



GLOBAL ANALYSIS

2025/26

Cover image: 18 July 2024, Quito, Ecuador — Members of various Amazonian Indigenous groups from Ecuador gathered at the Constitutional Court in Quito to demand the urgent issuance of Judgment No. 1296-19-JP, thereby guaranteeing their right to free, prior and informed consultation regarding their territories in light of the threats they face on a daily basis.

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Front Line Defenders adheres to the Dóchas Guide to Ethical Communications.

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Front Line Defenders (2025)

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FOREWORD

“TELLING THE TRUTH IS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE”

The renowned war 20th-century war photographer, Robert Capa, famously dreamed of “becoming unemployed,” hoping that an end to wars would diminish the need for the images he captured. In a way, I think we human rights defenders are similar: I, too, strive for a world with less injustice, where my human rights work is less needed.

More than once, I have tried to understand where this unrestrained desire to protect others comes from. Every time I think about it, I remember my father. He taught me that this love for protecting people is not just a feeling, but a responsibility.

I was 12 when he first took me to the main square of Simferopol, Ukraine. Every year on 18 May, after returning from exile, Crimean Tatars gathered there peacefully in memory of the victims of the 1944 deportations. Back then, my grandparents were among 200,000 or more Tatars forcibly deported from Crimea, Ukraine, to Uzbekistan. Nearly half of my people died in the first year after deportation.

I still remember the noise of the crowd in that square, the bright banners, the voices around me. They demanded rehabilitation and the right to live freely on their land. It was there, next to my father, that I first felt a deep connection to my people and their history. It was there that I realised: human rights that seem natural and self-evident are not a given — they are something you have to fight for.



Lutfiye Zudiyeva.

Seven decades after mass deportations, 2014 marked another sinister turning point, as people residing on the Crimean peninsula

found themselves under immense pressure: everyone was at risk of home raids, family separation, harassment and intimidation. Critics were arbitrarily arrested, HRDs and journalists persecuted, and religious and cultural organisations targeted. Many were forced to leave the peninsula, abandoning their homes and way of life.

Although political regimes have changed — from Stalinist to modern Russian — old methods of repression and fear have resurfaced. With each passing year, it becomes more difficult and dangerous to speak openly about human rights violations. The important role that HRDs play is being undermined globally.

In Crimea, HRDs like Server Mustafayev and Emir-Usein Kuku, among others, have been in Russian prisons for years. Many HRDs face administrative charges, harassment and detention, and some are stripped of their legal right to practise. In December 2025, security forces once again carried out searches of the offices of HRDs under the pretext of “operational search activities,” seizing documents and work equipment.

“
***My position was simple:
 journalism and human
 rights work are not
 ‘politics,’ but an attempt
 to tell the truth.***
 ”

I have personally been detained and fined several times, my home searched, and my work equipment confiscated. On 16 May 2025, the Russian Ministry of Justice added me to the register of so-called “foreign agents”. The state officially declared my work as a journalist and human rights defender as “political”.

“Foreign agent” laws are increasingly being used to stop human rights work under the guise of the threat of “terrorism” and “national security.”

My efforts to challenge my “foreign agent” status proved unsuccessful. My position was simple: journalism and human rights work are not “politics,” but an attempt to tell the truth.

When HRDs are seen as suspicious or hostile, we lose institutional protection — but more importantly, we are no longer seen as principled people. Society begins to perceive us as dissident “others,” rather than as individuals defending human rights.

Crimea is one example, but the stories I tell are replicated beyond my peninsula. I often think that human history moves in cycles: from order to chaos, and back to order again. The destruction wrought by major catastrophes motivates people to create institutions and agreements that will protect the world from repeating such tragedies.

Now, these mechanisms are being abused for political ambitions rather than their original purpose. Humanity faces a more complex task: to build a world order based not only on fear of the past and material well-being, but also on values and shared responsibility.

Technology is now developing faster than the laws meant to regulate it. Online repression has become a key means of targeting HRDs across the world. Artificial intelligence is being manipulated to target defenders in the form of surveillance and control. Clear rules and accountability are needed, so that technology protects people rather than violating their rights.

Like many of my colleagues, I feel a mixture of anxiety and hope. Across the world, the rise of the right is growing, influenced by U.S. politics. We can see the knock-on effects — the strengthening of anti-immigration rhetoric, restrictions on protests, and more.

In Morocco, police have blocked peaceful marches against corruption. In Tunisia, students and trade union leaders risk arrest for participating in rallies. In Palestine, HRDs in Gaza continue to endure the risks and impacts of ongoing war and conflict. In Ukraine, Sudan, and Palestine, HRDs document destruction and human rights violations under grave danger, risking their lives to tell the truth about war crimes.

Hundreds of fellow HRDs patiently continue their noble path and inspire every day with a simple but important principle: the dignity of every person matters. Even in the most difficult conditions, despite the risks, they endure, to ensure that fear and silence do not prevail. Every small victory — the release of one person from unlawful imprisonment, the recognition of a violation in court, the ability to safely express an opinion — is a step toward justice. This is how real change happens.

However, for this movement to be sustainable and to effect long-term systemic change, we need consistent support from the international community, from governments, and from citizens. HRDs should be supported, and be able to live and work without fear, knowing that they are not alone. International institutions must focus on protecting those deprived of liberty for their human rights work — especially older people, the seriously ill, and women — ensuring their access to medical care, fair trials, and securing their immediate release.

Lutfiye Zudiyeva

Lutfiye Zudiyeva is a prominent Crimean Tatar woman human rights defender and member of the human rights organization Crimean Solidarity, which monitors politically-motivated trials in Russian-occupied Crimea and supports political prisoners and their families. She also works as a journalist for the Ukrainian media outlet Graty.



<https://hrdmemorial.org>

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS MEMORIAL

AT LEAST 358 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FROM 28 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES WERE KILLED IN 2025 IN AN ATTEMPT TO SILENCE THEM AND PUT AN END TO THEIR WORK. THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS MEMORIAL PAYS TRIBUTE TO ALL OF THEM:

AFGHANISTAN

Hamza Ulfat

BANGLADESH

Md Asaduzzaman Tuhin

BOLIVIA

Francisco Marupa

BRAZIL

Alessandro Santos Santana

Alex Santos Santana

Danielly Rocha

Ednaldo Palheta da Cunha,

“Naldo Bucheiro”

Elias Camilo Lima, “Elias Topógrafo”

Everton Lopes Rodrigues

Francisco do Nascimento de Melo,

“Cafu”

Gideone Sinfrônio de Menezes

Filho, “Sapato”

Gil do Monteiro dos Santos

Gleison Barbosa de Carvalho,

“Guegué”

Itaraui Santana de Souza

João Celestino Lima Filho

José Jacó Cosotle, “Jacozinho”

Josenir Vieira de Oliveira, “Caseiro”

Marcelo Ortiz, “Ku’i”

Paulo Maciel Gonçalves dos Reis

Raimundo Nonato de Souza Gomes

Robson dos Santos Guedes, “Bob”

Ronilson de Jesus Santos, “Cara

Cortada”

Valdir do Nascimento de Jesus,

“Valdirzão”

Vicente Fernandes Kaiowá Vilhalva

Vítor Braga Braz

COLOMBIA

Aida Damaris Flor Camayo

Alan Josué Valencia Cuervo

Alba Rubiela Guerrero Angulo

Alberto Quitumbo Yatacue

Álvaro Roncancio Aguirre

Amilcar Mambuscay Tintinaguo

Ana Elsy Arteaga Camilo

Andrés Felipe Giraldo Velásquez

Ángel Arbey Vallejo Rosas

Angie Leandra Henao Zambrano

Arbey Morales Hernández

Astrid Viviana Ordoñez Arcos

Carlos Valero Renoga

Carmelo Guerrero Reyes

Cayetano Pedroza Molina

Célimo Chilivico Hurtado Bulgara

Cristian Arnovio Valencia Mina

Cristian Fernando Guanga

Cruz Evelio Bautista Pérez

Cruz Magnolia Sánchez

Daniel Esteban Raigoza Castañeda

Daniel Mauricio Trujillo Gutiérrez

Daniel Niño Niño

Darli Lucía Arcia Anaya

Darwin Meneses Pedroza

Diandra Natalia Zamora Henao

Diego Alejandro Manzano Torres

Diego Alexander Herrera Carranza

Diego Fernando Ruiz Soto

Duván Armando Lizcano Sánchez

Dyanis Valderrama Tuberquia

Edgar Iván Velasco

Edgar Tumiñá Gembuel

Edilsa Licona Mercado

Eduardo Campo Chá

Eider Mauricio Alegría Silva

Elizabeth Mojica Nieves

Erik Anderson Menza Pavi

Ernesto Esaú Muñoz Casamachín

Esther Julia Camayo

Eucario Callejas

Ferley Perdomo Molina

Fernanda Domicó

Ferney Elago Caviche

Florilba Ramos Morano

Francisco Aquiles Vallejos López

Freddy Ballesteros Ovallos

German Roso Aristizabal

Geyrungumu (Jesús Yerú) Torres

Márquez

Gilberto Ramírez

Glover Arley Hernández Benavides

Guillermo Arturo Galviz Plazas

Guillermo Velasco

Héctor Hugo González Epieyú

Hemerson Reinel Pérez

Hermes Ricardo Wilchez

Hernán Amaya Velásquez

Isaid Gómez Valero

Ismael Borray Marín

Israel Cifuentes Guerrero

Iván Darío Issa Nigrinis

Jacinto Chocué

Jaime Alonso Gallego Gómez

Jaime Becerra Castilla

Jaime Enrique Benítez

Jaime Esteban Rendón Rincón

Jairo Alberto Díaz Salazar

James Albeiro Caicedo Lucumí

James Tomás Guanga Quelal

Javier Alejandro Valencia

Jenni Paola Serrano

Jerónimo Martínez Ballesteros

Jesús Valero Renoga

Jhon Alberto Plaza Llano

Jhon Edwin Castrillón León

Jhon Esneider Pabón Osorio

Jhon Fredy Rico

Jhony Alexander Córdoba

Calambas

John Jairo Areiza Jaramillo

Jorge Eliecer Rangel Quintero
Jorge Enrique Cano Jaramillo
Jorge Luis Terán Castillo
José Adelmo Valencia
José Albeiro Liz Muchicón
José Díaz Castillo
José Efrén Vallejo Ruiz
José Erlery Velasco Bolaños
José Evelio Muñoz Ambito
José Francisco Romero Zamudio
José Isidro Carrillo
José Jesús Monsalve Valencia
José Miguel Mojica Conchanguí
Juan Camilo Espinosa Vanegas
Juan Carlos Angarita Ruedas
Juan Carlos Rodríguez Torres
Juan David Ramírez Rodríguez
Julian Arenas
Julio Enrique Niviayo Niviayo
Lácides Castellanos
Laura Enid Guzmán Macías
Leonairo Zamir Montero Paz
Lyonel Imbachí Córdoba
Libardo Guerrero Guerrero
Libardo Osorio Lozada
Lina María Puentes Vega
Lorenzo Antonio Rentería Arboleda
Lucero Velásquez
Luis Alberto Peña Camayo
Luis Alfonso Sánchez Barrera
Luis Alfonso Toro Durán
Luis Alirio Delgadillo Muñoz
Luis Aurelio Araujo Hernández
Luis Eduardo Cisneros Gómez
Luis Ernesto Sánchez Murillo
Luis Fernando Mayorga Rodríguez
Luis Fernando Ocampo Arias
Luis Fernando Sánchez Caicedo
Luz Heneida Hinegroza
Manuel Betancourt
Marco Antonio Suárez Arroyave
Marcos Yonda Toconás
Margarita Enith Gonzales Gil
María Mariela Monsalve Tobón
Martín Emilio Acevedo Quiceno
Marvin Andrés Romero
Maryuri Mayleiny Hernández
Miguel Ángel López
Miller Ojeda Muñoz
Nawar Michell Jiménez
Ned David Valencia Rodríguez
Neisair Ramos Navas
Nilson Andrés de Arco Salcedo

