enforced disappearance between 2017 and 2019. A First Information Report (FIR)¹⁰ into his killing was only filed following a court order two weeks after his murder. Instead of an assurance of justice and due process, Sindh police used excessive force against the HRDs, family members and peaceful protesters, and made a number of arbitrary arrests.

The Pakistani state also moved against the Pashtun community when it finally banned the grassroots Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) after years of harassment and detentions of its leaders. PTM is a peaceful human rights movement that had campaigned against extra judicial killings, enforced disappearances, discrimination and surveillance of the Pashtun community by the Pakistani authorities. In October, the government designated it as a “proscribed organisation” under the 1997 Anti-Terrorism Act, days ahead of a scheduled national gathering.

10. “A First Information Report (FIR) is a written document prepared by the police when they receive information about the commission of a cognizable offence. It is a report of information that reaches the police first in point of time and that is why it is called the First Information Report.” Source.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

In **Afghanistan**, an outspoken advocate for the right to education of women and girls was held incommunicado for 27 days, amounting to an act of enforced disappearance. During this time, the individual was interrogated about their work and allegedly subjected to torture and solitary confinement. They were denied access to legal counsel or medical treatment during their detention.

Enforced disappearances were also rampant in the refugee camps in **Bangladesh**, where Rohingya HRDs live and work. Armed and criminal actors responsible for the enforced disappearances largely operate with impunity in this context.

China's infamous system of residential surveillance at a designated location (RSDL), which is provided for under its Criminal Procedure Law, grants sweeping powers to the police to detain those suspected of committing a "national security" offence incommunicado for up to six months in any location chosen by the police. UN human rights experts have raised concerns that conditions of detention under RSDL "are analogous to incommunicado and secret detention and tantamount to enforced disappearance." Human rights lawyer **Gao Zhisheng**, remained missing for a seventh year, with his family last hearing from him in August 2017. The Chinese government has implausibly claimed that Gao is not under any "criminal coercive measures."

Indigenous and environmental defenders in the **Philippines** also remained at risk of being disappeared. In March, **Francisco "Eco" Dangla III** and **Joxelle "Jak" Tiong** were abducted in Pangasinan province and remained missing for three days before they were resurfaced. The two are environmental HRDs who have advocated for the protection of the Lingayen Gulf from black sand mining, opposed the proposal for six nuclear plants in Labrador Municipality, campaigned against coal-fired power plants, and resisted the establishment of waste incinerators for waste-to-energy projects. Additionally, as participants in the Environmental Defenders Congress (EDC) and the Asia Pacific Network of Environmental Defenders (APNED), the pair also worked to enhance protection and accountability mechanisms for environmental and human rights defenders facing attacks. Before their disappearance, they were [victims](#) of red-tagging, which is often a prelude to further attacks, as highlighted by the U.N Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression following her official country visit to the Philippines at the start of the year.

In August, the Court of Appeals denied the application for protective writs of two environmental defenders who had been abducted by armed masked men in September 2023. **Jhed Tamano** and **Jonila Castro** were disappeared for over two weeks after being forced into an SUV in Bataan province, north of Manila. After 17 days, the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) presented the pair at a press conference and attempted to portray them as having surrendered from the New People's Army (NPA). However, the two women used the press conference to protest their ordeal, confirming that they were abducted by military forces, subjected to death threats, and

endured 17 days of interrogation. Despite this, the Court of Appeals in August cited a lack of evidence of “any form of threat to their life, liberty, or security during their stay at the military camp of the 70th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army” and stated that the WHRDs “failed to prove the existence of any imminent and continued threats” following their release on 15 September 2023.

SEEKING SAFETY ABROAD

HRDs in the region took huge risks and depleted their savings to cross international borders in an effort to avoid persecution for their human rights work. If they made it safely into another country, they often remained at risk from state agents of their country of origin who were sent to track them down or from the security services of their host country collaborating with their country of origin. Even those who don't face this kind of transnational repression encounter enormous challenges in third countries, including relating to resources, permission to work, and being left in limbo when their travel documents expire but they cannot go to the embassy of their home country for renewal.

Afghan defenders, particularly women, have faced serious risks in reaching safety, facing obstacles at every turn in trying to locate pathways for themselves and family members. Those who do reach neighbouring countries are very often unable to find permanent solutions for resettlement; they are targeted by authorities in host countries with the threat of arrest, and forced return. There are few options for safety inside **Afghanistan** where the Taliban persecute HRDs with impunity. There are even fewer options for sustaining livelihoods and they struggle to make ends meet in order to support their families. Few organisations provide ongoing financial assistance to help with living costs, making it difficult for HRDs inside or outside Afghanistan to continue their human rights work.

Thailand was both a site of refuge and risk for defenders from neighbouring countries. HRDs from Vietnam, Cambodia, China and Pakistan all fled to Thailand to register with the UNHCR and file their application for resettlement on account of risks faced in their home countries. Large numbers of defenders from Myanmar also retreated across the Thai border to escape human rights violations, warfare, and deep poverty in their homeland.

The risks these defenders faced often followed them across borders. On 2 February, Vietnamese **HRD Lu A Da**, head of the H'mong Human Rights Coalition, was released on bail after he was **arrested** by the Thai Royal Police at his residence near Bangkok in December 2023. His arrest followed his public denouncement of the Vietnamese government's alleged systematic suppression of H'mong communities in **Vietnam**. Following his release, he was visited by an official from the Vietnamese embassy in Bangkok and told to return to Vietnam.

Another Vietnamese defender, **Y Quynh Bdap**, was arrested in June in Bangkok for “overstaying his visa,” putting him at risk of deportation to Vietnam despite his UNHCR refugee status. He was detained at the Bangkok Remand Prison pending an extradition



Chinese human rights lawyer Lu Siwei pictured in Laos before his arrest and deportation to China.

© Associated Press / Alamy Stock Photo

trial requested by the Vietnamese Government. The HRD is a co-founder of Montagnards Stand for Justice, a group promoting the rights of indigenous peoples in Vietnam's Central Highlands. He was convicted by Vietnamese authorities in absentia of terrorist offences in January and sentenced to ten years in prison. At year-end, Y Quynh Bdap's lawyers were preparing to submit an appeal against the decision of the Bangkok Criminal Court in September to extradite him.

Lu Siwei, a Chinese human rights lawyer who was arrested in **Laos** in 2023 at the behest of the Chinese authorities and deported back to **China** was re-arrested in October, and once again charged with "illegally crossing the border." The lawyer had fled China for Laos following years of persistent targeting by the authorities, including the revocation of his license to practice law in 2021 and imposition of an exit ban, which prevented him from participating in a fellowship in the USA that same year. In his legal work, he had focussed on cases relating to freedom of expression, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture, forced eviction, and demolition of personal properties. In recent years, he also provided legal counsel to political activists in Hong Kong who were detained and tried in mainland China while fleeing to Taiwan.

GENDER-SPECIFIC RISKS

The gendered risks faced by WHRDs were nowhere more visible or urgently felt than in **Afghanistan**, where the Taliban's policy of dehumanising women and girls accelerated. They were subjected to systematic violence and violations of their basic rights to freedom of movement, freedom of speech and association, participation in public life, and access to education, paid employment, and pensions for war widows. Protests for women's rights continue despite the severity of the threats faced and the Taliban's consolidation of power and their increasingly sophisticated surveillance systems. Front Line Defenders is aware of multiple WHRDs who risk their lives to document violations and collaborate with colleagues in exile on advocacy and protection strategies. Threats from their own relatives and from community members also posed significant risks to WHRDs, who are without effective mechanisms for redress. Organizations that remain in the country and work even in a limited capacity have faced threats including the arrest of staff, raids and violence. Taliban policies against women have bled into all aspects of life including education, work, movement and participation in any public spaces. WHRDs and HRDs [campaigning](#) against these policies stand out, and are arrested, brutalised, and in some cases have faced harsh prison sentences.

The situation of Rohingya WHRDs in **Bangladesh** and **Myanmar** remained one of great risk, while those working on the rights of women and girls faced particular challenges, including from within their own community. In Myanmar, women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ defenders have reportedly experienced gender-specific violations from both actors affiliated with the State Administration Council and from actors affiliated with armed opposition groups.

WHRDs in **China** too were targeted in ways that their male colleagues were not. In October, a court in Henan province sentenced [He Fangmei](#), to five and a half years in prison, one year and nine months of which was on a charge of "bigamy." He Fangmei was the co-founder of Home for Vaccine Babies, an informal network of families whose young children became seriously ill or disabled as a result of receiving defective vaccines after her own daughter was paralyzed in 2018 from such a vaccination. She was arrested in 2020 and as she was pregnant at the time, was confined in a psychiatric hospital with her children. Her two daughters remained in the hospital until April 2023 while her son was placed in foster care. He Fangmei has been separated from her children since at least March 2022, when she was transferred from the psychiatric hospital to a detention centre. The whereabouts of her two daughters are currently unknown. The WHRD's husband is also serving a five year prison sentence.

NON-STATE ACTORS

While criminalisation was frequently accompanied by state violence, especially in the context of peaceful protests, HRDs in some countries in the region also faced risk from non-state actors, who at times functioned with state support as proxies, or were enabled by a culture of impunity, apathy or inaction by state authorities – tantamount to the State's failure to protect the HRDs.

In **India**, HRDs in Manipur condemning the ongoing ethnic violence and criticising the actions of armed militant groups such as the Meitei Leepun (ML) have been attacked and threatened. **Babloo Loitongbam**, an Indian HRD and lawyer, was issued with a [warning](#) by ML in September to cease his peacebuilding efforts. The following day approximately 50 individuals visited his house, threatening his family with severe consequences unless he limited his public appearances and stopped his human rights work.

The People's Water Forum (PWF), which took place on the sidelines of the World Water Forum in **Indonesia** in May, was targeted by groups of masked men who acted with impunity. On 20 May, a PWF press conference was disrupted and HRDs attending were attacked. The following day, around 50 masked individuals imposed a blockade on the hotel where the PWF participants were staying, which lasted for three days. The U.N Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation attempted to enter the hotel but was prevented from doing so, intimidated and shoved. When he raised the issue of the blockade with a group of nearby police officers, he was told that "they could not intervene because the hotel entrance was in the hands of the civilians." In the months following the PWF, Indonesian HRDs who attended continued to be subjected to intimidation and threats.

HRDs in **Bangladesh** and **Myanmar** were targeted for their work by armed groups and Front Line Defenders is aware of several cases of HRDs documenting human rights violations who have been threatened. One defender was threatened by an armed group for highlighting the forced recruitment of young men from camps in Bangladesh who were sent back to Myanmar against their will to fight with Rohingya armed groups aligned with the Myanmar military. Another HRD who is engaged in community education and documentation of killings by armed groups was also targeted. Members of the armed group entered his refugee shelter to threaten him, and started an online smear campaign, portraying him as a member of a rival armed group. There was growing hostility towards Rohingya activists in Northern Rakhine State, as the Arakan Army was accused of multiple human rights violations, and the main armed Rohingya groups affiliated themselves with the Myanmar military.

The former Awami League government in **Bangladesh** (see below) deployed hired thugs in an attempt to break up the quota-reform demonstrations led by student activists in June and July. These hired thugs beat students at the main site of the protests – the University of Dhaka campus – which caused more students to join the demonstrations in anger. The

government then deployed its own student wing, the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), to attack the protesting students. When campuses were eventually shut down, members of the BCL waited outside to attack student defenders and also went to the hospitals to further attack already injured students, and to intimidate medical staff into refusing to treat them.

RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION

In February, the **Hong Kong** government announced that it would introduce a local national security law (known as the Article 23 legislation), in addition to the 2020 National Security Law for Hong Kong imposed by the mainland Chinese government. The Hong Kong government issued a consultation paper and called for public input. Front Line Defenders responded to the government's call by making a [submission](#) on the proposed legislation. At the end of the one-month consultation period, the Hong Kong government issued a public press release attacking several human rights groups who made submissions, including Front Line Defenders, and labelled these organisations as "anti-China."



Members of Mother Nature Cambodia leave the Phnom Penh Capital Court after their fourth trial hearing on 17 June 2024.

© LICADHO

The law, known officially as the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance, was rapidly adopted by the Hong Kong legislature and went into force in late March. The law contains numerous vaguely defined concepts and grants sweeping, often unchecked, powers to the authorities in charge of enforcing it. The vagueness of the terms used in the legislation allows for the potential criminalisation of interaction by Hong Kong residents with United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms, as noted in a [communication](#) sent by a number of UN Special Procedure Mandate Holders in March.

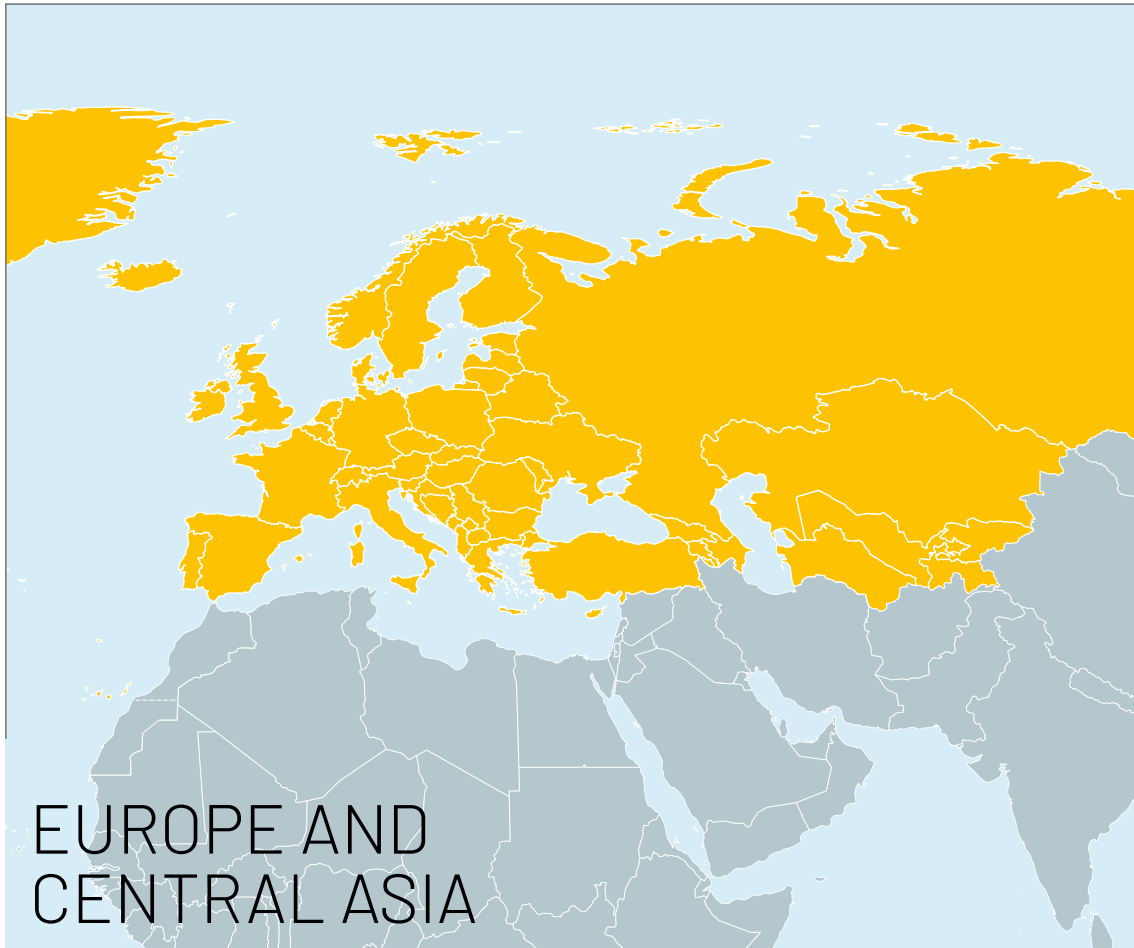
In **Malaysia**, regressive amendments to the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (CMA) were passed in December, amidst widespread criticism from civil society. The amendments provide for an alarming expansion of the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC)'s powers to decide what kind of content is permitted online, to compel service providers to provide user data, and to suspend the services of Content Application Service Providers (CASPs) for non-compliance. The amendments allow the MCMC and its "authorised officers" to enter premises, conduct search and seizures without a warrant, and compel social media platforms to disclose user data upon request without any judicial oversight. Separately, the MCMC Act has been amended to give the MCMC immunity from any court or other proceedings. The act presents a risk for human rights defenders as it fosters greater censorship and undermines accountability.

In **Bangladesh**, the interim government's advisory council approved a draft Cyber Protection Ordinance (CPO) on 24 December. The CPO allows the prosecution and jailing of citizens who "hurt religious sentiments." This restriction violates international human rights law as under such standards, the right to religion or belief does not include the right to be free from criticism and ridicule. Section 8 of the CPO empowers the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to remove or block content that may undermine "national unity," "economic activity," "security," "defence," "religious values" or "public order," on request of law enforcement agencies and the director-general of the National Cyber Security Agency.

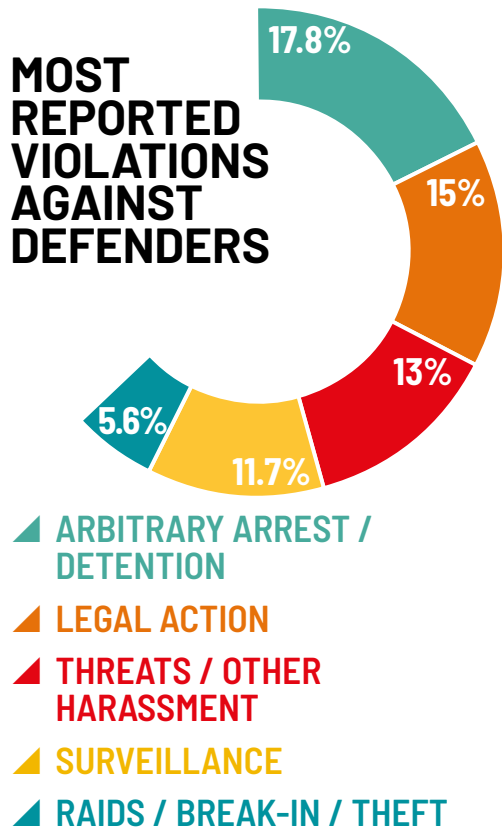
POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

In **Sri Lanka**, a case against stand-up comedian and WHRD **Natasha Edirisooriya** was dismissed in court, and the Human Rights Commission gave a positive order declaring that her rights were violated and set out the procedure to be followed in future arrests or actions. Sri Lanka's International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act No. 56 of 2007, under which charges were brought against the WHRD, has been weaponized against defenders and to quash dissent against state policies. While the dismissal of charges against Natasha Edirisooriya is welcome, the case highlights a broader pattern of persecution across South Asia where the process itself is punishment. HRDs are arrested, held under regressive laws that deny access to bail, in order to ensure maximum suffering and where a successful prosecution is not the end goal. In its order and in a welcome intervention, the Human Rights Commission spoke out against the mistreatment of the WHRD but also for the need to follow clear guidelines when the law is applied.

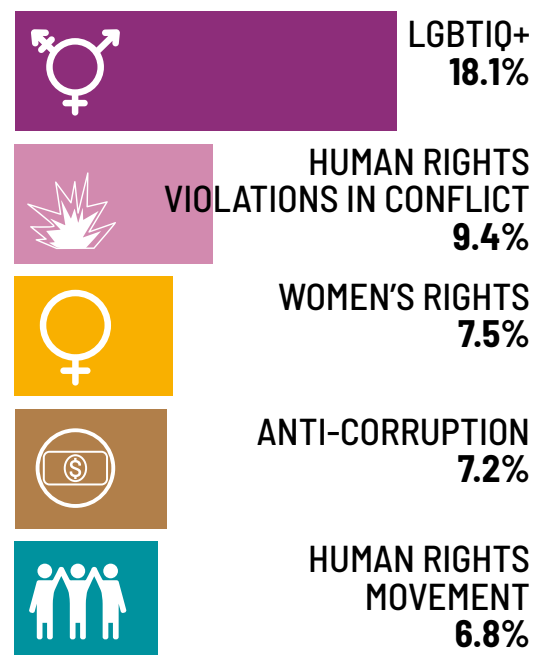
In **Indonesia**, HRDs **Haris Azhar** and **Fatia Maulidiyanti** were acquitted in January of criminal defamation charges which had been hanging over them for over two years. The case had been initiated by the Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment following a discussion that the two HRDs had had on Haris Azhar's YouTube Channel, in which they questioned the close links between the Indonesian military and mining operations in West Papua. The East Jakarta District Court ruled that the comments made by the two HRDs in the video did not amount to defamation.



MOST REPORTED VIOLATIONS AGAINST DEFENDERS



MOST TARGETED AREAS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE



Source: Front Line Defenders (2024)

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Across Europe and Central Asia, HRDs have shown great resilience in the face of extremely challenging contexts. Defenders worked in volatile environments where they were limited in conducting human rights activities as they risked being detained, arrested and imprisoned. Systemic harassment and intimidation of HRDs was reported to Front Line Defenders in **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Russia, Italy, Türkiye, Uzbekistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine** including in **Russia-occupied Crimea, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Serbia and Georgia**. The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine continued to present wartime human rights violations including incommunicado detention and killing of HRDs. In many countries, HRDs documenting human rights violations faced risk of being detained, disappeared, arrested and imprisoned.

INTIMIDATION, HARASSMENT AND CRIMINALISATION

Across the region, HRDs were subjected to defamation and various types of harassment as pro-government actors attempted to undermine their legitimacy in the eyes of the public. In **Uzbekistan** a pro-government blogger, accompanied by an unidentified man, [ambushed Umida Niyazova](#), a WHRD who has exposed labour rights violations in the country, particularly in the cotton sector, and fellow WHRD [Sharifa Madrakhimova](#) outside Madrakhimova's home. Sharifa Madrakhimova reported the attack to the Uchkuprik District Police Department, naming the pro-government blogger as one of the perpetrators. However, no wrongdoing was found on the blogger's part. Two days later, the blogger published a defamatory YouTube video targeting [Umida Niyazova](#). The video falsely accused her of spreading disinformation and of being in the pay of Western governments.

Since the July 2022 protests in Uzbekistan erupted in response to the authorities' attempt to pass constitutional amendments revoking Karakalpakstan's autonomy, the government has pursued HRDs who have documented human rights violations in Karakalpakstan. As a result, HRD community leader and advocate [Aqylbek Muratbai](#) has been living in



exile in Almaty, Kazakhstan, working to support the Karakalpak diaspora in **Kazakhstan** and providing extensive assistance to Karakalpak activists and HRDs who were forced to flee Uzbekistan. In February, he was arrested by the Kazakhstani authorities at the request of the Uzbekistani government. In September, his asylum application was rejected, and he now faces the possibility of extradition to Uzbekistan and a lengthy prison sentence.

In **Turkmenistan**, government authorities continued to harass and intimidate WHRD and 2021 Martin Ennals Award Finalist **Soltan Achilova**, who was once again prevented from travelling to Geneva to be recognized for her contributions to the documentation of human rights violations. As they prepared to travel in November, a group of law enforcement officers bundled Soltan Achilova, her daughter and her daughter's husband into an ambulance and brought them to an "Infectious Disease Control Centre" in the Choganly neighbourhood of Ashgabat. They were detained at the medical facility for two days to ensure they could not participate in the event. Achilova has been targeted because of her work as a journalist and photographer, through which she documents human rights violations in Turkmenistan. In doing so, she is one of the few voices presenting an alternative narrative to the government about the situation in the country.



Top: Turkmenistani WHRD and 2021 Martin Ennals Award Finalist Soltan Achilova.

© Martin Ennals Award

Below: Cypriot HRD and 2024 Front Line Defenders Award winner Doros Polykarpou.

© Doros Polykarpou

In **Cyprus** **Doros Polykarpou**, recipient of the 2024 Front Line Defenders at Risk Award and founding member of the NGO [KISA - Action for Equality, Support, and Anti-Racism](#) was set to stand trial on 15 October 2024 before the Nicosia District

Court in Cyprus. The trial was postponed to early February 2025, and then postponed against to September 2025, due to the Prosecutor's failure to provide evidence to the defence in a timely manner. For years, Polykarpou has advocated on behalf of people on the move, trying to ensure that the law is applied equally to them and that their legal rights are protected. Linked to this work, he has been charged with misdemeanour acts of illegal entry, insult and assault. If convicted, he could face up to three years of imprisonment. This charge follows an incident with security guards in March 2022 at the Pournara First Reception Centre in the Nicosia district, during which the HRD was physically attacked. Despite having filed a complaint with the police the same day, the assault was not investigated.

Earlier in the year, KISA's offices were the target of a bomb attack which caused major destruction to the office and the organisation's IT equipment. The organisation has been routinely targeted and threatened by the far-right and anti-migrant groups in the country, who have also issued death threats to Doros Polykarpou and his family. At the time of writing there had been no progress in the police investigation into the bomb attack.

In **Türkiye** in November, WHRD and one of the founding members of Human Rights Association **Nimet Tanrikulu** was taken into police custody on suspicion of membership of a terrorist organisation following an early morning raid on her house. After four days in detention, the prosecutor referred her, along with 13 others, to the Ankara 4th Criminal Judgeship of Peace with a request for pre-trial detention. During interrogations, the WHRD was specifically asked why she had travelled to certain countries abroad or certain cities in Türkiye and about the content of her phone communications with particular people who were arrested during the same operation. The questions referred to events as far back as 2008. Following the pre-trial detention decision of the judgeship, she was transferred to Sincan Women's Prison in Ankara. After 95 days in detention, she was released on bail on 4 March 2025.

Human rights journalists, and in particular journalists working at Kurdish media outlets, continued to be arrested and prosecuted on terrorism-related charges. Police used violence against journalists covering protests, gatherings or demonstrations. During the Newroz festivities in Istanbul, **Tuğçe Yılmaz**, a journalist from the prominent human rights news portal bianet, was pushed to the ground by police officers as she filmed them violently apprehending a person.

HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYERS

Human rights lawyers formed the backbone of the human rights movement in a number of countries and were consequently targeted with harassment, arbitrary arrest, detention and criminalisation, with censorship laws often used to persecute them.

In February, the Russian occupational law enforcement authorities from the Center for Combating Extremism in Simferopol, Crimea, **Ukraine** [approached](#) HRD and lawyer [Emil Kurbedinov](#) and drew up an administrative report against him in 20 minutes relating to a social media post that he authored on the Telegram channel “KEMs’ka Volost” the previous year. In it, he had shared legal advice on how students, who could be targeted by the Russian de-facto authorities in Crimea with forced conscription, could avoid compulsory military service. He was accused of “abuse of freedom of mass information,” under Article 13.15 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation. The case remained ongoing at year-end.

Also in **Crimea** in November, Russian de-facto authorities violently raided the home of human rights lawyers [Lilia Hemedzhy](#) and [Rustem Kyamilev](#), resulting in Rustem Kyamilev’s arbitrary arrest. He was charged with two administrative offences and sentenced to 10 days of detention for the ‘display of prohibited symbols’ on his social media pages, along with a fine for so-called ‘discrediting the Russian army,’ both relating to his opposition to the war in Ukraine. During the raid, the officers seized various documents and devices containing privileged information related to the legal defence of political prisoners. Both HRDs reported that they were subjected to violence by law enforcement authorities during the raid.

Russian human rights lawyers working in Crimea were also targeted by Bar Associations, which intervened to prevent them from doing their work. In June, the Council of the Tyumen Regional Bar Association disbarred [Aleksey Ladin](#) after the Disciplinary Commission’s conclusion that he had violated the code of ethics of the legal profession. The Bar Association’s decision was based on charges he faced in October 2023 as a retaliation for his human rights work in Crimea. The revocation of his attorney’s license deprives Aleksey Ladin of the right to practice law and prevents him from continuing his work on politically motivated criminal cases in Crimea.

These systematic attacks on the legal profession have a significant chilling effect on the work of lawyers in Crimea. This leaves their clients, who often face spurious prosecutions undertaken for political reasons, without effective legal representation, in violation of their right to liberty and to a fair trial.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, human rights lawyers were subjected to intimidation, harassment and criminalisation. In November, the Pervomaiskii District Court of the City of Bishkek [ruled](#) to place HRD and lawyer [Samat Matsakov](#) in pre-trial detention following a raid on his apartment during which documentation related to a high-profile torture case was seized.



Belarusian HRD Leanid Sudalenka pictured in Poland on 5 November 2023.

© Viasna Human Rights Center via AP

After the raid, the authorities brought the HRD to the State Committee for National Security for questioning, denying him access to his lawyers. That evening, he was brought to Pervomaiskii District Court of the City of Bishkek for a hearing which started at 11.30 pm and continued until 9am the following day. Despite the timing of the hearing, and in a powerful show of solidarity, around 50 HRDs, lawyers, and journalists arrived to observe the hearing and demanded that the Court hold it in a venue that could accommodate all of those present, which the Court agreed to. Samat Matsakov remained in detention at year-end.

HRDs and human rights lawyers who are criminalised and judicially harassed are deprived of their right to a fair trial. Some HRDs have been sentenced in absentia. In June, the Homiel District Court in **Belarus** sentenced [Leanid Sudalenka](#) to five years imprisonment on charges of “facilitating extremist activity.” He was not permitted to appoint a lawyer of his choosing and was instead represented by a court-appointed lawyer, who remained unreachable to him. The HRD left Belarus in 2023 after his release from a three year prison sentence for the alleged “organisation and preparation of, or active participation

in, actions that grossly violate public order.” On his release, he publicly exposed the gross human rights violations occurring within the penitentiary system in Belarus, which likely contributed to the opening of the new criminal case against him.

ENVIRONMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

HRDs defending environmental rights in the region were subjected to threats, SLAPPs and intimidation. In **Armenia**, [Oleg Dulgaryan](#), a prominent environmental HRD and Head of the Centre for Community Mobilization and Support (CCMS), received a letter from Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine (ZCMC), the largest mining company in the country, accusing him of defamation. In a systemic attack against the defender, the company demanded compensation of one million Armenian drams (approximately EUR 2,300), as well as a public retraction of the allegedly defamatory statements, which raised concerns about the environmental impacts of the Amulsar mining project. Prior to receiving the letter, a number of pro-government media and social media outlets subjected the HRD to a [defamation](#) campaign. The campaign speculated that it was unclear who commissioned bio-monitoring studies in mining-affected communities, that the HRD might be sharing data with Azerbaijan to be used against Armenia, and [suggested](#) that the National Security services should investigate the HRD to address [these concerns](#).

In **Serbia**, the Misdemeanor Court in Belgrade sentenced three environmental HRDs in August — [Ivan Bijelić](#), [Nikola Ristić](#), and [Jevđenij Julijan Dimitrijević](#) — to between 30 and 40 days in prison for allegedly disrupting public order and peace through “rude and reckless behavior.” They were arrested when the police dispersed a group of peaceful protesters at Prokop station in Belgrade who had blocked the area to protest lithium mining in Serbia. The three environmental HRDs were released on 13 August from prison after the court of appeal overturned the decision and ordered a retrial. The protest was a response to a July ruling by the Constitutional Court which overturned a governmental decree that had previously halted a Rio Tinto mining project due to pollution concerns.

HRDS INVESTIGATING CORRUPTION

HRDs investigating corruption remained at risk in a number of countries in the region. In **Kyrgyzstan**, authorities shuttered an entire media outlet and individual HRDs working as journalists were charged with “abuse of freedom of mass information”.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, in the Republika Srpska, human rights journalist [Sanja Vasković](#) was summoned to the Istočna Ilidža Police Station in East Sarajevo for questioning in relation to the criminal offence of “defamation” following a complaint made by the owner of the company MRAZ D.O.O. Sanja Vasković is an investigative journalist, who has reported on the misuse of public money, nepotism, and corruption in tenders and public institutions. Despite being awarded the honour of “best journalist in written media” by the Association of Journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina, she and her colleagues at the media outlet SPIN

Info routinely receive threats and are verbally attacked for their work. In addition to attempts to discredit their reporting, their families are also targeted in response.

In October, the Leninskiy District Court in Bishkek, **Kyrgyzstan** sentenced journalists **Azamat Ishembekov** and **Makhabat Tazhibek Kyzy** five and six years imprisonment respectively, labeling their journalism investigating corruption as “calls for mass civil unrest.” Two other HRDs and journalists who had been on trial since January, **Akilek Kaparov** and **Ayke Beyshekeeva**, received three years’ probation on the same charges. Law enforcement officers also arrested and temporarily detained HRD and whistleblower **Zhoomart Karabaev**. He was targeted for systematically exposing how the National Academy of Sciences of Kyrgyzstan signed off on expert reviews which were pre-drafted by the State Committee for National Security, which became the primary basis for sentencing state critics. In May, Zhoomart Karabaev provided witness testimony on behalf of writer Olzhobai Shakir regarding the evidentiary support presented by state authorities. He has also spoken out on social media about these practices, calling for an end to the unjust persecution of state critics.

In **Ukraine**, **Yevhenii Shulhat** reported threats he received in April after he alerted the authorities to his anti-corruption investigation involving a high-ranking official from the Department of Cyber Security of the Security Service of Ukraine. On the same day he made an information request about the official, the Prosecutor General’s Office announced that it had opened an investigation into him, citing Articles 364 and 171 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine. Prior to the investigation, the HRD recorded an attempt to conscript him into the military as a retaliation for his human rights work.

In **Azerbaijan**, human rights journalists from **Abzas media** were detained as a result of their investigation of high-profile corruption cases in Nagorno-Karabakh, with their pre-trial detention extended multiple times. Azerbaijani authorities also **arrested Anar Mammadli** for allegedly smuggling money into the country. The HRD is the chairperson of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre (EMDS), an organization that has been conducting independent election monitoring in Azerbaijan since 2001. He has faced systemic persecution for his work, including detention.

PERSECUTION OF LGBTIQ+ DEFENDERS

In **Kazakhstan**, LGBTIQ+ defenders demonstrated great courage, solidarity, and strength in fighting off the introduction of an anti-LGBTIQ+ propaganda law in the country. Engaging in collective resistance through social media campaigns, public hearings and parliamentary debates, groups united to publicly oppose the introduction of the Russia-inspired legislation.