Niver Membache Piraza
Nixon Peñaloza Chacón
Orlando Vesga Badillo
Oscar Becerra Aguirre
Óscar Gómez Agudelo
Óscar Marino García Hernández
Pablo Flórez Narváez
Pedro María Roperó Delgado
Pedro Nel Angarita Ascanio
Rafael José Barragán Blanco
Ricardo Cardona
Ruhail Martínez Anaya
Ruviel Hurtado Gironza
Sergio Luis Blanco Quintero
Shantal Barbosa Álvarez
Sirley Vanessa López Loaiza
Teófilo González Coqui
Ubicael López Noguera
Victor Cerquera
Walberto Quintero Medina
Willer Gallego Mazabuel
William Arnulfo Marín Amaya
William Ferney Pazú Toconás
William Leandro Hernández
Mayorga
Willy David Pérez Quiróz
Wilmer Solarte Pascal
Wilmer Yair López Santander
Yeimar Gamboa Yépez
Yeison Aizama Variaza
Yilber Carnaval
Yojanes Estiven Lopera Cometa
Yulí Maribel Silva Acero
Zuleima Mosquera Beltrán

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Feza Sikitu
Nabwija Furaisha
Pierre Byamungu Katema

ECUADOR

Darwin Fernando Baque
Efraín Fúerez
Jorge Humberto Jijón Montenegro
José Alberto Guamán Izama
María Chóez
Patricio Aguilar
Robinson del Pezo Cañarte

FRANCE

Pierre Alessandri

GUATEMALA

Abel Hernández Ramírez
Agustín Zapeta Aguilar
Arelis López
Carmen Ismael Alonzo González
Clovis Aguirre
Hanswer Adolfo Gómez Marroquín
Manuel Orellana
Marco Antonio Zuleta Quevedo,
“Tono”
Misael Mata Asencio
Vidal Antonio Méndez Ramírez

HONDURAS

Abel Monroy
Alexis Castillo Fuentes
Arnulfo Díaz
Carlos Antonio Rivas Canales
Douglas Alexander Pereira
Héctor Otoniel Hernández Castro
Javier Antonio Hércules Salinas
José Luis Hernández Lobo
Josué Esaú Aguilar Carcamo
Juan Antonio Silva
Juan Bautista Silva
Ramón Rivas Baquedano
Suyapa Guillén

INDIA

Jagabar Ali
Mukesh Chandrakar
Raghvendra Bajpai
Rasik Parmar

INDONESIA

Vian Ruma

IRAN

Hassan Saedi
Khosrow Alikordi
Somayeh Rashidi

KENYA

Albert Ojwang
Richard Raymond Otieno, “Molo
President”
Salman Loa Peikine

MEXICO

Abel Roberto Román Bojórquez
 Aida Karina Juárez Jacobo
 Ángel Sevilla
 Anonymous
 Anonymous
 Anonymous
 Anonymous
 Anselmo Campuzano Martínez
 Antonio Hernández Espinoza
 Arnaldo Nicolás Romero
 Calletano de Jesús Guerrero
 Cándido Essau Román Pérez
 Cristino Castro Perea, “Tino”
 Gabriel Hernández Tovar
 Humberto Piza Pérez
 Jesús Rafael Muñoz Gómez
 José Carlos González Herrera
 José Luis Lucas Quirino
 Juan Pablo Alonzo Estradas
 Karina Ruiz Ocampo
 Katia Daniela Medina Rafael
 Kristian Uriel Martínez Zavala
 Leovigildo Molina Elías
 Magdalena Pérez Santes, “Maleno”
 Marco Antonio Suástegui Muñoz
 Marcos Aguilar Rojas
 María del Carmen Morales
 Mario Alberto Leal Larios
 Martín Melvin García Carvajal
 Miguel Ángel Beltrán Martínez
 Raúl Irán Villarreal Belmont
 Roberto Hernández
 Ronald Paz Pedro
 Rubén Cruz Sagastume
 Sandra Estefana Domínguez
 Martínez (forcibly disappeared in
 2024, killing confirmed in 2025)
 Sergio Cruz Nieto
 Sergio Hugo Ureiro Castañeda
 Silvia Hernández Meza
 Sofía Raygoza Ceballos
 Teresa González Murillo
 Yerli Yaritza

NICARAGUA

B.A.M
 Gerson Sellinton
 Salvador Castillo Chang

PAKISTAN

Abdul Latif Baloch
 Allah Daad Wahid
 Ehsan Baloch
 Tajmanullah
 Zeeshan Zaheer

PALESTINE

Abdul Rahman Al-Abadla
 Abdulqader Khader
 Adam Abu Harbid
 Ahmad Qalaja
 Ahmed Abu Al-Rous
 Ahmed Abu Aziz
 Anas Al-Sharif
 Aya Almadhoun
 Ayda Khader
 Basil Al-Jabour
 Faten Khader
 Fatima Hassouna
 Hamdi Al-Najjar
 Haneen Khader
 Hassan Al-Dabous
 Hassan Al-Qishawi
 Hossam Shabat
 Hussam Al-Masri
 Ibrahim Zaher
 Ihab Al-Halabi
 Ismail Abu Hatab
 Mahmoud Abu Amsha
 Mahmoud Islim Al Basos
 Mahmoud Wadi
 Majed Salah
 Mariam Abu Dagga
 Marwa Musallam
 Marwan Al-Sultan
 Moamen Aliwa
 Moaz Abu Taha
 Mohammed Al Kuaifi
 Mohammed Al-Khaldi
 Mohammed Noufal
 Mohammed Qraiqea
 Mohammed Salama
 Mousa Hamdan Khafaja
 Nada Khader
 Odeh Hathalin
 Omar Al Dirawi
 Saed Abu Nabhan
 Sultan Khader
 Yahia Barzaq
 Yahya Sobeih

PERU

Andy Raúl Coquinche Vásquez
 Benny Raúl Coquinche Vásquez
 Denisse Ana García Solsol
 Fernando Núñez Guevara
 Gastón Medina Sotomayor
 Hipólito Quispehuaman Conde
 Isai Shuk Shawit
 Jorge Antonio Otero Rentería
 Luis Arturo Juárez Paz
 Mitzar Castillejos Tenazoa
 Raúl Celis López

PHILIPPINES

Ali Jehhon Macalintal
 Rico Gonzaga Malubay
 Rudolph Dela Cruz Espe
 Warlita Jiménez

SAUDI ARABIA

Turki Al-Jasser

SOMALIA

Hassan Sankay Ali

SOUTH AFRICA

Muhsin Hendricks
 Pamela Mabini

SUDAN

Alzaki Adam
 Khalid Al-Zubair Al-Malih, “Khalid
 Esti”
 Taj Al-Sir Ahmed Suleiman
 Yahya Hamad Fadallah

TÜRKIYE

Hakan Tosun

UKRAINE

Oleksandr Ivakhnenko
 Pavlo Matviiets
 Victoria Roshchyna (forcibly
 disappeared in 2023, killing
 confirmed in 2025)

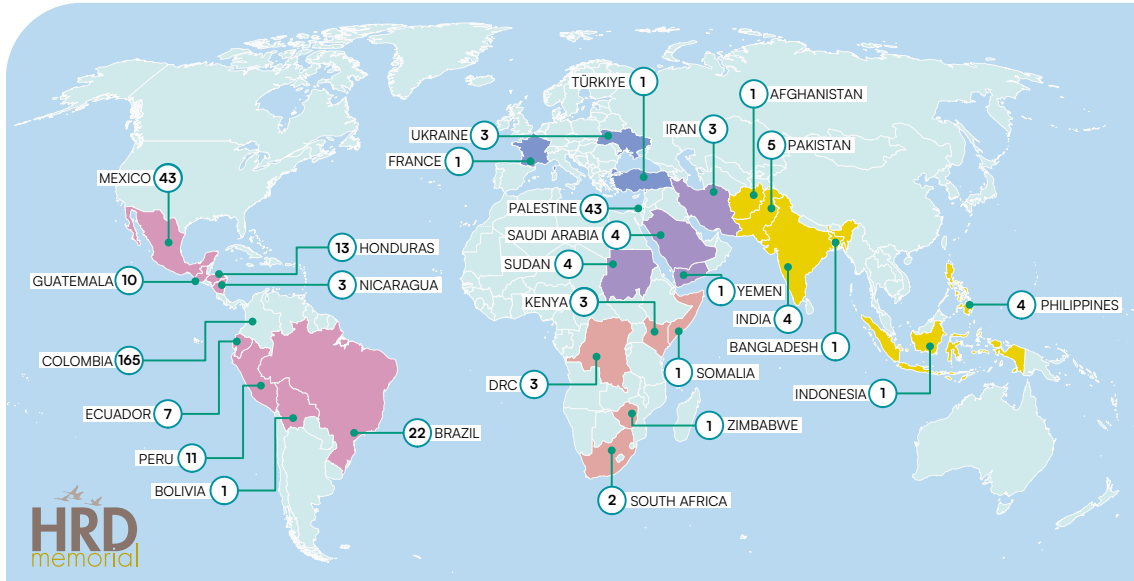
YEMEN

Iftehan Al-Mashahri

ZIMBABWE

Watson Flexy Munyaka

PATTERNS OF KILLINGS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



AFRICA 10

- Democratic Republic of the Congo: 3
- Kenya: 3
- Somalia: 1
- South Africa: 2
- Zimbabwe: 1

ASIA 16

- Afghanistan: 1
- Bangladesh: 1
- India: 4
- Indonesia: 1
- Pakistan: 5
- Philippines: 4

EUROPE 5

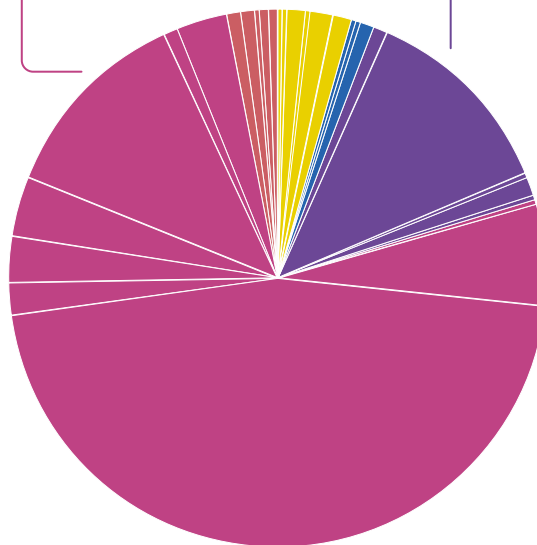
- France: 1
- Türkiye: 1
- Ukraine: 3

MENA 52

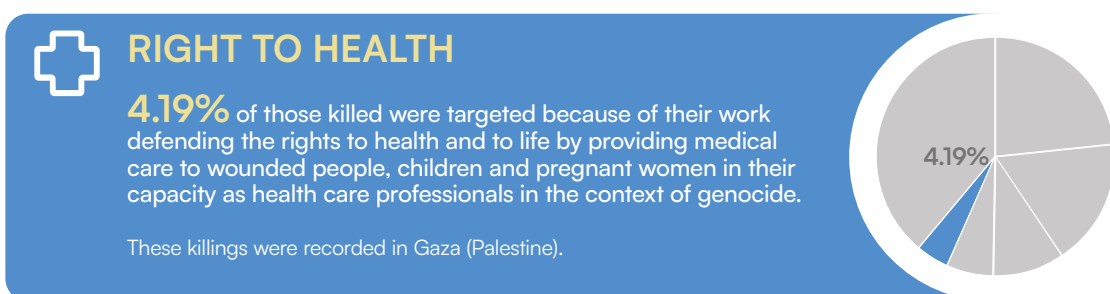
- Iran: 3
- Palestine: 43
- Saudi Arabia: 1
- Sudan: 4
- Yemen: 1

AMERICAS 275

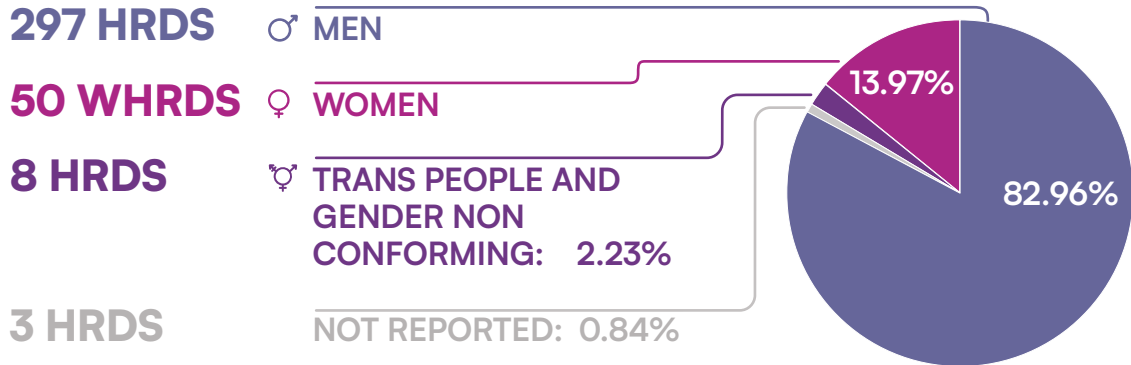
- Bolivia: 1
- Brazil: 22
- Colombia: 165
- Ecuador: 7
- Guatemala: 10
- Honduras: 13
- Mexico: 43
- Nicaragua: 3
- Peru: 11



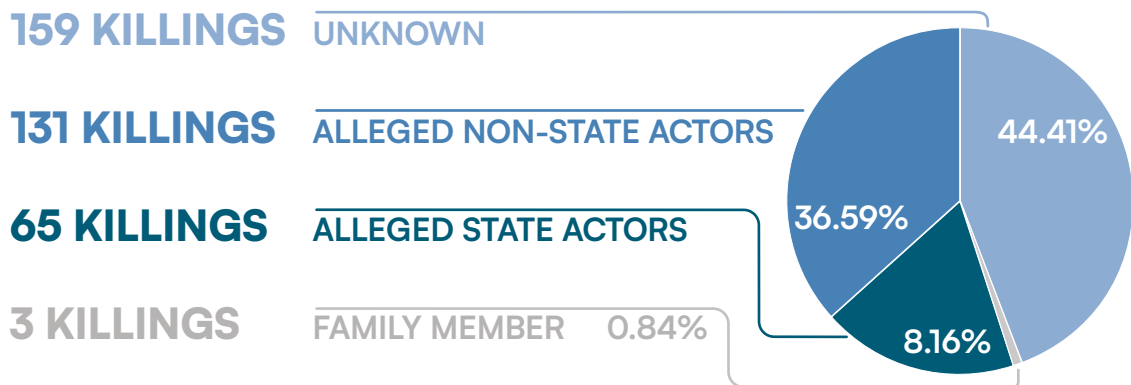
MOST TARGETED AREAS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE



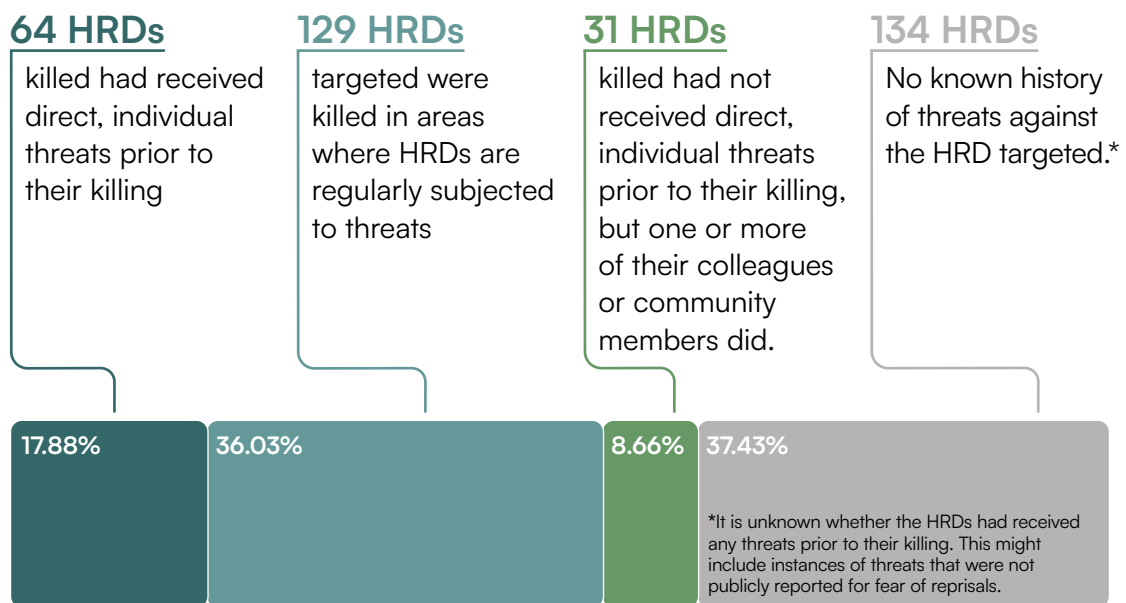
KILLINGS OF HRDS BY GENDER



PERPETRATORS OF KILLINGS

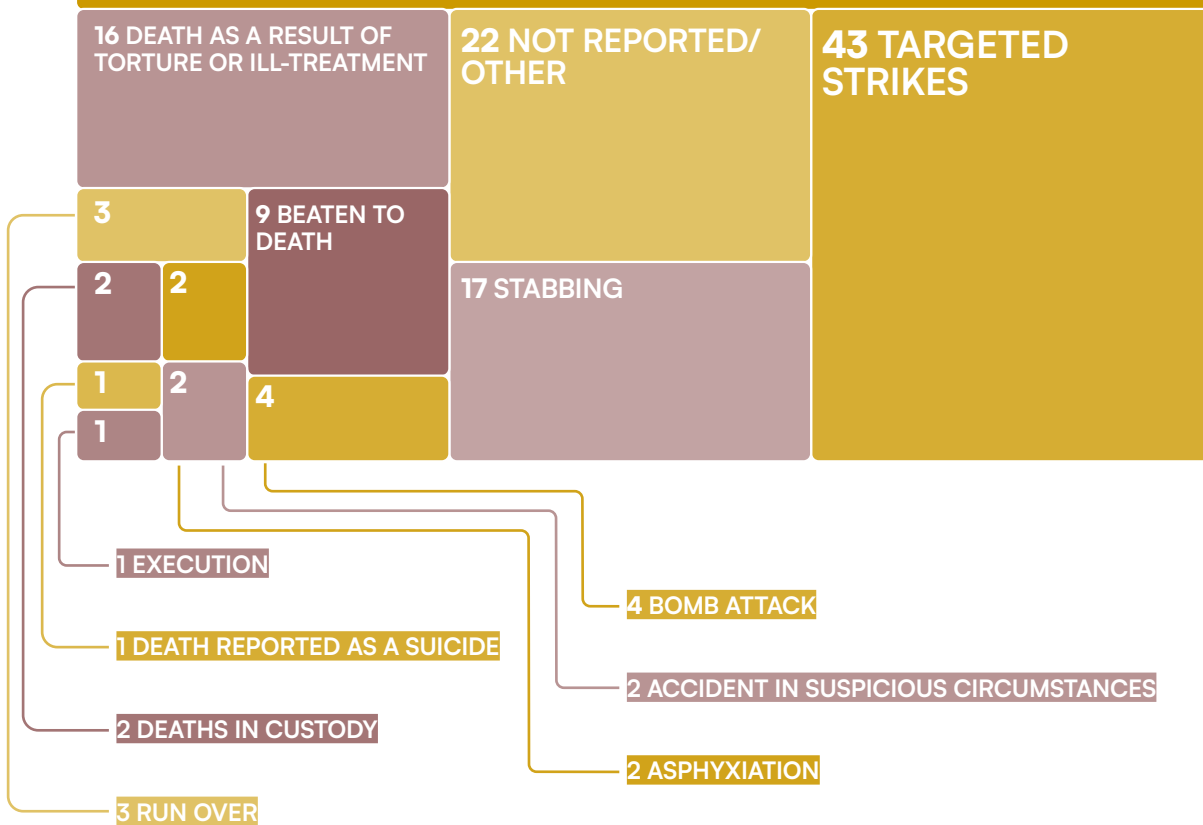


NATURE OF THREATS FACED BY DEFENDERS PRIOR TO THEIR KILLING



TYPES OF KILLING

236 SHOOTING



THE MISSING DATA

The HRD Memorial data shown here represent cases of verified killings of HRDs between 1 January — 31 December 2025.

This dataset does not reflect the total numbers of killings perpetrated in 2025: there are cases that are impossible to verify and/or document due to the imposition of internet blackouts, suppression of media, targeting of documenters, self-censorship, or the total closure of civic space, particularly in countries and regions subjected to ongoing armed conflicts and genocide. These countries include **Afghanistan, China, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Iran, Libya, Myanmar, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.**

In this context, 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 killings, 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 for their work.

At the time of publication, the HRD Memorial continued to research and conduct verifications on the additional killings of 119 individuals perpetrated in **Bangladesh, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Ecuador, Gaza (Palestine), Iran, Kenya, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Philippines, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Uzbekistan, Venezuela** and **Yemen.**

THE PROJECT

Led by Front Line Defenders, the HRD Memorial is a joint, global initiative by a network of human rights organisations: **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**; **IM-Defensoras** (Mesoamerica); **Karapatan** (the Philippines); **OMCT**; **El Programa Somos Defensores** (Colombia); **Red TDT** (Mexico); and **UDEFEQUA** (Guatemala).

The HRD Memorial is supported by an extensive network of individual human rights defenders and organisations that thoroughly contribute to the verification of killings of HRDs and its contextual analysis in all world regions.

GLOBAL STATISTICS

HOW HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ARE TARGETED AROUND THE WORLD

The following statistics are derived from Front Line Defenders' urgent actions and approved grant applications between 1 January and 31 December 2025. The statistics are based on 2,739 reported violations in 119 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.