Nevertheless, HRDs and organisations supporting LGBTIQ+ communities continued to be violently targeted. On 9 October, representatives of the “Kazakhstan Parents Union”

[attacked an event in Almaty](#), organised by leading Kazakhstani feminist and LGBTQI+ initiative, "[Feminita](#)". Although representatives of Feminita reported the attack to the police, no investigation was opened, nor action taken.

In **Belarus**, authorities orchestrated an attack against the LGBTQI+ community, targeting HRDs and community leaders. At least 30 LGBTQI+ persons were arrested, including a number of HRDs. According to a monitoring report of local human rights organisation TG House, in September and October, Belarusian law enforcement authorities targeted at least eight LGBTQI+ defenders with raids, questioning, physical and psychological violence, various forms of degrading treatment, and arrests for their human rights work.

In **Serbia**, in January, an unidentified masked man pounded the front window of the Belgrade Pride Info Centre until it smashed. According to Civil Rights Defenders, which supports the Centre, this was the 19th attack on it since the centre opened in 2017, with none of the perpetrators brought to justice.

Although the Belgrade Pride march was mostly peaceful, after it concluded a young LGBTQI+ rights defender was attacked by a group of young men, who hit him from behind with a blunt object. The HRD reported that even though the attack happened in front of the police, they did not intervene and he had to admit himself to hospital. He was hospitalised for two days due to a concussion and a head injury. Although the attackers were identified and questioned a month later, the charges were immediately dropped due to "lack of evidence".

ILL-TREATMENT OF HRDS IN DETENTION

HRDs who are detained and sentenced to prison for their human rights work face additional pressure in state custody. In **Russia**, the authorities of the Vladimir Region Maximum Security Prison (Vladimirskiy Central Prison) in Vladimir Region, Russia, placed [Bakhrom Khamroev](#) in a punishment cell for five days after reports surfaced that the prison authorities had subjected the HRD to physical violence. Bakhrom Khamroev is serving a 14-year prison sentence on account of his work in defence of migrants' rights. In January, he was subjected to both verbal and physical abuse, including severe beatings, by prison guards targeting his legs, back, kidneys and head, which caused him to lose consciousness. Following this incident, the prison authorities also denied him access to his lawyer.

Isolation is frequently used to punish HRDs in detention. This has even been confirmed by Russia's own courts; in April the Rostov Regional Court found that prominent Crimean Tatar HRD and coordinator of "Crimean Solidarity", [Server Mustafayev](#), had been subjected to forced isolation while in pre-trial detention after the authorities imposed limitations on his communications with the outside world and failed to uphold his rights as a detainee. Notwithstanding this decision, Mustafayev continued to be subjected to "strict detention conditions" in Penal Colony #1 in Tambov.

Ukrainian HRD and civic journalist [Iryna Danylovych](#), who was forcibly disappeared in [Russian-occupied Crimea](#) in 2022, continued to be [denied medical care](#) in Penal Colony #7 in Zelenokumsk, Stavropol Region of Russia. In December, the European Parliament voted on an urgent resolution urging her immediate release on medical grounds.

In [Uzbekistan](#), the authorities continued to subject [Dauletmurat Tajimuratov](#) to ill-treatment. The defender reported that the prison guards from the Penal Colony #11 beat him due to a disagreement regarding a parcel he received from his mother. He also reported receiving threats from the Head of the Penal Colony #11, who claimed that when the HRD is transferred to a different penitentiary facility, the authorities will fabricate a case against him for “violating the incarceration regime” in order to send him back to a high-security prison. Additionally, prison authorities refused to transmit his letters, or share with him mail he had received.

In a pre-trial detention centre in [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Zhoomart Karabaev](#) received death threats from centre officials, who also claimed that he was suicidal, a move interpreted by the HRD as providing an explanation should he die in detention. Meanwhile, WHRD [Makhabat Tazhybek Kyzy](#) was subjected to physical violence by a law enforcement officer from the State Penitentiary Service as retaliation for her official complaint about psychological violence inflicted by another prison staff member, which she submitted in March. The WHRD also reported to her lawyer that the prison psychologist had further questioned her about her human rights work.

SYSTEMIC USE OF SECURITY LAWS AGAINST HRDS

Human rights organisations have also been targeted and labeled to prevent them from conducting human rights work. In [Russia](#), the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation designated the informal human rights association [Aborigen-Forum](#), an indigenous people’s rights group, as an “extremist” organization. This designation places anyone associated with Aborigen-Forum at high risk of administrative and criminal prosecution, including punishments of up to 10 years in prison and heavy fines. Charges can be brought for participating in any activities organized by the association, reposting their content on social media, donating while in Russia, or mentioning the organization without labeling it as “extremist.” In November, the Russian authorities included HRD [Sergey Davidis](#) in the state-wide list of “terrorists and extremists,” seemingly as a result of a criminal case initiated against the defender. Sergey Davidis reported he was not notified of any criminal persecution against him and it is unclear what gave rise to this persecution.

HRDs were also targeted for being outspoken on social media. The Leninsky District Court in Yekaterinburg placed a defender in pre-trial detention, and accused him of “repeated demonstration of extremist symbols” in relation to his use of links to Facebook posts about human rights violations on his Telegram channel. In 2022, the Russian Federation listed Meta, including Facebook and Instagram, as extremist organizations.

RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION

GEORGIA: FOREIGN LAWS AND CHILLING EFFECT ON HRDS

On 28 May, the Parliament of **Georgia** [passed](#) the 'Transparency of Foreign Influence' Law. The law was introduced in April after the Parliament had shelved an earlier version due to protests and international criticism of its [repressive nature](#). The legislation requires all non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and media outlets that receive more than 20% of their funding from foreign sources to register as organizations "pursuing the interest of a foreign power." This fundamentally contradicts the spirit of Article 13 of the UN Declaration on Human rights Defenders which states, "Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to solicit, receive and utilize resources for the express purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms through peaceful means."

In the weeks before the Law was passed, HRDs faced an alarming surge in smear campaigns and intimidation amid the mass protests in Tbilisi in response to the text's re-introduction to Parliament in April.¹¹ The debate on the legislation was accompanied by almost daily mass [protests](#) in front of the Parliament Building in Tbilisi. Concurrently, the offices of many prominent human rights organisations were vandalised with posters and graffiti. The posters all followed a similar style: they had photographs of the organisations' leadership, the name of the HRD(s), and offensive comments about them "selling out" and being "traitors." Other posters and graffiti were not personalised yet employed similar defamatory messaging. Moreover, more than 100 Georgian HRDs and CSOs were targeted in a well-organised campaign of intimidation which used phone calls and messaging platforms. HRDs received calls from phone numbers which falsely appeared as registered in foreign countries and when they answered, they were warned to stop protesting against the Law. Many reported that the attackers also subjected their relatives, spouses, and children to similar intimidation.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the government of **Republika Srpska** withdrew its foreign agent draft law, which was adopted by the Parliament in September 2023. The draft law had aimed to create a registry system which would require non-profit organisations who receive international funding to register as "foreign agents." President Dodik reintroduced the law in early 2025 despite the objections and concerns of human rights defenders and civil society organisations.

In November, Serbian Progressive Party members brought a similar draft foreign agent law to the parliament in **Serbia**. According to the draft bill, non-profit organisations and associations which receive the majority of their funding from foreign institutions, states, international organisations or states will be defined as foreign agents.

11. The law defines civil society and media outlets as "organizations pursuing the interests of a foreign power" solely for receiving funding from abroad.



In Georgia, the offices of many prominent human rights organisations were vandalised with posters and graffiti.

© Private

In July, **France** enacted a law on foreign interference. Among the measures introduced is the creation of a registry to identify the activities of persons acting on behalf of a “foreign sponsor” to influence public decision, similar to USA’s Foreign Agents Registration Act. The law also allows the government to use algorithmic technology to detect “suspicious” connections which may reveal foreign interference. Although already in use, this measure had only been deployed to detect terrorist threats. The freezing of assets, which had also been only limited to those engaged in acts or threats of terrorism, was extended to foreign interference in the new law. This vaguely worded law risks impacting on human rights organisations and defenders by labelling them as foreign agents, discouraging engagement with international partnerships and hidden their ability to work on issues like migration or police violence.

In September, the Chamber of Deputies in **Italy** passed Security bill no 1236, which awaited Senate approval by year-end. If adopted, the Bill risks significantly limiting the rights to freedom of expression and assembly. It introduces new offences, heavier sentences for unauthorised demonstrations or damage to property or infrastructure, and allows security agents to commit certain crimes for the sake of national security. The bill appears designed to target demonstrations and acts of non-violent civil disobedience, increasing

penalties for damage to property. If an act disrupts public work or infrastructure, it would be considered as aggravating circumstance. Blocking roads would become a criminal offence, and if done as part of a group of people, the punishment would increase to up to two years in prison. National and international human rights groups have produced in-depth analysis on the dangers that the Bill would pose to democratic society. Furthermore, several international rights watchdogs, including ODIHR, CoE Commissioner for Human Rights Commissioner and a group of UN Special Rapporteurs, communicated their concerns with the Italian authorities.

The government of **Türkiye** submitted a draft bill to the Parliament in May which includes amendments to the “Crimes Against the State Secrets and Espionage” Section of the Turkish Penal Code. Article 16 of the draft bill proposed an additional crime of “foreign influence,” which states that anyone who acts against the security and the internal and external political interests of the State, in pursuit of the strategic interests or under the instructions of a foreign state or organisation shall be sentenced to imprisonment between three to seven years. The offences included “conducting and researching about Turkish citizens or institutions, organisations or foreigners residing in Türkiye.” Following strong criticism from civil society and the main opposition party, arguing that this law would allow the government to prosecute and silence critical voices, journalists and human rights defenders, the bill was withdrawn, only to be reintroduced to the Parliament in November. The new draft omitted the first paragraph of the article which specified “anyone who conducts or researches about Turkish citizens or institutions, organizations or foreigners residing in Türkiye.” The article was withdrawn once again due to strong opposition at the parliamentary session. The AKP government plans to reintroduce the bill in 2025.

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

RELEASE OF HRDS OLEG ORLOV AND ALSU KURMASHEVA

In August, prominent Russian HRD and council member of the Human Rights Center “Memorial” (HRC “Memorial”) **Oleg Orlov** and WHRD and journalist **Alsu Kurmasheva** were released in a prisoner exchange with **Germany, Norway, Poland, Slovenia** and **the USA**. Oleg Orlov had been sentenced to two and a half years in prison for alleged repeated “public actions aimed at discrediting the use of **Russian Federation** armed forces to protect the interests of the Russian Federation”. During his time in detention he was subjected to ill-treatment. Alsu Kurmasheva had been convicted under Articles 207.3 and 330.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation for allegedly disseminating “fake information” concerning the activities of the Russian military in Ukraine and for failing to register as a foreign agent, and had been sentenced to six and a half years in prison.



Russian HRD Oleg Orlov speaks at a press conference in Berlin on 7 August 2024 after his release as part of a prisoner exchange.