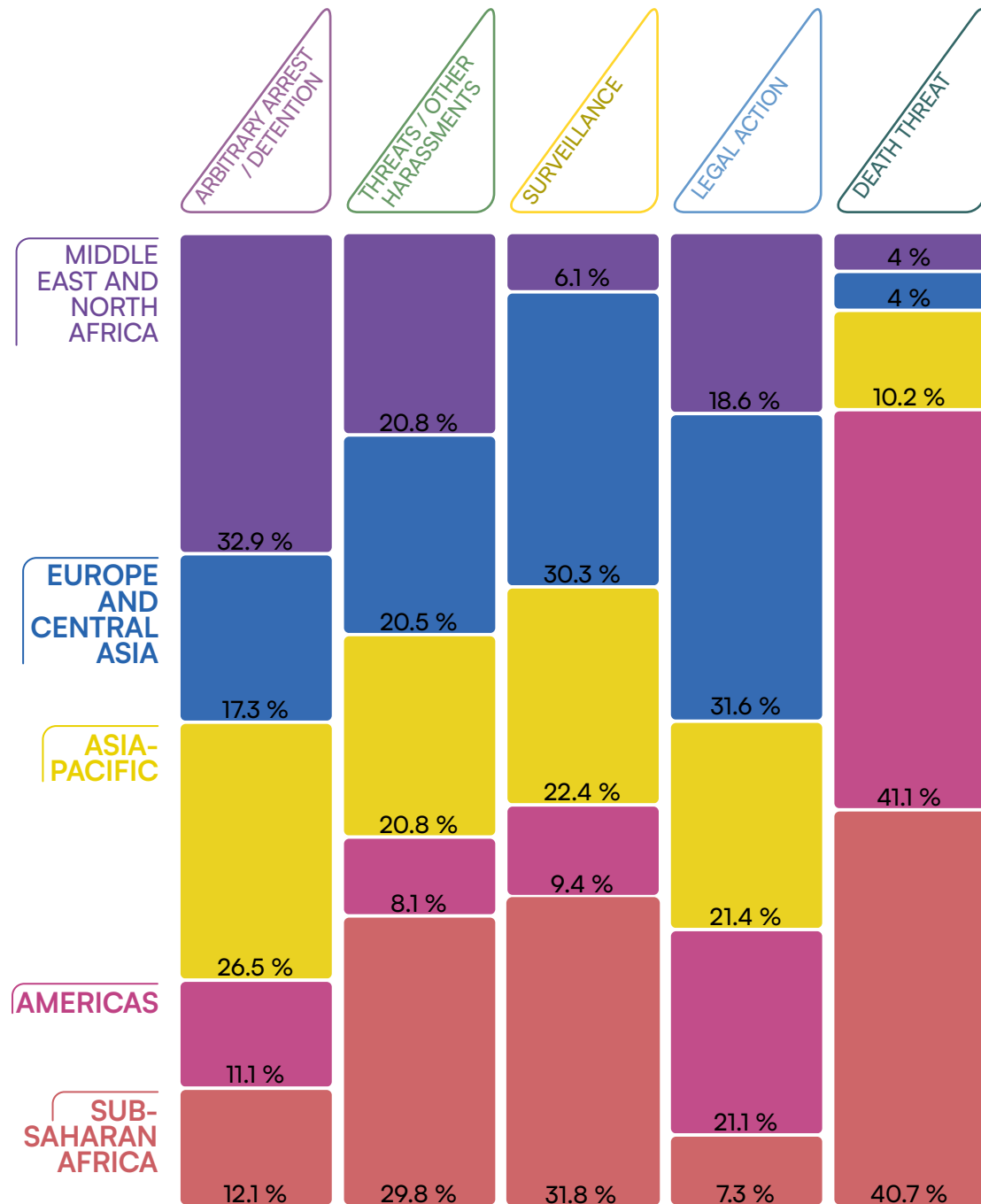
The information Front Line Defenders receives is dependent on HRDs being aware of the organisation and sharing information about their situation; as such, this data cannot be seen as wholly representative for all HRDs in all countries. This data should serve as an indicator — but not a comprehensive 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 Front Line Defenders' 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 2025, as well as the most targeted groups of human rights defenders. The full list of violations and groups of HRDs that the organisation documented violations against is set out in the methodology section of this report.



5 MOST REPORTED VIOLATIONS AGAINST HRDS

The table below reflects the regional breakdown of the most reported violations against defenders globally. For instance, in 2025, of the total number of Arbitrary Arrests and detentions documented globally, 32.9% were recorded against HRDs in the MENA region.

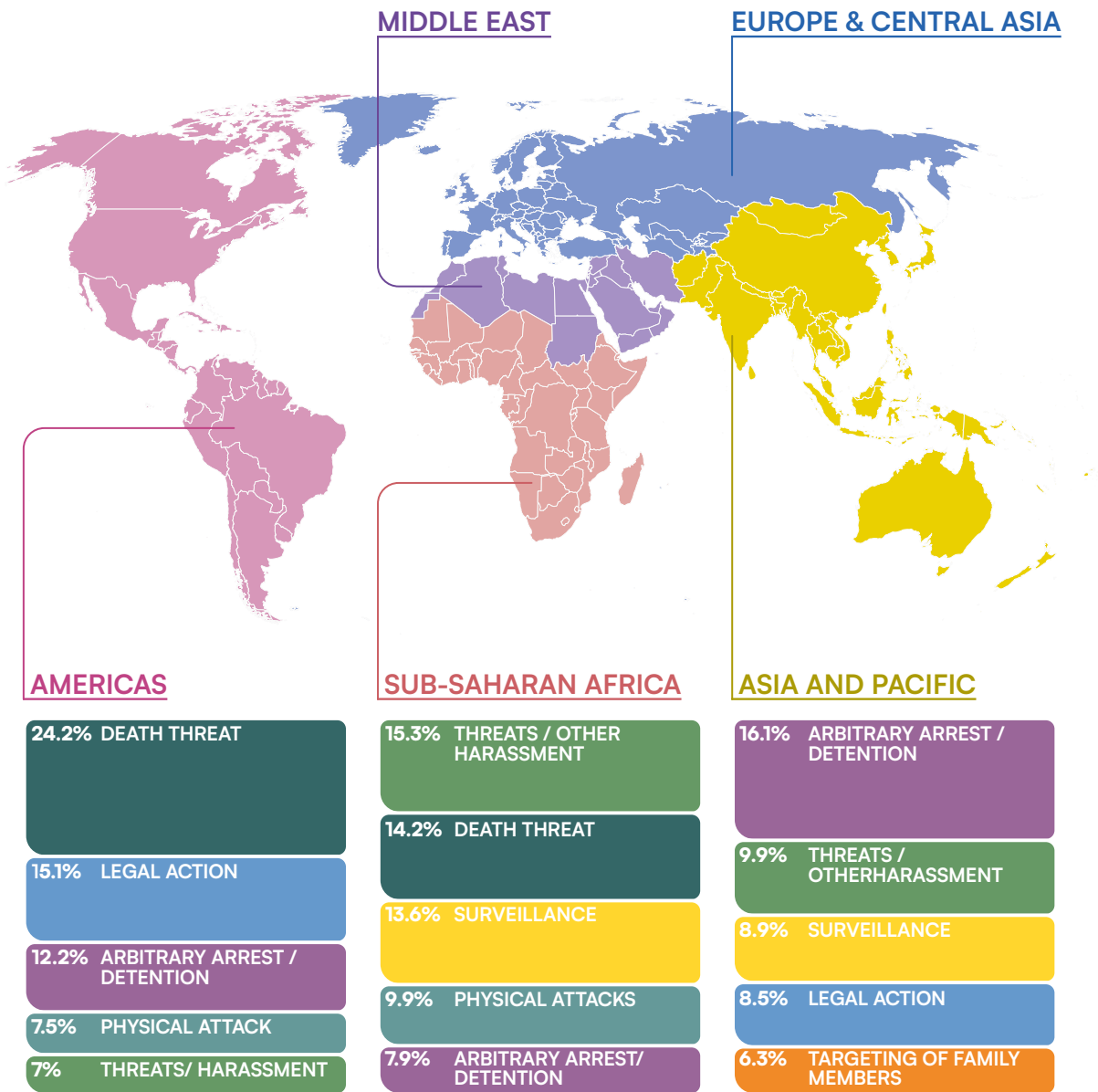
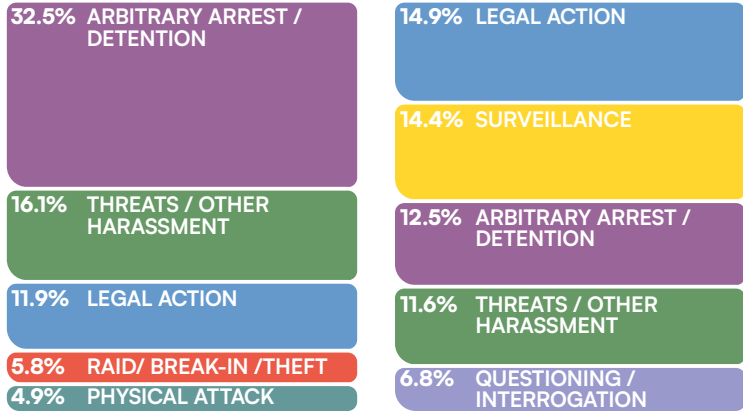


% OF VIOLATIONS PER REGION

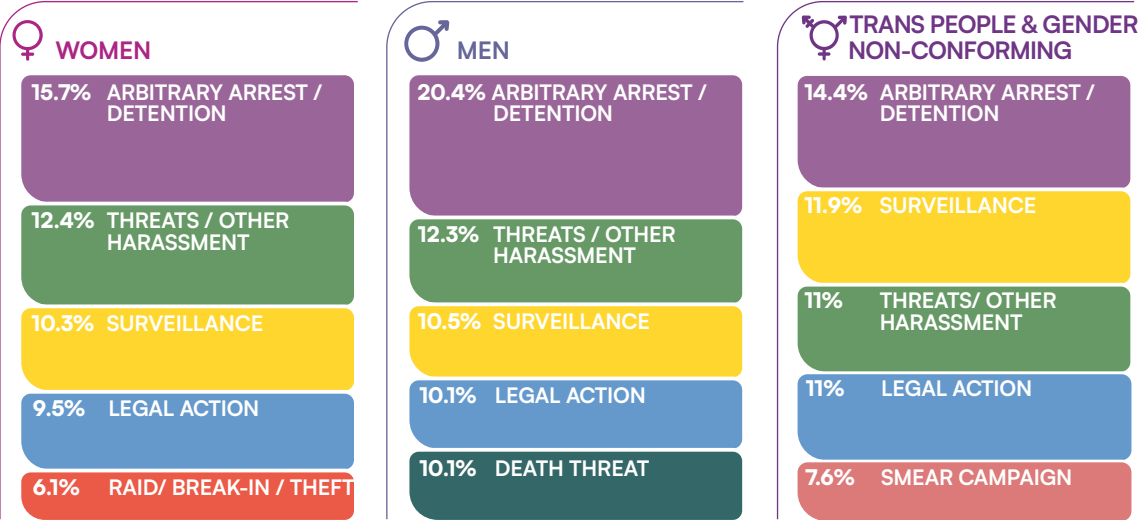
Further details at the methodology session.

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.

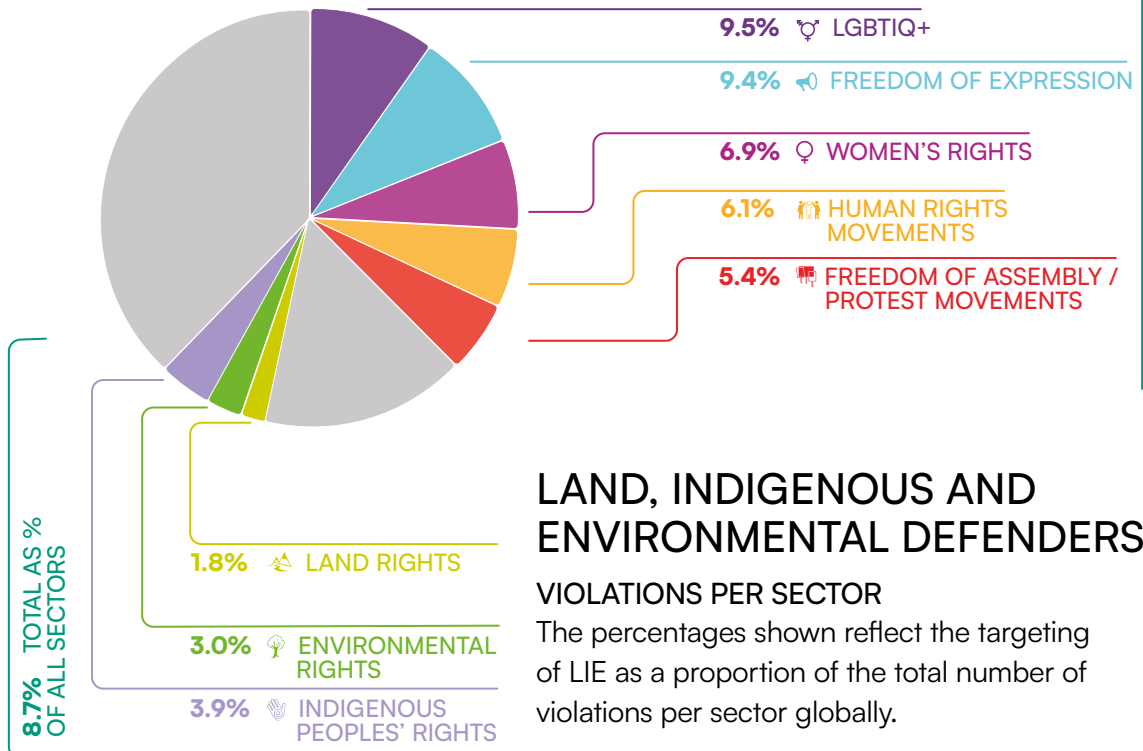


MOST REPORTED VIOLATIONS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS BY GENDER



FIVE MOST TARGETED AREAS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE

According to the violations reported to Front Line Defenders in 2025, these are the five most targeted sectors of human rights defence among 44 categories. These proportions show the frequency with which different areas of human rights defence are linked to documented violations.



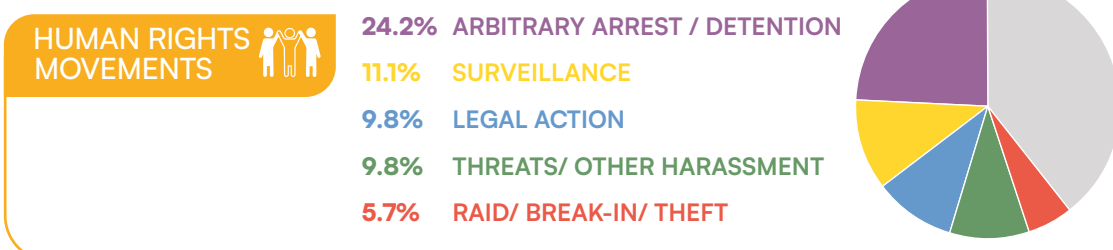
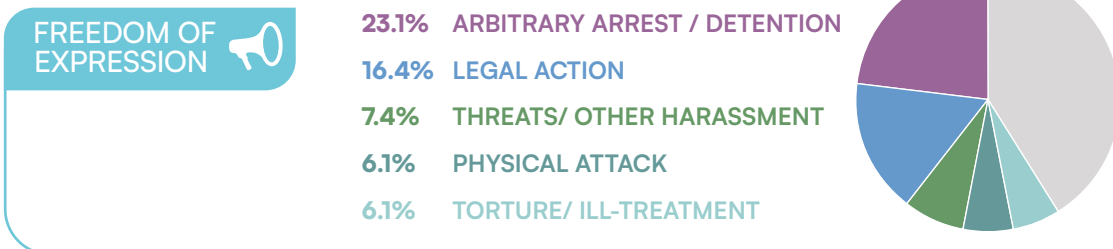
LAND, INDIGENOUS AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS

VIOLATIONS PER SECTOR

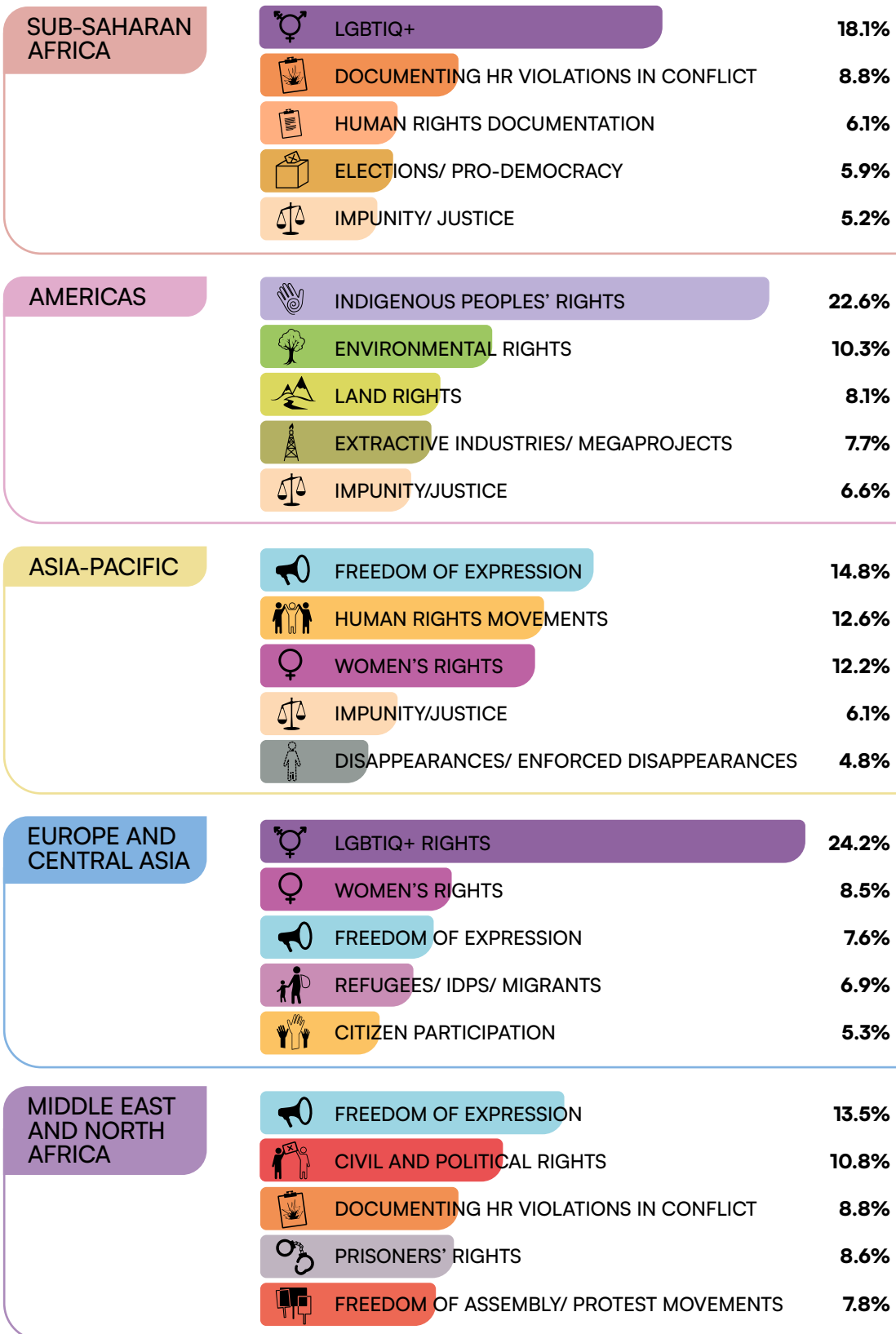
The percentages shown reflect the targeting of LIE as a proportion of the total number of violations per sector globally.

5 MOST REPORTED VIOLATIONS AGAINST EACH AREA OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE

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



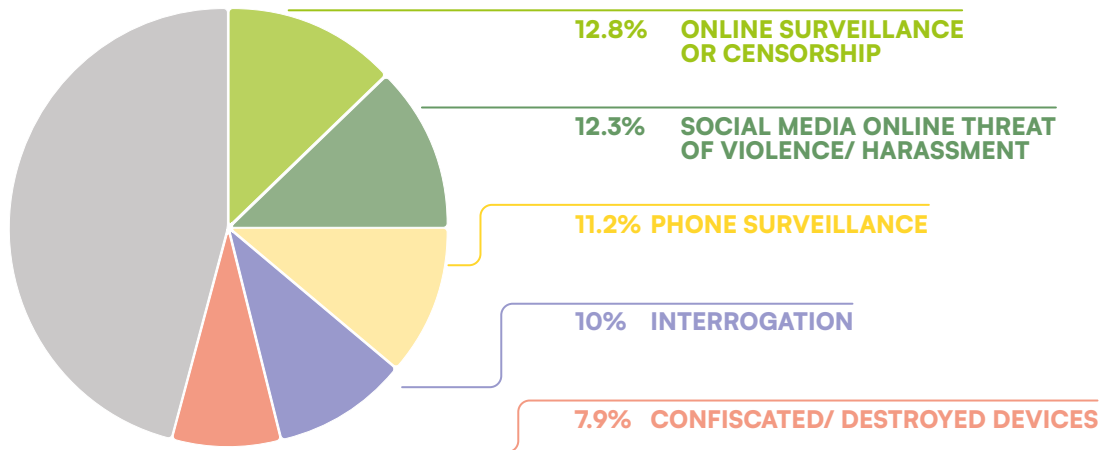
TRENDS ACROSS THE REGIONS: FIVE MOST TARGETED AREAS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE BY REGION



DIGITAL THREATS AND VIOLATIONS

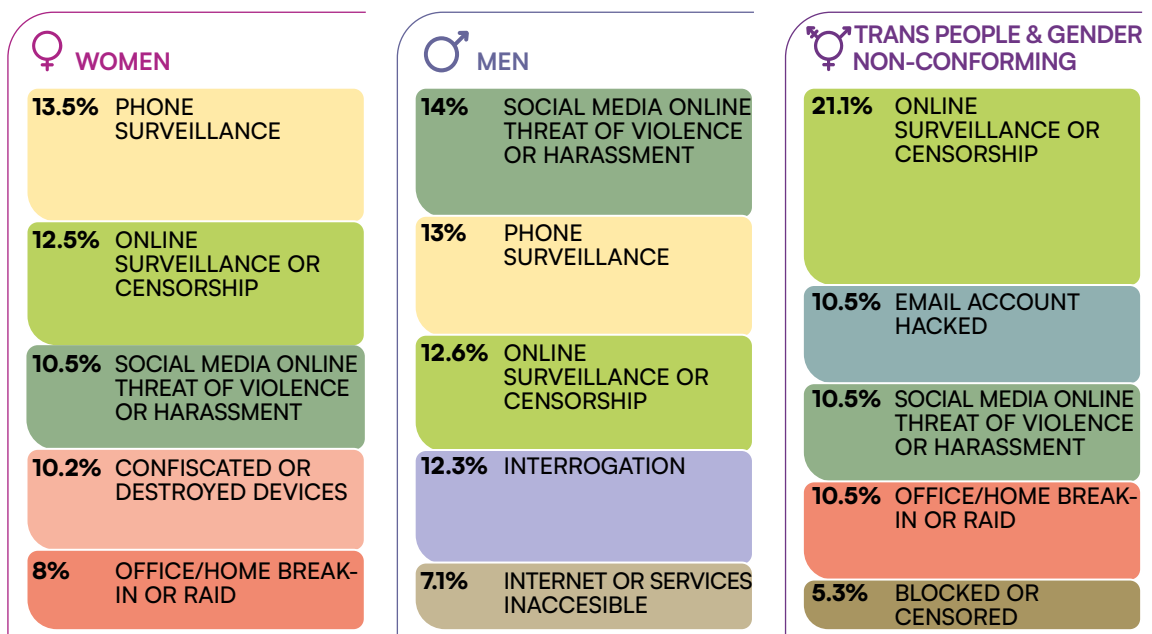
The following statistics are derived from Front Line Defenders’ digital protection work between 1 January and 31 December 2025. Front Line Defenders documented 1,221 digital threats and violations.