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ITALIAN COURT DROPPED CHARGES AGAINST MIGRANTS' RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE "IUVENTA" CASE

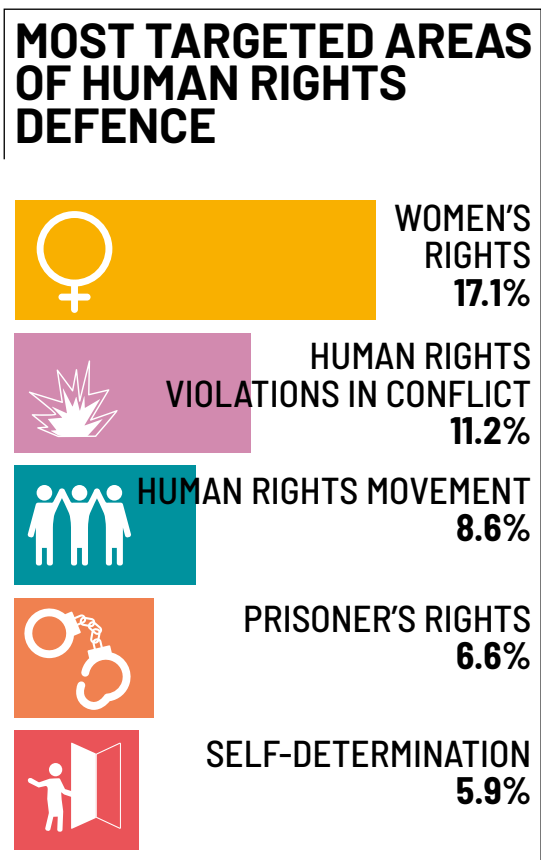
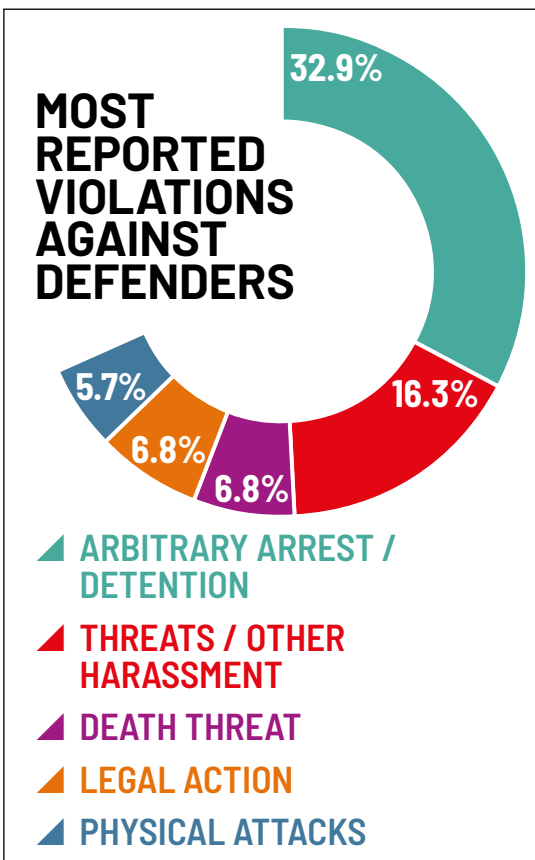
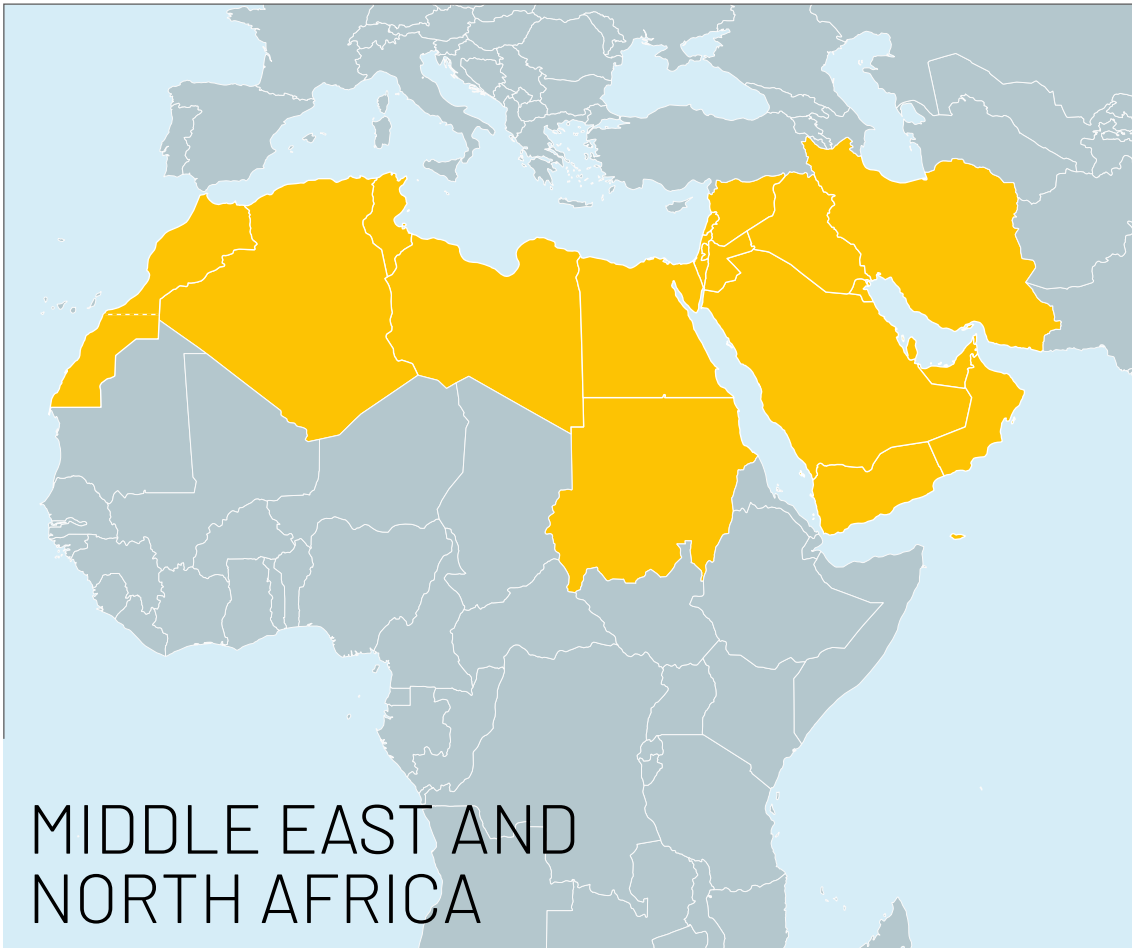
On 19 April, an Italian court in Trapani dismissed the charges of "aiding and abetting illegal immigration to **Italy**" in the Iuventa case and acquitted twenty-one individuals, including HRDs along with three organisations, including **Jugend Rettet**, Save the Children, and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). The decision came after seven years of legal harassment following the seizure of the Iuventa search and rescue ship. Iuventa is a collective of crew members of the Iuventa ship, operating search and rescue (SAR) missions in the Mediterranean Sea, and the volunteers assisting them. Iuventa has saved over 14,000 lives in the Mediterranean until it was seized by the Italian police on 2 August 2017. On 28 February, during the final phase of the preliminary hearings, in his closing arguments, the prosecutor asked for the termination of the proceedings, citing a lack of evidence of wrongdoing and existing doubts about the credibility of the witnesses. The decision to bring a case against the Iuventa crew despite such weak evidence highlights the hostility of the environment in which defenders of migrants' rights work in Italy.

ALL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ACQUITTED IN MIGRATION MONITORING ASSOCIATION (GÖÇİZDER) CASE

In **Türkiye**, members and associates of the Migration Monitoring Association (GÖÇİZDER) were acquitted of the charges of "membership to a terrorist organisation." The charges were based on the organisation's human rights work with internally displaced people in Türkiye. The 22 people, of which at least eighteen are human rights defenders were arrested in June 2022 following raids to their homes and the organisation's office. Seven months later, four human rights defenders were released at the first hearing and the remaining were released in January 2023. The charges were dropped due to the lack of clear and convincing evidence proving that the defendants committed the alleged crimes. The decision was final as the prosecutor did not appeal the court's decision. Despite these acquittals, the Ministry of Treasury and Finance and the Ministry of Interior ordered the assets of GÖÇİZDER and its four former members to be frozen on the basis that they were "affiliated with the PKK/KCK terrorist organisation." Neither the ministries nor the Ankara 4th Heavy Criminal Court which approved the decision provided any reasoning for this decision. Furthermore, on 25 December, Bakırköy 15th Civil Court of First Instance ruled to dissolve GÖÇİZDER.

MALICIOUS DEFAMATION CHARGES AGAINST WHRD HAJRIJA ČOBO DISMISSED

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, [Hajrija Čobo](#), a woman environmental rights defender from Kakanj, was the subject of a SLAPP filed by the British mining company Adriatic Metals BH d.o.o. Čobo is a representative of NGG Park prirode Trstionica i Boriva, an informal grassroots group of local activists who campaign to protect their forests and rivers which are their main source of drinking water. The company [accused](#) the WHRD of spreading false information in the media and through her social media network, and demanded compensation for the alleged damage to the company's reputation. In April, the mining company submitted a letter to the Kakanj Municipal Court, stating that it would be willing to withdraw the lawsuit. [Hajrija Čobo](#) rejected the withdrawal, arguing that the plaintiff should waive its claim and a judgement should be made, and that her legal expenses should be fully compensated. In June, the Court dismissed the defamation charges without waiting for the preliminary hearing to take place.



Source: Front Line Defenders (2024)

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

In a region beset by armed conflict and autocratic, or increasingly autocratic, rulers, the challenges faced by HRDs in the Middle East and North Africa in 2024 were enormous, yet their work has perhaps never been so important. The crucial work done by defenders ranged from documenting human rights violations in conflicts, to providing humanitarian support, to fighting for the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ persons. While this work was rarely acknowledged, defenders continued to help secure and realise the human rights of their communities.

HRDS IN CONTEXT OF CONFLICT

As the conflict which broke out in **Sudan** in April 2023 escalated, defenders in the country were the targets of numerous human rights violations. The extension of the war from Khartoum to other states increased the risks for HRDs of extra-judicial killings, arbitrary detentions, kidnappings, enforced disappearances and accusations of spying. Gezira state continued to experience chaotic conditions as the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) stormed several villages in the eastern localities. States of emergency were imposed in the provinces of Blue Nile, East Darfur, Gezira, Gedaref, Kassala, Khartoum, Kordofan, Red Sea, River Nile, Sennar and West Darfur, which restricted HRDs from doing their work in places where it was most needed.

Defenders working on good governance initiatives and peacebuilding were singled out. In May, **Neda Hasim Eltayeb** was re-detained by Military Intelligence in Gedaref while on her way home, having just been released by security forces after 24 hours. Neda is a member of the Coalition of Women in Political Parties and Civil Society (Mansam) and involved in several civil society groups and initiatives, including Women Against Injustice and the Sudanese Women Group for Peace Building.

The previous month, the public prosecutor in Al Nohud locality, West Kordofan issued arrest warrants against 48 members of Taqaddum, a civil society coalition which has been involved in peace negotiations in Sudan since October 2023.

Many HRDs living in Khartoum, Gezira, Senna, North Kordofan and Darfur also faced reprisals, and WHRDs faced particular risks in an environment characterised by rampant sexual violence. A psychologist and a woman human rights defender who was volunteering in a hospital to assist survivors of sexual violence was threatened with execution when she refused to hand over data on the women she was treating. In another case, a WHRD and journalist who was covering instances of sexual violence in northern Darfur was abducted by the RSF, and she herself was then subjected to both physical and sexual violence. Shortly after her release, the house in which she was living was bombed in an indiscriminate attack, resulting in the death of her father.

In September, a WHRD working with youth groups and displaced women, and delivering humanitarian aid to displaced families was threatened by RSF soldiers who raided her family house in Al-Fashir, north of Darfur.

In addition to the targeted attacks because of their work, and the untargeted attacks linked to the general violence of war, HRDs also lived with scarcity of food, water, power and internet access. Famine, flooding and mass displacement exacerbated the situation.

Defenders who documented human rights violations also faced reprisals from both warring parties, including harassment, intimidation and arbitrary detention. In one case a HRD who had been collecting information on violations in northern Darfur on a daily basis was arrested by a militia linked to the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). He was detained for two weeks before being released and ordered to leave the area. He relocated to an area which is controlled by the RSF only to receive a series of threats accusing him of sending information to the SAF. Like scores of human rights defenders in Sudan, he was forced to leave the country for his own safety.

Many human rights organisations were attacked and their computers and other digital devices stolen, resulting in their work being exposed to information leaks and targeting by intelligence and security agents.

Internet services were frequently disrupted, with a nearly month-long blackout across the entire country occurring in February after the RSF took over the data centres of internet service providers in Khartoum. In addition to the devastating impact that internet cuts have on the delivery of humanitarian support, they also enabled the spread of rumours, misinformation and disinformation.

By October, the conflict had newly **displaced** nearly 6 million people within Sudan and driven over 1.4 million people into five neighbouring countries. HRDs in the country

continued to demonstrate resilience and determination to champion human rights despite the dangerous conditions in which they worked and lived and a worsening humanitarian crisis. They staffed emergency rooms, provided humanitarian support, were often first responders to the wounded, and documented human rights violations. Human rights lawyers provided emergency legal services while WHRDs did extraordinary work in supporting survivors of sexual violence and rape.

Atrocities perpetrated against Palestinians in **Gaza** by Israel intensified to a scale which the UN Special Committee to investigate Israeli Practices found was “consistent with the characteristics of genocide.” In July, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that Israel’s occupation of the Gaza strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is unlawful, along with the associated settlement regime, annexation and use of natural resources. Despite these pronouncements on the international stage, the relentless and largely indiscriminate bombardment of Palestinians in Gaza persisted throughout the year.

In this context, HRDs were exposed to psychological, physical and digital violations of their rights, yet many have expressed their determination to remain in Gaza to continue to serve their communities. In many cases, where it was possible, they arranged for their children and other family members to travel to Egypt, while they stayed behind to document violations, assist with the medical response or help with the effort of feeding a population being intentionally starved.

Numerous Palestinian HRDs were killed, injured, detained or forcibly disappeared by the Israeli army during the year in both targeted and untargeted attacks. Those in detention were frequently subjected to torture, and had their mobile phones and other electronic devices with which they worked confiscated. Defenders also faced significant communication-related challenges as telecommunication infrastructure was damaged in the military onslaught. Defenders who documented the impact of the war in traditional media and on social media were particularly at risk, and the number of defenders, including journalists, who were killed or injured raises serious questions about whether such attacks constitute official Israeli government policy in order to “silence critical reporting and obstruct documentation of possible international crimes.”

In February, two WHRDs, lawyers and members of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), **Dana Yaghi** and **Nour Abu Nour**, were killed in Israeli airstrikes, along with their entire families. Thirty-seven members of Dana’s extended family were killed. Dana Yaghi worked with the Women’s Rights Unit in PCHR, and Nour Abu Nour documented human rights violations against women and children for the organisation.

Healthcare workers on the front lines of the emergency health response continued to be targeted in what the UN Human Rights Office found to be a “pattern of deadly attacks on and near hospitals.” **Dr. Adnan Al Bursh**, an orthopaedic surgeon working at Al Awda Hospital in northern Gaza, was one of a number of medical personnel and doctors



Palestinian HRD and director of Gaza's Kamal Adwan Hospital, Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya is seen approaching Israeli tanks before his arbitrary arrest.

© Muhannad Al-Muqayyed

detained by the IDF when the hospital was raided in December 2023. In April, it was reported that he had died in detention, after having been reportedly tortured in prison. A colleague of his, **Dr Saeed Joda**, who was the last remaining orthopaedic specialist in Gaza, was shot dead by an Israeli drone in December as he traveled between hospitals. **Mohammed Abu Salmiya**, the director of Gaza's al-Shifa Hospital, was abducted by Israeli forces on 23 November 2023 from his workplace, tortured and held for almost eight months without any charges. He was released from prison on 1 July. In November, medical doctors **Hussam Abu Safiya**, director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, and **Nihad Ghunaim** were injured after an Israeli attack on Kamal Adwan hospital. These are a small number of cases that Front Line Defenders is aware of where medical practitioners have been detained or killed, seemingly in retaliation for their work.

Palestinian journalists and defenders documenting the conflict in real time reported systemic censorship on Facebook, Instagram and X. Content and accounts supportive of Palestine were deleted while extensive "shadow banning" also took place.

While international focus remained largely on the carnage in the Gaza Strip, the situation for HRDs in the **West Bank** further deteriorated. In September, American-Turkish WHRD and member of the International Solidarity Movement, **Aysenur Ezgi Eygi**, was **shot dead** by the IDF as she observed a demonstration by Palestinians in the Occupied West Bank village of Beita. Recipient of the 2021 Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk Award **Sami Huraini** and his family were targeted and subjected to physical violence by settlers on a near weekly basis. Sami Huraini continued to document violations on Instagram and has reported being subjected to multiples instances of arbitrary detention by the Israeli military.

Administrative detention continued to be abused as an intimidation and harassment tactic.¹² This was exemplified by the case of **Bassem Tamimi**, an HRD and a leader of the Nabi Saleh Popular Struggle Committee in Ramallah, a non-violent group protesting Israel's ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territory through weekly peaceful demonstrations. On 25 April, just three days before the expiration of the initial 6-month administrative detention order, another 6-month administrative detention order was issued against the defender, extending his detention until 27 October. The initial order, issued by the Israeli military commander of the West Bank on 6 November 2023, was given without any charge or trial. He was finally released in June last year.

Lawyer and WHRD **Diala Ayesh** was arbitrarily detained for almost a year under administrative detention, without being informed of any charges or any opportunity to present a defence, as no trial took place. Prior to her arrest, Diala Ayesh had been monitoring the situation of prison conditions for Palestinians in Israeli jails. She was

12. Administrative detention is a system that allows the Israeli military to detain Palestinian civilians for six months with no charges, and this detention can be renewed every six months indefinitely.

arrested by Israeli military forces while passing through the “Container” checkpoint, an Israeli military checkpoint that separates the southern parts of the West Bank from the rest of the provinces. According to her lawyers at Addameer Prisoners Support and Human Rights Association (‘Addameer’), Diala Ayesh was subjected to assault, threats, and insults by Israeli soldiers during her arrest. On her release in January 2025, she reported being subjected to abuse and humiliation during her time in detention.

Palestinian defenders in Israel and Israeli HRDs worked under immense pressure. **Ahmad Khalefa** was indicted on charges of “incitement to terror” and “identifying with a terrorist organization” as part of Israel’s ongoing crackdown on political dissent. Ahmad Khalefa is a Palestinian human rights attorney in Israel working across a span of critical human rights issues, such as the forced transfer of Bedouin communities in the Negev, infringements on freedom of speech in Israeli society, and the discriminatory use of administrative detention without trial against Palestinians. Following a speech at the UN Security Council in September in which she criticised the actions of the Israeli government, executive director of Israeli human rights organisation B’Tselem, Yuli Novak, was subjected to a barrage of threats, intimidation and smears. This included the call from a Likud Knesset member for her arrest and trial for aiding the enemy during wartime and a demand from the Deputy Speaker of the Knesset to the Ministry of the Interior to revoke her citizenship.

The human rights situation in **Lebanon** also deteriorated in 2024 with the intensification of hostilities between Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Hezbollah before a ceasefire was negotiated on 27 November. By that time, nearly 900,000 people had been internally displaced in Lebanon, according to the International Organisation for Migration. A further 425,000 – of whom around 70 percent are Syrian refugees and about 30 per cent Lebanese – are estimated to have crossed from Lebanon to **Syria**.

Lebanon had become a sort of hub for HRDs in the region who had fled to relative safety there in the face of multiple crises in surrounding countries in previous years. However, the high cost of living stemming from hyperinflation and the collapse of the banking sector in 2019 had made survival for HRDs there very challenging, even before the outbreak of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah. HRDs also reported having issues with the Lebanese security forces because of the lack of residence permits or the difficulty to renew expired residence permits.

Individuals and organisations promoting and defending the rights of migrants in Lebanon, particularly domestic workers, faced harassment, police interrogation and raids. A human rights organisation that was fighting the deportation of Syrian activists back to the Assad-regime was also threatened, with its staff receiving a number of summonses.

ANTI-DEATH PENALTY DEFENDERS IN IRAN

2024 saw an alarming number of executions take place in **Iran**, and in parallel, there were increased efforts by HRDs to signal their opposition to the death penalty. This started in the most unlikely of places, in Ghezelhesar prison, in January when a group of human rights defenders and other detained prisoners began a weekly protest against executions that were taking place in the jail. They chose to hold their protests on Tuesdays, the day when prisoners facing execution are generally transferred to solitary confinement, a day or two before they are hanged.

During the course of the year, the “No Death Penalty Tuesdays” campaign spread to at least 34 other prisons and to outside of prison walls as well. In November, the Iranian authorities moved against one of the HRDs involved in the campaign; the prison sentence of **Ahmadreza Haeri**, a founding member of this protest movement, was increased on charges of “gathering and collusion with the intention of acting against national security,” “propaganda against the state,” and “spreading disinformation.”

In a message smuggled out of Ghezelhesar Prison to mark the one-year anniversary of the campaign, Ahmadreza Haeri told the NGO Iran Human Rights: “when we started the ‘No Death Penalty Tuesdays’ campaign, in the back of my mind, I thought we must one day reach a free, democratic and developed Iran that recognises and respects the rights of all its citizens, regardless of their identity, language, religion or beliefs. I believe deeply that ‘No Death Penalty’ is a strategic campaign for both today and our future. If we all agree on just this one principle of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and make the right to life an unbreakable red line, we can hope for a brighter future and transitional justice. We can ensure that our tomorrow will not fall back into tyranny after today’s struggles.”

In July, the labour rights defender and anti-death penalty campaigner **Sharifeh Mohammadi** was herself sentenced to death on a charge of “membership in a group with the intention of overthrowing the state of the Islamic Republic of Iran.” The sentence came as a reprisal for her involvement in the labour rights movement and her support for the abolition of the death penalty. Although the decision was overturned in October, it was re-issued in February 2025.



Far left: Iranian labour rights defender and anti-death penalty campaigner Sharifeh Mohammadi.

© Sharifeh Mohammadi

Left: Ahmadreza Haeri, a founding member of the “No Death Penalty Tuesdays” campaign in Iran.

© Ahmadreza Haeri

HARASSMENT AND CRIMINALISATION

Elsewhere in the region, harassment and criminalisation of defenders were commonly used by State authorities to restrict and limit HRDs from doing their human rights work.

In **Iran**, authorities detained HRDs under restrictive and repressive laws, and often sentenced them to prison or in at least one case, to capital punishment. In July, WHRD and workers' rights activist **Sharifeh Mohammadi** was sentenced to death for "membership in a group with the intention of overthrowing the state of the Islamic Republic of Iran."¹³ In August, **Esmail Gerami** was charged with "propaganda against the state" and sentenced to one year in prison in connection with a protest about pensions and against the death sentence in Sharifeh Mohammadi's case across different cities in Iran. Esmail Gerami is a retired worker from the Iran Cardboard Company, who has been advocating for the rights of retired people through organising assemblies and associations since 2017. In 2020, he started a Telegram channel called "Independent Association of Social Security Workers," where he posts news on the peaceful assemblies of retired people and raises awareness about their rights.