FIVE MOST PREVALENT DIGITAL THREATS AGAINST HRDS



MOST REPORTED DIGITAL THREATS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS BY GENDER

The table below highlights the top 5 types of threats HRDs reported to Front Line Defenders’ Digital Protection Programme, categorised by gender



FIVE MOST PREVALENT DIGITAL THREATS BY REGION

The table below highlights the top 5 types of threats HRDs reported to Front Line Defenders in each region through our Digital Protection Programme

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA	ONLINE SURVEILLANCE OR CENSORSHIP	17.5%
	SOCIAL MEDIA ONLINE THREAT OF VIOLENCE / HARASSMENT	11.6%
	PHONE SURVEILLANCE	10.1%
	PHYSICAL SURVEILLANCE	8.7%
	INTERROGATION	8.3%
AMERICAS	CONFISCATED / DESTROYED DEVICES	13.5%
	SOCIAL MEDIA ONLINE THREAT OF VIOLENCE / HARASSMENT	11.2%
	SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT/ INFORMATION BLOCKED/ BANNED	10.1%
	MALWARE ATTACK	10.1%
	OFFICE/HOME BREAK-IN/RAID	6.7%
ASIA-PACIFIC	PHONE SURVEILLANCE	17.7%
	INTERROGATION	17.1%
	SOCIAL MEDIA ONLINE THREAT OF VIOLENCE / HARASSMENT	16.4%
	CONFISCATED/ DESTROYED DEVICES	9.0%
	OFFICE/ HOME BREAK-IN/RAID	8.0%
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	INTERROGATION	15.0%
	ONLINE SURVEILLANCE OR CENSORSHIP	12.5%
	OFFICE/HOME BREAK-IN/ RAID	12.5%
	EMAIL ACCOUNT HACKED	10.0%
	CONFISCATED/ DESTROYED DEVICES	6.3%
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA	ONLINE SURVEILLANCE OR CENSORSHIP	17.1%
	SOCIAL MEDIA ONLINE THREAT OF VIOLENCE/ HARASSMENT	14.3%
	PHYSICAL SURVEILLANCE	11.4%
	INTERROGATION	11.4%
	SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT/ INFORMATION BLOCKED/ BANNED	10.0%

GLOBAL OVERVIEW

The right to defend human rights [remained deeply contested](#) in 2025, as the international system established to uphold those rights came under increasing strain. States' commitments to the universality of human rights, codified in various international and regional treaties they have ratified, were often exposed as fragile or selectively applied, with some state actors no longer even paying lip service to the principle of a rules-based international order in which human rights are a [central pillar](#). An attendant [increase](#) in authoritarian practices, unregulated corporate power, and a [growing crisis](#) in the funding for human rights deepened during the year against a backdrop of multiple, prolonged armed conflicts which inflicted devastating human rights abuses on civilian populations.

In many countries, the conflation of human rights work with 'terrorism' or 'extremism' gathered pace and human rights defenders (HRDs) were routinely depicted as posing a threat to national security. This stigmatisation undermined their legitimacy, removed critical legal protections and often made their work impossible to continue. It is notable how many such cases were documented in relation to demonstrations of solidarity with **Palestine**. Numerous examples highlight that the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association is often dependent on the identity of those exercising it: when they are indigenous, or from a marginalised group, or support a politically sensitive cause, that right is frequently violated.

The landscape for defenders globally, and particularly, indigenous, women and LGBTIQ+ defenders, has become increasingly hostile. Legislation limiting the right to defend rights was introduced in every region, including in states which had traditionally been vocal in their support for human rights. This erosion of rights extends to the corporate sphere, where a retreat from established due diligence standards due to an increasing tolerance of looser policies has closed off many avenues for victims to seek redress. As has been the pattern for many years, attacks against HRDs were often inextricably linked to state and corporate interests in the extractive industry sector, facilitated by trade agreements which deepen inequality, external debt, and the misuse of national security laws. Together, these factors have created an environment of



July 2017, Salé, Morocco — Sahrawi human rights defender and 2025 Front Line Defenders Award winner Mhamed Hali leads peaceful demonstrations in solidarity with Sahrawi political prisoners who were arrested following peaceful protests at the Gdeim Izik camp.

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unaccountability in which violations go unchecked, perpetrators operate with impunity, and the mechanisms designed to protect fundamental rights are systematically undermined.

Trends which impact HRDs and limit their work have remained consistent over the past number of years, up to the present. According to Front Line Defenders' data, in 2025 the most commonly reported violations against HRDs regionally were: arbitrary arrest or detention in Asia-Pacific (26.5%) and the Middle East and North Africa (32.9%); death threats in the Americas (41.1%) and sub-Saharan Africa (40.7%); and legal action in Europe and Central Asia (31.6%). At a global level, regarding areas of human rights defence, those working on LGBTIQ+ rights reported most violations (9.5% of all recorded violations), followed by those working on freedom of expression (9.4%) and land, environmental and indigenous peoples' rights (8.7%).

Against such overwhelming pressures, HRDs in every region of the world remained motivated by the values of human rights and sought to hold their governments and other powerful actors accountable for violations, broken promises and failures to uphold their human rights obligations. As demonstrated by the recipients of the 2025 Front Line Defenders Award for

Human Rights Defenders at Risk, HRDs contribute to their societies in countless ways; including by [challenging discrimination](#), [creating opportunity for marginalised communities](#), [providing legal assistance in contexts of executive overreach](#), [exposing human rights violations](#), and documenting patterns of [systemic persecution](#). For these peaceful and legitimate activities, carried out in accordance with international human rights law, defenders are subjected to a wide range of abuses, including killings, arbitrary detention, criminalisation, online violence and social stigmatisation. Yet their work and their courage in the face of these risks far exceeds the level of protection and support available to them, a gap which widened further in 2025 amid severe funding cuts and declining political support for human rights. This report highlights the scale of the challenges facing human rights defenders in an increasingly fragmented geopolitical environment and the impacts these challenges are having, despite the remarkable resilience of such defenders. It is also informed by analyses and reflections of HRDs themselves whose perspectives throughout the report underscore both the realities of their work and the major challenges they continue to confront.

THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FOR HRDS

The global policy environment for the protection of human rights and those who defend them was seriously weakened in 2025. The massive fundings cuts implemented by the administration of **United States** President Donald Trump shortly after his inauguration in January directly impacted thousands of human rights organisations. These cuts, combined with those of **Germany** and the **United Kingdom**, [amounted to 84% \(US\\$53 billion\) of the projected 2026 ODA cuts](#) (HRFN, 2025), reducing drastically the global pool of support to marginalised communities. Front Line Defenders surveyed 60 international and regional civil society organisations engaged, to varying degrees, in protection of human rights defenders and found that they had lost more than €45 million annually in direct protection support since January 2025. Concurrently, 83% of respondents reported an increase in emergency grant requests from HRDs since January 2025.

In parallel, [states' failure to pay their UN fees on time](#) — most significantly the **United States** — exacerbated the organisation's budgetary crisis. This has contributed to the [scaling back](#) of human rights monitoring missions and the inability of human rights mechanisms to [adequately fulfil their mandates](#). The effects of these cuts are not abstract: **Colombia**, one of the world's most dangerous countries for HRDs, has seen its policies and initiatives for conflict resolution and peacebuilding weakened due to a significant reduction in international cooperation, particularly from USAID. In June, due to budget constraints, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia [announced the dismissal of nearly half of its staff and the closure of three offices](#) in areas affected by the armed conflict. InspiraPaz, a US\$20 million USAID-funded project to prevent human rights violations in conflict areas, strengthen community resilience and develop alternatives, was also wound down.

Accountability efforts were not just hampered by funding cuts; they were also undermined by an unprecedented attack on a key global mechanism for combating impunity for serious human rights violations — the International Criminal Court (ICC). The **United States** Government imposed sanctions on ICC officials and judges following the Court’s issuance of arrest warrants in November 2024 for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant in relation to alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in the **Occupied Palestinian Territory**. The scale and scope of these measures expanded rapidly: initial designations targeted the ICC Prosecutor, Deputy Prosecutors, and several judges, directly impacting the Court’s ability to operate independently and effectively. By July, the sanctions had [extended](#) to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967 (or UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territory), **Francesca Albanese**. In September, key Palestinian [human rights organizations](#) documenting violations to enable future accountability — including **Al-Haq**, **Al Mezan**, and **the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights** — were sanctioned. Parallel measures against another Palestinian human rights organisation, Addameer, were adopted in June, when the organisation was [sanctioned](#) by the United States Treasury on purported counter-terrorism grounds. The impact of the sanctions on Palestinian human rights organisations has been profound, with rapid funding withdrawals, staff lay-offs, full refusal of banking facilities (effectively preventing them from using the international banking system) and serious limitations on other NGOs’ ability to support them. Documentary evidence from the sanctioned organisations exposing human rights violations by the Israeli army was also removed from United States-owned internet platforms. Calls for an EU response, including the blocking statute,⁴ have been met with inaction and indifference. The **United States** government’s attack on the ICC, as well as human rights organisations providing evidence to it, demonstrates the efforts taken to ensure that accountability for the most serious human rights abuses only takes place when it coincides with the interests of the **United States** government.

The incremental strangulation of independent civil society continued apace at the global level, where a raft of new legislation (see later in this analysis) was proposed or introduced. Such actions were often combined with administrative measures to limit the ability of HRDs and organisations to obtain resources, develop a domestic constituency or engage international support. This type of multi-pronged attack occurred in multiple countries, including in **Georgia** where the *Law on Registration of Foreign Agents (FARA)* was enacted in April. *FARA* requires individuals or organisations to register as ‘foreign agents’ if they engage in a wide variety of acts, including ‘political activities’ that are carried out ‘on behalf of’ a foreign entity. In practice, this means that organisations in receipt of foreign funding — a right protected under the HRD Declaration — will be targeted. In addition to the bureaucratic hurdles such a law poses, it is deeply stigmatising to HRDs and organisations conducting outreach to the general public. In parallel, the bank accounts of a number of human rights organisations relating to election monitoring, good governance and democracy were frozen in June 2025. Such organisations

4 According to the European Union, the purpose of the blocking statute (Council Regulation (EC) No 2271/96) is “to protect EU operators from the extra-territorial application of third country laws. The European Union does not recognise the extra-territorial application of laws adopted by third countries and considers such effects to be contrary to international law.”

were accused by the Prosecutor General of supporting the 2024 violent protests which occurred in reaction to the return of the Georgian Dream Party to government.

The Trump administration withdrew from the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in February 2025 and was soon followed by **Israel**. **Nicaragua** withdrew its membership that same month, following the publication of a [report](#) by the HRC-mandated Group of Human Rights Experts on the country which found that President Daniel Ortega had consolidated state control over the population “through widespread repression,” including through the arbitrary detention of HRDs. As WHRDs were confronted with further rollbacks on women’s rights, the **United States** administration contributed to an increasingly hostile environment through its public [opposition](#) to language relating to “gender” at the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York in March. This came at a time when a new [report](#) by UN Women, to mark 30 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on women’s rights, noted that “anti-rights actors are actively undermining long-standing consensus on key women’s rights issues.”

In **the European Union**, landmark efforts to regulate the human rights and environmental impacts of corporations were significantly debilitated through the “Omnibus I” package, introduced under the banner of reducing regulatory burdens and improving competitiveness, after [heavy lobbying](#) by businesses. The revisions substantially diluted the original ambition of the [Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive](#) (CSDDD) and weakened protections for affected communities and defenders. The revised text reduces the number of companies covered by the directive by around 70%. It also limits the ability of companies to request information from [smaller business partners](#), weakening supply-chain transparency and reducing the effectiveness of due diligence processes. In addition, the definition of stakeholders was narrowed, and consultation obligations were reduced during key stages. The revised directive further removes the obligation for companies to suspend or terminate relationships with business partners linked to serious harm where that harm cannot be prevented. Furthermore, the Omnibus I package removed harmonised EU-wide civil liability provisions and support for representative actions that could have helped victims overcome barriers when seeking justice in European courts. Instead, enforcement will largely depend on national legal systems, creating fragmented standards across member states, which will create barriers for victims of corporate abuse and increase opportunities for companies to exploit gaps between national regimes.

The principle of the universality of human rights came under renewed pressure in Europe when 27 of the 46 Council of Europe member states signed onto a [joint statement](#) calling for amendments to be made to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). One of the proposed amendments is that Article 3, which provides protection against torture, and inhuman and degrading treatment, be “constrained to the most serious issues,” when considering expulsion of non-nationals convicted of criminal offences. As detailed below, HRDs [protecting the rights](#) of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees already work within a context where they are treated with heavy suspicion, subjected to smear campaigns and criminalised for their work. Qualifying whose rights are protected under the ECHR poses further challenges to this work. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Michael O’Flaherty [noted](#) that “the

careless association of migration with criminality is wrong and dangerous”, and stressed the “need to respect the universality of human rights. Any discourse that suggests a hierarchy of rights holders on the basis of their being more or less deserving is deeply problematic.”