In July, **Mohammad Habibi** was sentenced to six months and one day in prison on the charge of "gathering and colluding against national and external security" by Branch 2 of the Shahryar Revolutionary Court. The evidence presented for this charge consisted of the HRD's social media posts, which he published in protest against the poisoning of school girls within the context of the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protest. Mohammad Habibi has been an outspoken campaigner for teachers' rights, children rights and is the spokesperson of the Coordinating Council of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations (CCITTA) in Tehran.

In November, student rights defender **Leila Hossein Zadeh** was convicted of appearing in public without the hijab and anti-State propaganda, and sentenced to one year in prison on the charge of "propaganda activities against state" and 33 million IRR for not wearing a hijab in public. However, the details of the sentence were not communicated to the WHRD, nor was she given a court hearing, nor an opportunity to provide her final defence regarding these two charges, as required under the Code of Criminal Procedures of Iran.

Moroccan authorities maintained their pressure on peaceful Sahrawi HRDs, deploying a variety of means to interfere with their personal and professional lives. On 9 October, authorities expelled **Ahmed Ettanji** and **Mohamed Mayara** from the town of Cape Bojador in occupied Western Sahara after threatening to arrest them while the two were in the town for a family visit. Both defenders are journalists who document violations in the territory. In June, the Moroccan Court of Cassation upheld a judgment preventing human rights lawyer Mhamed Hali to join the Bar Association. This decision against him came after the Agadir Bar Association rejected his application on the grounds that "he is not a

13. In February 2025, Branch 2 of Rasht Revolutionary court re-sentenced her to death on the charge of "Baghi", or "the rebelling against the just Islamic ruler(s)" under the Islamic Penal Code, after the sentence had been overturned by Branch 39 of the Supreme Court of Iran in October 2024.

person fit to practice because he is a member of an organization (Sahrawi Association of Victims of Grave Human Rights Violations committed by the Moroccan State (ASVDH) that denies Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara” and that “the concerned candidate is well known for his separatist and anti-territorial integrity attitudes.” Furthermore, Sahrawi defenders who underwent periods of detention reported physical abuse and ill-treatment while imprisoned.

Defenders protesting the Israeli bombardment of Gaza were also criminalised. **Ismail Lghazaoui**, a Moroccan agricultural engineer who peacefully advocates for Palestinian people’s rights was sentenced to one year in prison and a fine of 5,000 Moroccan Dirhams (equivalent to 478 euros) for “inciting to commit felonies and misdemeanors by electronic means.” Neither the Court nor the prosecution provided any information regarding the specific misdemeanour or felony the defender was accused of inciting. His sentence was **reduced** to four months on appeal, two of which were suspended.

The environment for HRDs in **Tunisia** working with migrants remained hostile, in line with the tone set by President Kais Saied in a 2023 speech in which he stated that “the undeclared goal of the successive waves of illegal immigration is to consider Tunisia a purely African country that has no affiliation to the Arab and Islamic nations.” Black Tunisians, Sub-Saharan Africans and HRDs assisting them bore the brunt of a xenophobic backlash. In May, during a meeting of the National Security Council, President Saied doubled down on his comments, accusing NGOs that assist migrants of “receiving enormous funds from abroad” and of being “traitors and foreign agents.” Organisations were subjected to office raids and staff were targeted with multiple smear campaigns and summoned for questioning by the police, while there were also numerous attempts to hack into their social media accounts and electronic devices. Sherifa Riahi, a paediatrician, former executive director of the NGO *Tunisie Terre d’Asile* and defender of the rights of migrants, was arrested in May on charges of “money-laundering.” Although the money-laundering charges were dropped, at the time of writing she remained in prison and away from her son and daughter, who was three months old at the time of her detention.

In **Egypt**, defenders continued to be criminalised in retaliation for their human rights work and this is exemplified by the prolonged detention of human rights defender **Alaa Abdelfattah**. Alaa



Egyptian writer, software developer and HRD Alaa Abdelfattah, who has been in prolonged detention.

© Alaa Abdelfattah

Abdelfattah is a writer and software developer who has been a key figure in the Egyptian revolutionary movement. He is known for his advocacy for free speech and social justice, and he gained prominence during the 2011 revolution. He was arrested in 2019 and charged with spreading false news and later sentenced for sharing a post about a prisoner's death under torture. Despite completing the five years in detention which he was originally sentenced to, authorities extended his sentence until 2027. This practice of 'rotation' whereby the same charges are brought repeatedly against HRDs was highlighted in January by the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders in the cases of **Hoda Abdel-Moneim** and **Moaaz Al-Sharqawy**.



Danish-Bahraini citizen and former Front Line Defenders Protection Coordinator Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja has been unjustly imprisoned since 2011.

© Front Line Defenders

Any kind of reporting which may reflect negatively on the Egyptian government remains risky. A defender who works as a freelance journalist had his home raided by the security services after he conducted interviews to mark the 13th anniversary of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Another defender and reporter who wrote a series of articles on human trafficking and undocumented migrants in Egypt was placed under surveillance, and his colleagues were questioned about whether he had any political affiliations.

In **Bahrain**, former Front Line Defenders Protection Coordinator **Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja** marked his 5,000th day of arbitrary detention in December, as he continues to serve a life-sentence handed down as a result of his peaceful human rights work. **Naji Fateel** was one of a very small number of HRDs freed during the year in a series of royal pardons which saw the release of nearly 3,500 prisoners. Notably, neither Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja nor **Abduljalil Al-Singace** were included in the pardons.

Another defender in the region who has spent over a decade in prison, **Mohamed al-Roken**, was sentenced to life imprisonment by a court in the **United Arab Emirates** in July. The human rights lawyer had completed a 10 year prison sentence in 2022, having originally been imprisoned after a grossly unfair trial on charges of plotting to overthrow the government. He was not released, however, and along with a number of other HRDs, was retried on similar national security charges last year. In 2023, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found his ongoing detention arbitrary.

PATTERNS OF TARGETING OF WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Despite working in a region where deeply patriarchal attitudes remain entrenched and the visible participation of women in public life is often met with online and offline threats, WHRDs persisted in their efforts to promote and protect human rights, and were frequently punished for it. As one WHRD in the region told Front Line Defenders, “women who raise their voices for change are not only silenced but also threatened with their lives and those of their families.” Another WHRD who works with displaced women referenced the opposition that many WHRDs face from within their families or support networks when she said: “my community does not see my work as legitimate women’s rights work, but I firmly believe that helping these women secure identification documents, jobs, and social integration is their fundamental right. Without these basic needs, they remain marginalized and excluded from society.”

The **Saudi** regime continued its recent trend of sentencing women’s rights activists to extremely long prison sentences for posts on social media. In January, **Manahel al-Otaibi** was **sentenced** by the non-jury Specialized Criminal Court in a secret trial to 11 years in prison for “having committed terrorist offences punishable under articles 43 and 44 of the Terrorist Crimes and Terrorism Financing Act.” The sentence was upheld on appeal in November. The charges against her appear to relate to online criticism of the male guardianship laws and her calls for the liberalisation of dress codes for women. She joins other **imprisoned WHRDs**, including **Fatima al-Shawarb** and **Norah al-Qahtani** who are serving 30 years and 45 years respectively because of their online activity promoting human rights.

In **Iran**, authorities intensified their discrimination and violent repression of women and girls through “morality” policing, surveillance, and legislative measures to further curtail women’s rights and freedoms during and after the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ protests. Police moved against prominent WHRDs in Gilan Province in an attempt to prevent the protests from re-igniting. In May, Branch 11 of the Rasht Revolutionary Court of appeals confirmed a verdict in the sentencing of ten WHRDs, without convening a session. **Zohreh Dadres**, **Forough Samienia**, **Sara Jahani**, **Matin Yazadani**, **Yasaman Hashdari**, **Shiva Shahsiah**, **Negin Rezaie**, **Azadeh Chavoshian**, **Zahra Dadres**, **Jelveh Javaheri** and **Houman Taheri** were sentenced altogether to over sixty years in prison due to their women’s rights work.

Following their arbitrary arrests, Tasnim, a State-run news agency closely associated with the intelligence services, published an article accusing the human rights defenders of planning to “*incite riots on the anniversary of the autumn 2022 riots*,” “*receiving funds under the cover of the financial support to vulnerable families of the victims*,” and “*having connections with hostile media outlets*.”

Another WHRD, **Atefeh Rangriz**, was sentenced to seven years in prison on charges of “forming a group with the intention of acting against national security” and “propaganda against the state” in November. She received an additional two years in prison based

on her social media posts and a Telegram group that she created where she published her translation of the work of the Argentinian feminist Verónica Gago into Farsi. Atefeh advocates for women, children and worker's rights in Iran through her translation of the work of international feminists and activists, research on the human rights situations in Iran, and social media activities.

In mid-December, the husband of WHRD Nasrin Sotoudeh, **Reza Khandan**, was arrested and taken into custody in Tehran. The following day, he was transferred to Evin Court and Evin Prison where he has been detained since. **Nasrin Sotoudeh** was barred from visiting him during this time because she was not wearing the compulsory hijab. Reza Khandan was informed that a prison sentence of three and a half years which had been handed down to him in 2019 but suspended since, had come into effect. He received this sentence for co-producing "I protest compulsory hijab" badges in 2019.

In **Iraq**, WHRDs were at the forefront of the movement to highlight the impact of climate change and resource scarcity. The rise of climate-induced displacement in the country has disproportionately affected rural areas, particularly the Al-Ahwar region, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in southern **Iraq**. As diminishing agricultural viability forces rural populations to migrate to urban centers, WHRDs working in these areas are confronted with the erosion of traditional livelihoods and community structures. In Al-Ahwar, WHRDs often focus on issues such as resource management, environmental justice and support for displaced families. However, their work is difficult because of limited mobility and access to resources due to the displacement of families, as the socio-economic strain heightens tensions in rural areas. According to one WHRD who is based in the region and works to protect the environment, she faces judicial harassment, threats and smears because of her efforts to protect the country's marshlands in the face of so-called development. The risks to environmental defenders in Al-Ahwar were highlighted by the abduction and torture of **Jassim Al-Asadi** in 2023.

WHRDs and feminist activists in **Algeria** continued to challenge societal violations impacting their human rights including campaigns against the Algerian Family Code. WHRDs have argued that these laws enable an environment conducive to violence against women which has seen a persistently high rate of femicide in the country. In retaliation for criticising the Algerian Family Code, WHRDs have become targets for hacking attacks and smear campaigns.

DEFENDING LGBTIQ+ RIGHTS

The MENA region remained one of the most difficult places for LGBTIQ+ defenders to work in, as they faced multiple levels of risk: from the State, from extremist groups, from online mobs, from their communities, from their employers and from their families.

An extreme Christian group in **Lebanon** issued threats against a defender working on access to services for LGBTIQ+ people, advocacy and legal aid, and an LGBTIQ+ organisation in the country was subjected to multiple hacking attacks during the course of the year.

In **Tunisia**, trans woman human rights defender **Mira Ben Salah** was targeted by smear campaigns on social media for her civic engagement and activism with the queer movement, amidst calls for her imprisonment. These attacks carried through to 2025 when pro-government social media pages published her personal contact information and home address as harassment was extended to her family. Another LGBTIQ+ defender in Tunisia with a public profile was questioned by police while neighbours reported an increase in strangers looking for information about their work.