Notwithstanding these headwinds, the year did provide a number of positive policy advances at the international, regional, national and local levels. Among the most significant of these was the [Advisory Opinion](#) issued by the International Court of Justice affirming that states have binding legal obligations under international human rights law to address climate change, highlighting that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a precondition for the enjoyment of human rights. This opinion also represents an important recognition of the years-long struggle of environmental and indigenous peoples’ rights defenders, who have consistently opposed the degradation of their natural environment on the grounds of human rights, and who, as a result, have been relentlessly targeted.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) handed down its own [Advisory Opinion](#) in July on the climate emergency and human rights, in which the crucial role of HRDs in climate governance and protection is highlighted. The opinion stresses the heightened risk that environmental defenders face and the duties of States to prevent attacks against them, including through the use of due diligence and national protection mechanisms. The intersectional risks faced by Indigenous, Afro-descendant, rural and women HRDs was noted, with calls made for a nuanced protection approach.

At the national level, **Guatemala** approved the Public Policy for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders 2025–2035. This framework was adopted to comply with a 2014 IACHR ruling instructing the state to develop a comprehensive protection system for defenders which recognises the legitimacy of human rights work and focuses on protection, prevention, access to justice and reparation. While this policy represents a significant and normative advance in the region, civil society has underlined that its implementation, adequate resourcing, and the effective participation of defenders, particularly indigenous, rural, and women defenders, will be decisive in determining whether it translates into real improvements for HRDs.

[Elsewhere in the Americas](#), the **Brazilian** Government launched the National Plan for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. The plan establishes an inter-ministerial committee to monitor the situation of HRDs in the country and develop measures to address it, including monitoring the performance of the National Protection Mechanism under the accompaniment of civil society. This initiative follows years of sustained advocacy by civil society organisations and gained momentum following IACHR rulings holding Brazil accountable for its failure to protect HRDs. Throughout the year, the **Chilean** Congress drafted a [bill](#) to establish a policy on the protection of environmental defenders which passed first stage in lower chamber and is pending discussion in the Senate. Despite these positive steps, expectations remain low in light of the ongoing weakening of human rights policies under President José Antonio Kast’s government, which, in March 2026, withdrew the country’s proposed [Third National Human Rights Action Plan](#) (2026–2029).

At the local level in the **Philippines**, Quezon City became one of at least six localities to [adopt](#) an ordinance designed to protect HRDs. The ordinance acknowledges the “vital role of human rights defenders”, confirms their rights and commits to the creation of a Human Rights Defenders Protection Committee to “develop and implement policies to protect HRDs from threats and violence.” As the number of administrative divisions with protection ordinances grow, HRDs hope that this momentum will translate into the adoption of the [long-delayed](#) National Human Rights Defenders Protection Law.

REPRISALS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS OF MEMORY, TRUTH AND JUSTICE IN GUATEMALA

By Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM)

In 2025, the situation of human rights defenders in **Guatemala** was marked by a tendency to [criminalise](#) their work, which is reflected in the misuse of criminal law and the prosecution of cases against defenders.

Currently, at the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo — GAM — (Mutual Support Group) we have observed that defenders of memory, truth and justice in Guatemala carry out their work in a context of [growing denial of serious human rights violations and structural impunity](#), particularly with regard to the events that took place during the internal armed conflict. This obstructs the right to truth and delegitimises efforts to access justice, with a particular impact on this type of defence, where the defenders themselves are victims and survivors.

Through our work supporting communities and organisations, we have documented how, in the face of denial of gross human rights violations, human rights defenders, communities and organisations have had to overcome obstacles, including the [criminalisation](#) of lawyers, victims and organisations who are subjected to harassment and the misuse of criminal law against them. [Harassment on social media](#) by military personnel, businesspeople and politicians who are part of pro-impunity groups spreading hate speech against defenders has been documented. The risks they face in their defence of human rights are exacerbated when [judicial proceedings for access to justice are suspended, annulled or significantly delayed as a result of decisions by judges or magistrates of the Supreme Court of Justice and the Constitutional Court, as well as the Public Prosecutor’s Office](#). This has been particularly evident in emblematic judicial proceedings such as with the Ixil Genocide, Diario Militar and CREOMPAZ cases, in which justice is being sought for crimes committed against more than two thousand victims, the majority of whom belong to Indigenous Peoples.

One example worth highlighting is that [GAM](#), as a reference organisation for transnational justice processes over the last five years, has been the target of threats on social media and

a criminal prosecution for our work defending rights. GAM, along with other organisations working on transitional justice, have faced risks and violations when documenting human rights violations, namely in instances where historical archives holding valuable information on rights violations are compromised by being subjected to surveillance and consultation by the Public Prosecutor's Office. This constitutes harassment against these organisations, with a risk that such documents could be seized and permanently withheld.

In addition, organisations and defenders working on transitional justice issues report [serious obstacles regarding their work, as spaces for national advocacy to promote access to justice](#) have been considerably reduced, especially in entities such as the Public Prosecutor's Office, due to its role in investigations.

State protection for human rights defenders in Guatemala has historically been a significant issue in the country. However, in November 2025, the Executive approved [the Policy for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders](#), derived from an international obligation and promoted by human rights defenders and organisations. It is important to monitor this policy at a national and international level in order to strengthen the defence of human rights in Guatemala.

As human rights defenders and representatives of organisations, we will face several challenges nationally in 2026. The environment in which we carry out our human rights work and the risks we face, as well as structural impunity, will be directly affected by the results of the second-level elections in Guatemala. This will involve the appointment of the magistrates of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, as well as the Attorney General of the Republic and the Rector of the University of San Carlos de Guatemala — the only public university in the country with a say in the promotion of positions in the country's justice system. The visibility and monitoring by international organisations, and other entities, of cases of criminalisation and threats we suffer as human rights defenders is and will continue to be essential to support our defence as we continue fighting for memory, justice and reparation for past atrocities.

CONFLICT, POST-CONFLICT, AND CRISIS SITUATIONS

In a context defined by the proliferation of armed conflicts and other crises, human rights defenders were forced to constantly adapt their strategies to allow for them to continue delivering for their communities. From the fourth year of the full scale **Russian** invasion of **Ukraine**; the war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide against Palestinians by the Israeli authorities in **OPT**; the 12-day war in **Iran**; the escalating violence in the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** and **Sudan**; growing gang-control in **Haiti**; border tensions between **Thailand** and **Cambodia**; the ongoing civil war in **Myanmar**; to the continued conflict in **Yemen** and the human rights crisis in **Afghanistan**, defenders operated in environments where state and non-state actors consistently target those supporting their communities or documenting violations. These environments presented unique and compounded risks, where, for example in **Myanmar**, the military government “[has criminalised the exercise of the right to freedom of expression, locking up journalists and human rights defenders who report on the junta’s actions and abuses.](#)”

Whether in **Sudan**, **Ukraine**, **Gaza** or the **DRC**, HRDs were targeted directly for their work documenting human rights violations and exposing abuses. The HRD Memorial recorded the killing of 32 defenders engaged in such work in **Palestine**, **Sudan** and **Ukraine**. The targeting of journalists and HRDs in such contexts has a chilling effect, designed to discourage others from exposing abuses.

Defenders on the frontlines of these catastrophes faced a scale of threats that overwhelmed protection mechanisms, challenging organisations to coordinate and verify cases amidst volatile conditions, namely with internet blackouts and reduced funding. What follows are not exhaustive accounts, but illustrative examples of a pervasive trend: the systematic targeting of those who persisted in their promotion of rights amidst the violence of sustained conflicts.

This trend was evident in the murder of WHRD and civil servant Iftehan Al-Mashahri, who was shot dead in September in the city of Taiz in **Yemen**. Director of the Cleanliness and Improvement Fund and tasked with “[keeping Taiz’s basic services running amid the chaos of war](#)”, the WHRD had previously faced down armed individuals who had attempted to extort her in her work. In the weeks prior to her killing, she reportedly told friends that “the noose is tightening”. The assassination was roundly condemned by local civil society as an attack on civic leadership and women’s participation in public life. Following her killing, sustained public protests erupted, with demonstrators and rights organisations demanding accountability and an end to impunity.

The situation in **Sudan** remained dire, where the warring parties of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), were joined by new armed groups. The conflict has led to the displacement of over 12 million people. Defenders, particularly those staffing



2025, El Obeid, Sudan — Emergency Response Rooms of Sudan’s activities in El-Obeid, capital of the state of North Kordofan. ERR received the 2025 Right Livelihood Award and 2025 Rafto Prize for their lifesaving work amid Sudan’s internal armed conflict.

© LCC- Emergency Response Room of North Kordofan

Emergency Response Rooms⁵ (ERRs), faced targeted attacks, arbitrary detention, sexual violence, death sentences and killings. In August 2025, ERR volunteer **Khalid al-Zubair Al-Malih (“Khalid Esti”)** died in SAF custody, having been detained since 2023 on ungrounded accusations of collaboration with the RSF. In November **Al-Fadil Ismail Adam Abdelbari**, known as “Awfy,” was [arrested](#) by the RSF in the main market of Zalingei, Central Darfur and held for over a month. A volunteer with the ERRs in Zalingei, the HRD is widely recognised in his community for his humanitarian and voluntary work. Healthcare workers in **Sudan** have played a key role [defending the right to health](#) and have been targeted for treating the wounded or refusing to abandon their patients. Journalists, lawyers and others have all paid a high price for their persistence in supporting their communities and exposing human rights abuses in the context of the war. The HRD Memorial recorded three cases in **Sudan** in 2025 where HRDs were targeted and killed because of their work documenting violations.

5 The Emergency Response Rooms of Sudan are grassroots networks that emerged in the wake of the war in Sudan. In 2025 they were [awarded](#) with the Rafto Prize.

In the **Occupied Palestinian Territory/Israel**, the bombardment of **Gaza**, mass displacement and the military ground incursion created an impossible environment for defenders. A number of local Palestinian and Israeli organisations, as well as international NGOs and the [UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#) concluded that a genocide was being committed against the Palestinian people in **Gaza**. The HRD Memorial documented the killing of 42 HRDs in **Gaza** in 2025. HRDs reporting on violations or those defending the right to health and life were targeted by the Israeli Defence Forces with arrest, torture and killings. [Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya](#), director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, was [arrested](#) in late 2024 for refusing to evacuate the hospital. At the time of writing, he remained in administrative detention without trial or charge, and has been reportedly tortured. He reported being subjected to [“to severe physical abuse, including beatings with batons and electric shock sticks, as well as repeated blows to the chest”](#) and denied medical treatment despite developing severe scabies.

In the **West Bank**, a growing pattern of settler attacks, arrests, assaults, property destruction, land grabbing and intimidation targeting human rights defenders and their communities was observed. One HRD, [Odeh Hathalin](#), was recorded as killed by the HRD Memorial in 2025, murdered by an Israeli settler in July. In December, **Israeli** occupation forces carried out [coordinated](#) military raids on the offices of the [Union of Agricultural Work Committees \(UAWC\)](#) in Ramallah and Hebron. During these raids, IDF soldiers reportedly destroyed the office infrastructure, seized documents and equipment, physically assaulted staff and detained eight individuals who were present on the premises. The organisation provides essential agricultural, developmental, and humanitarian assistance to farmers and rural communities in the **West Bank**, including those facing settler violence, land confiscation, and the risk of forced displacement. It was one of six leading Palestinian civil society organisations designated as ‘terrorist’ by Israeli authorities in 2021, with no substantial evidence provided to back up this assertion. According to the UN Human Rights Office in Palestine, the attack on UAWC [“followed weeks of harassment and public incitement by Israeli settlers and leaders of settler groups, particularly citing UAWC’s work during the olive harvest season.”](#)

Iran was an evident example of the devastating impact of conflict on societies where the space to defend human rights is already severely restricted, during the Twelve-Day War (13-25 June). HRDs’ lives and their physical and psychological well-being were drastically affected by **Israeli** and **US** airstrikes and the Iranian response, while freedom of expression and access to information were both further restricted. In June, the **Israeli** air force attacked the Evin compound, where Evin prison is located and where numerous HRDs are imprisoned. Defenders spoke of their terror during the attacks in which, [according to a spokesperson of the Iranian Judiciary System](#), more than 70 people were killed. Following the attacks, prisoners were transferred to alternative jails where they endured poor hygiene conditions and lacked access to essential supplies.