LGBTIQ+ HRDs in **Syria** worked in a very hostile environment, where the criminalisation of homosexuality, severe social stigma and grave risks from extremist groups all contributed to the challenges faced. Many defenders carry out their work anonymously online but if outed, are often forced to flee abroad to continue their work. In one such case Front Line Defenders is aware of, an LGBTIQ+ defender was stopped as he left the country and had his phone inspected. When border guards discovered LGBTIQ+ content on it, they beat him and detained him for ten days before releasing him back into Syria.



Trans woman human rights defender Mira Ben Salah in Tunisia.

© Mira Ben Salah

RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION

As in other regions of the world, legislation restricting the ability of HRDs to work freely was introduced or passed. In **Iraq**, draft laws on Freedom of Expression and Peaceful Assembly and a Cybercrime draft law were re-introduced to Parliament. If passed, these laws would allow for the prosecution of individuals for violations of “public morals” or “public order” and would prohibit criticism of religious figures. Under the Cybercrime law, individuals could be sentenced to up to life in prison for posting information online that undermines Iraq’s “economic, political, military or security interests.”

WHRDs criticising proposed amendments to the Personal Status Law in Iraq, which undermines women’s rights, faced organised opposition and were considered threats to cultural and societal norms. One WHRD told Front Line Defenders: “As women advocating against the proposed amendments [to the law], we endure targeted defamation campaigns and social stigma, particularly on social media. Through Coalition ‘188,’ we have launched campaigns to combat these attacks, which frequently question our character

and morality, branding us as adversaries of cultural and religious norms in an attempt to undermine our credibility.”

Defenders of women’s and LGBTIQ+ rights were also impacted by a directive issued by the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission that banned the use of the word “gender” and prohibited activities or events related to the concept. WHRDs working on this issue were targeted by cyberattacks, including hacking and online harassment. The concept of gender has been portrayed as a moral threat to society and as a concept closely related to homosexuality, perversion and the destruction of society.

In April, amendments to the “Anti-Prostitution and Homosexuality Law” were passed which criminalise LGBTIQ+ people in Iraq. The amendments impose penalties for those engaging in same-sex relations and who undergo gender-affirming surgery, while organisations promoting “sexual deviancy” are liable to a sentence of at least seven years.

In **Egypt**, HRDs advocated for the recently proposed draft Criminal Procedure Code to be aligned with Egypt’s international human rights law obligations. The instrument which is being debated by the Egyptian Parliament, violates privacy rights as it “grants sweeping and abusive powers to law enforcement officials to surveil and intercept people’s communication and online activities.” There is real risk that HRDs will be targeted under the draft law and surveilled for their human rights work. HRDs urged the Egyptian Parliament to reject the proposed draft and develop a new Criminal Procedure Code that upholds the rights enshrined in the Egyptian Constitution and aligns with international human rights standards.

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

LENGTHY PRISON SENTENCES IN IRAN OVERTURNED

Three ten year sentences previously handed down to HRD members and directors of the Nozhin Socio-Cultural Association in **Iran** were overturned. In July, **Seivan Ebrahimi** was released from Sanandaj prison after being acquitted of the charge of “forming groups and association with the intention of disturbing the national security.” The ten year sentence issued against him in early December 2023 was overturned. In August, **Soma Pourmohammadi** was acquitted of the same charge by the Court of Appeal. Her ten-year sentence issued in mid-April was also overturned. In December, Branch 1 of the Sanandaj Revolutionary Court sentenced **Edris Menbari** to two years in prison on the charge of “forming groups and association with the intention of disturbing the national security,” which replaced a ten year sentence issued by the

same court in October 2023. The current sentence, which is based on his peaceful human rights activities promoting socio-cultural rights as a member of the Nozhin association, has suspended one year of this sentence for a period of three years, on condition that the defender halts his membership in Nozhin and refrains from any activities within Nozhin or any similar association for the duration.

Finally, in October 2024, The Kurdistan Court of Appeal reduced **Jina Modares Gorji's** prison sentence to two years and four months, down from 21 years. The sentence was reduced after the Court of Appeal acquitted her of "collaborating with hostile groups and states" and reduced her sentence to one year for "propaganda against the state" and 16 months for "forming an illegal group with the aim of overthrowing the state." This occurred after irregularities in due processes and fair trial were recognized by the Supreme Court.

RENEWAL OF THE INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONAL FACT-FINDING MISSION FOR THE SUDAN

In October, the United Nation Human Rights Council **renewed** the mandate of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan, despite opposition from a number of countries including China, Morocco, Qatar and the UAE. **The Mission** was established in response to widespread violations of human rights and related crimes that have been committed in **Sudan** since 15 April 2023. HRDs in the region have worked closely with the mission and **supported** its work.

In October, the Mission **noted** that both **Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)** and the RSF had engaged in a pattern of arbitrary detentions as well as torture and ill-treatment in areas under their control, **in acts** amounting to war crimes. It found that both **sides** have engaged in attacks against the media, journalists and HRDs, while lawyers, doctors, human rights defenders from the Masalit community were "systematically targeted" by the RSF. The Mission also documented a number of incidents of rape carried out by the RSF or their militias against WHRDs in Darfur

METHODOLOGY

FOR THE DOCUMENTATION OF KILLINGS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The HRD Memorial is a global initiative led by 13 national and international human rights organisations committed to improving data collection on HRDs who are killed for their human rights work. HRD Memorial partners gather this data annually and historic data on killings dating back to 1998, when the UN Declaration on human rights defenders was adopted.

The HRD Memorial brings partner-verified data together under the HRD Memorial umbrella and conducts additional open source research and case-specific verification. The listing of cases as “Anonymous” on pages 6-8 respond to security risks the community and family of the HRD faced at the time of publication of this report, and to the specific request to not publish the name of a minor HRD. All cases listed as “Anonymous” have been fully verified by HRD Memorial partners.

Partners in the HRD Memorial include:

ACI-Participa (Honduras); Amnesty International; Comitê Brasileiro de Defensoras e Defensores de Direitos Humanos (Brazil); Comité Cerezo (Mexico); FIDH; Front Line Defenders; Global Witness; Human Rights Defenders’ Alert – India; Karapatan (the Philippines); OMCT; El Programa Somos Defensores (Colombia); Red TDT (Mexico); and UDEFEGUA (Guatemala).

The HRD Memorial presents a unique, verified dataset that highlights the scale of the killings of defenders worldwide, keeps their memory alive, celebrates their courage and achievements, and offers solidarity to their families, friends and colleagues.

For 2024, the HRD Memorial has counted on the invaluable support of the following organisations and individuals to verify and complete its dataset:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ▶ Abduweli Ayup | ▶ Angelique Decampe |
| ▶ Alianza por los Derechos Humanos de Ecuador | ▶ Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) |
| ▶ Amaru Ruiz, Fundación del Río (Nicaragua) | ▶ Auriga Nusantara (Indonesia) |

- ▶ Centro de Asistencia Legal a Pueblos Indígenas (CALPI)(Nicaragua)
- ▶ Civil Rights Defenders (Sweden)
- ▶ COFAVIC (Venezuela)
- ▶ Comissão Pastoral da Terra (Brazil)
- ▶ Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDDHH)(Peru)
- ▶ Defence of Human Rights (Pakistan)
- ▶ Hiba Ezzideen
- ▶ Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, HRCP (Pakistan)
- ▶ Iniciativa Mesoamericana de Mujeres Defensoras (IM-Defensoras)
- ▶ Iniciativa para la Investigación y la Incidencia A.C. (Mexico)
- ▶ Peace Brigades International – Honduras Project
- ▶ The Coalition of Somalia Human Rights Defenders (CSHRD)(Somalia)
- ▶ Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD)
- ▶ Wayamoutheri (Venezuela)
- ▶ ZMINA Human Rights Centre (Ukraine)

The HRD Memorial is committed to continuing to develop and refine its methodology and verification processes to ensure that these processes continue to be robust and up-to-date.

FOR STATISTICS RELATING TO THREATS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Each year, Front Line Defenders records hundreds of violations against human rights defenders through its public and private casework and its grants programme. The statistics presented on pages to are derived from 2068 violations reported to Front Line Defenders, between 1 January and 31 December 2024.

Front Line Defenders often document multiple threats and violations per case or grant, as this is the reality of the situation for HRDs, who very often face multiple types of threats and attacks at once.

It is important to note some caveats with the data presented:

The statistics are drawn from 2068 recorded violations, which combine information from Front Line Defenders protection work via grants and public and private casework.

For the purpose of calculating the most reported violations against HRDs, the category “threats/other harassment” was considered only when recorded as a stand alone violation. Given that threats are such a common violation, they tend to be inconsistently reported by HRDs particularly when accompanied by other types of violations, or only reported when they reach a relatively high threshold of severity.

Incidents of killings have been removed from this dataset. The data on killings are reported separately in the HRD Memorial dataset.

The groups of HRDs presented under “Areas of human rights defence” are listed in Front Line Defenders’ internal Terminology Guidelines, in which “Issues working on” includes the following:

Abuse of Power / Anti-Corruption; Abolition of Death Penalty; Access to Healthcare; Afro-Descendants Rights; Anti-Racism; Anti-Slavery / Anti-Trafficking; Children’s / Youth Rights; Citizens’ Rights / Participation; Climate Justice; Digital Rights; Disability Rights; Disappearances / Enforced Disappearances; Environmental Rights; Extractive Industries / Megaprojects; Freedom of Assembly; Freedom of Religion or Belief; Food Sovereignty; Housing Rights / Forced Evictions; Human Rights Documentation; Human Rights Movements; Impunity / Justice; Indigenous Peoples’ Rights; Labour / Trade Union / Workers Association; Land Rights; LGBTIQ+ Rights; Minority Rights; Peacebuilding; Peasant / Campesino Communities; Poverty / Economic Insecurity; Prisoner’s Rights while in prison; Refugees / IDPs / Migrants; Right to Education / Student Rights; Self-Determination; Sexual & Reproductive Health and Rights; Sex Worker Rights; Torture / Police Brutality; Women’s Rights / Feminism.

For the purpose of reflecting the most targeted “Areas of human rights defence,” the categories of environmental rights defenders, land rights defenders and indigenous rights defenders have been disaggregated. By disaggregating this data, Front Line Defenders seeks to analyse particular trends within each of those targeted groups across different countries.

Front Line Defenders recognises that human rights movements often take varying forms in the different regions and for the purpose of reflecting on their work, human rights movements refers to collective efforts or organisations targeted for promoting, protecting, and advocating for human rights as recognised under international legal frameworks.¹⁴

“Freedom of Expression” and “Freedom of Assembly” were removed from “Areas of human rights defence”, as in the majority of cases FLD documented, these rights are enabling others, rather than solely the focus of the HRDs’ work. Therefore including them in the overall numbers would misrepresent different groups of defenders.

The information Front Line Defenders receives is dependent on HRDs being aware of the organisation; as such, this data cannot be seen as wholly representative for all HRDs in all countries. Therefore, this data should serve as an indicator – but not a comprehensive report – of the scope of the violations, threats and risks that HRDs face on a daily basis.

14. These movements operate based on principles enshrined in key treaties, declarations and customary international law including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (1998).

Front Line Defenders recognises that there are myriad threats and violations that HRDs may experience, but which go unreported. This may be because they do not believe that the violation they are experiencing is serious enough to seek assistance or are not in a comfortable position to discuss and report it. There is also the possibility that they do not have access to support to be able to report the threat or violation, or may feel that silence is a better option to ensure their safety.



FRONT LINE DEFENDERS

GLOBAL ANALYSIS 2024/25

The Global Analysis is directly based on Front Line Defenders work with Human Rights Defenders globally over the course of 2024. Front Line Defenders would like to thank all donors who supported its work during the year.

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