“

We [human rights defenders] have written so many times, that we are against any war, attacks on homeland and its people. Unfortunately, our agency was not taken into account in any of circumstances leading to current situation. However, we can be each other's refuge in this difficult time, we do have agency over this matter.

”

Human rights defender Mohammad Habibi on social media on 16 June 2025

In the **DRC**, the situation for human rights defenders [deteriorated rapidly](#) following the takeover of Goma by the ‘Mouvement du 23 Mars’ (M23) in January. HRDs in North and South Kivu faced severe risk from both M23 and government forces, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, and targeted violence against them and family members. Front Line Defenders responded to a surge in attacks against women human rights defenders (WHRDs), including sexual violence and assaults with weapons, particularly against those working on land rights, environmental protection, and peacebuilding. In one such case, four WHRDs were abducted by an armed militia as they held a workshop on sexual health and reproductive rights in South Kivu. They were held in an underground cell and subjected to acts of sexual violence and torture for a week before managing to escape during a clash between the militia and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo. They subsequently continued to face intimidation and death threats via phone calls from members of armed groups which forced them to go into hiding. In August, the mother of **WHRD Espérance Martha** was shot dead by unidentified individuals at her home in Kalingi.

The environment for defending human rights was further undermined by internet shutdowns, movement restrictions, and systematic censorship by the National Intelligence Agency on social media platforms. Amidst catastrophic humanitarian shortages, defenders continued to document violations and provide critical aid, often serving as the sole source of verified information where international institutions could not operate, despite the severe risks of retaliation for exposing abuses. Defenders faced heightened xenophobia in Kinshasa, as they were accused of collaborating with **Rwanda**, while those attempting to flee to neighbouring countries risked refoulement.

ECONOMIES OF VIOLENCE

In many countries, HRDs were targeted within hybrid systems of control where state actors, corporations, criminal organisations, and paramilitary groups operate in overlapping and mutually reinforcing ways. These systems are not fragmented but rather form integrated political economies in which both legal and illegal activities coexist and sustain each other. Defenders who challenge land dispossession, extractive industries, or illicit economies often confronted the same networks of power, regardless of whether those activities were formally lawful or criminalised.

Militarised forces and private security are increasingly deployed to suppress resistance, often under the guise of “green” development or national progress. In an August [report](#) to the General Assembly, the UN Working Group on Mercenaries⁶ warned that the use of “private violence” was “widening, deepening and evolving at a rapid rate”. It further warned that “mercenaries, mercenary-related actors and private military and/or security companies are being used beyond the battlefield, to plug security gaps, secure strategic sites, project power beyond borders, circumvent international law and target local populations and civilians.”

In **Brazil**, violence against indigenous, quilombola, and rural communities remained a concerning pattern, particularly in southern Bahia and Mato Grosso do Sul, where the HRD Memorial documented the killing of five indigenous and land rights defenders in 2025. The paramilitary group [Invasão Zero](#), composed of landowners, farmers, and allied police forces, intensified its campaign under a self-proclaimed mission of “zero invasions”. The movement deployed vigilante violence to evict, without a court order, indigenous groups and landless workers from vacant or disputed land they had occupied. This campaign has been linked to at least seven armed incursions on indigenous lands. Namely, [in October](#), over 50 armed individuals attacked Pataxó indigenous land in **Comexatiba**, south of Bahia, leaving two indigenous leaders with gunshot wounds. Furthermore, violent acts against quilombola and rural workers, where torture, arson, and forced displacement were reported.

The convergence of actors with capacity and intent to commit violence produced a continuum of threats and affected defenders working on a wide range of issues, including those defending the rights of Indigenous peoples, minority groups, Afro-descendant communities, access to land, and the environment. They encountered a spectrum of risk ranging from surveillance, smear campaigns, and judicial harassment — including the increasing use of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) — to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and killings. In 2025, at least 131 human rights defenders were killed by non-state actors. The risks were particularly acute in territories where economic interests — such as mining, agribusiness, fossil fuels, or drug trafficking — were dependent on territorial control. In the Americas, large-scale extractive and agribusiness projects frequently overlapped with

⁶ Full name is The UN Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination

territories infiltrated by organised crime, creating systems where violence is used to regulate land access and suppress dissent. Furthermore, as traditional drug cartels evolve into decentralised networks, violence is used to dominate local economies, creating resilient systems of control that target communities and defenders that threaten their operations.

In **Colombia**, instability in peace processes throughout 2025 was accompanied by the expansion of armed actors across strategic rural areas. These actors compete for territorial control by regulating local economies, including illegal mining, land grabbing, and the expansion of livestock farming, illustrating the convergence of legal and illegal economic activities. In this context, violence against HRDs is closely tied to efforts to control land, resources, and economic flows. Indigenous, campesino, and Afro-Colombian leaders, as well as former combatants promoting community-based alternatives, have been threatened, silenced, and killed for challenging these systems. According to HRD Memorial partner, 'Programa Somos Defensores', at least 165 human rights defenders were killed in 2025 in the country. In December, the attempted assassination of Wayúu indigenous leader **Misael Socarras Ipuana** took place when the car in which he was travelling was fired on by two armed individuals in La Guajira. Socarras, a beneficiary of Colombia's protection mechanism, managed to escape while one of his bodyguards was injured. The HRD was most likely targeted because of his work exposing environmental degradation and violations of the rights of the Wayúu people as a result of the expansion of the Glencore-owned Cerrejón mine, the largest open-pit coal mine in Latin America.

In **Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras** and **Nicaragua**, violence against Indigenous, and Afro-descendant peoples on the Caribbean Coast continued to worsen, driven by the invasion of settlers and the expansion of extractive activities and the tourism industry which in some cases resulted in the forced eviction, [physical violence](#), [sexual abuse](#) and [criminalisation](#) of HRDs. In Nicaragua, armed attacks by criminal groups and settlers against Indigenous and



2 March 2026, La Esperanza, Intibucá, Honduras — Memorial altar commemorating Honduran Indigenous defender Berta Cáceres on the tenth anniversary of her murder.

© Front Line Defenders

Afro-descendant communities occurred with widespread impunity and with the tolerance or complicity of the state, all of which increased the risk of physical violence and forced displacement of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.

Such defenders are targeted not only for protecting territory or the natural environment; they are targeted for asserting Indigenous, Afro-descendant, or minority identities in contexts where state and corporate interests are determined to marginalise them and seize their resources. Across the globe, this violence is also framed through a lens of national security, where peaceful resistance to violations committed by actors engaged in extractive industry is criminalised as “terrorism” or “sedition”.

In **Pakistan**, Balochistan, home to the deep-sea Gwadar Port, is the fulcrum of the **China-Pakistan** Economic Corridor, designed to provide **China** with overland access to the Arabian Sea. Scores of Chinese, Pakistani and international companies and conglomerates across the technology, energy and infrastructure sectors are involved while local communities criticise a lack of consultation, and human rights abuses. The project has exacerbated longstanding grievances of the Baloch population over ongoing and entrenched discrimination, marginalisation and state violence. Furthermore, despite Balochistan being Pakistan’s most [mineral-rich](#) province, 71% of households [face](#) ‘multi-dimensional poverty’. In response to calls for greater rights, the authorities continued to misuse public order and anti-terror laws to [criminalise](#) Baloch HRDs and unlawfully detain members of the **Baloch Yakjehti Committee**, a peaceful grassroots movement that has mobilised thousands to demand justice, accountability and an end to enforced disappearances. Of the five HRDs recorded as being killed in Pakistan by the HRD Memorial in 2025, four were Baloch defenders.

Extractive industries often operate in environments where projects are supported by local and national authorities to the detriment of the local population, or where governance is weak or aligned with private interests, and criminal groups or other non-state armed actors control access to land, water and labour. Similarly, [industries linked to global supply chains](#) can reproduce patterns of dispossession and coercion when consultation is absent and regulation is weak. In one such [example](#), authorities in the **Philippines** [arrested and charged](#) 10 indigenous peoples’ rights defenders in May 2025 for attempting to prevent the development of a large-scale luxury eco-project on their territory. This case reflects a deeply embedded pattern of so-called “development aggression” in the **Philippines**, where state-backed or state-tolerated corporate ventures systematically displace indigenous communities in the name of investment and progress.

Human rights defenders also frequently face a distinct form of violence rooted in ethno-religious nationalism and systemic racism, where their identity is weaponised to delegitimise their struggle for territory. This intersectional targeting ensures that the defence of ancestral lands is conflated with “anti-state” activity, stripping these communities of their human rights. This was evident in the mineral-rich state of Chhattisgarh in **India**. **Raghu Midiyami** and



Ten Indigenous and non-Indigenous HRDs from the Molbog Bugsuk community in Palawan, Philippines, were arrested in May 2025 and charged with grave coercion for participating in a peaceful blockade against the development of a large-scale luxury ecotourism project on their territory.

© Molbog Bugsuk community

Suneeta Pottam, both linked to the banned human rights movement [Moolvasi Bachao Manch](#) in Chhattisgarh, were [arrested](#) under the widely abused counter terror legislation the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in February and April. Both defenders are active in promoting the rights of Adivasis, objecting to the ever-increasing militarisation of their communities and campaigning against the [forcible acquisition](#) of indigenous lands.

EXPOSING CORRUPTION IN THE MINING SECTOR IN THE DRC

By FDAPID (*Foyer de Développement pour l'Autopromotion des Personnes Indigentes et en Détresse*)

In the Wanyanga sector of the Walikale Territory in North Kivu Province, environmental defenders are constantly targeted because of claims⁷ related to the mining company ABM SA (Alphamin Bisie Mining SA), and the non-transparent management by local government of the 0.3% of ABM SA's revenue which is legally required to be allocated to local community development.

In February 2025, the specifications outlining AMB SA's social obligations related to this legal requirement expired. However, on the ground, the impact of the projects carried out was not visible. Concerned about the poverty of the population of Walikale, an area rich in natural resources, the Movement of Young Leaders for Change (JLC) denounced the situation by publishing images of the drilling operations which reportedly wasted USD\$1,870,000. JLC members organised several meetings to analyse the DRC's mining code and regulations, and subsequently adopted a strategy of flooding WhatsApp groups with critical messages to prevent the signing of a new set of specifications before the previous set had been evaluated.

JLC's denunciation was supported by 82 civil society organisations through an advocacy letter addressed to the Congolese authorities, calling for an investigation into the disappearance of approximately USD\$30,000,000 allocated to development projects between 2016 and 2024, while the population continued to live in precarious conditions. The organisations hoped that this pressure would block ABM SA from violating the mining law. However, allegations emerged that AMB SA may have exerted influence over the evaluation process for projects carried out during this four-year period. This evaluation was carried out over two days and the new specifications were signed the following day.

The criticisms of AMB SA and the authorities' actions led to a smear campaign and death threats against JLC members, including Issa Butambo Aristote, Ushindi Balbiye Jean Calvin, Jimba Kalekela Lucien, Bwira Kabaki Bestron, Eugénie Bulenda Engel, Kahindo Macho Rachel, Moyoni Riziki Célestine, and Makuru Kashira Célestin. After receiving several threats via telephone calls and WhatsApp messages, the group was informed of a plan to kill eight JLC activists, with the source specifying that the assassins were already in Goma to carry out the killings. Some young JLC members and agents from the Wanyanga sector were also victims of cybercrime between 17 and 30 October when their WhatsApp accounts were hacked by a network of scammers. The FDAPID issued alerts to draw the attention of the authorities and human rights defender protection mechanisms to the situation of these environmental defenders. The National Assembly of the DRC has set up a parliamentary commission, whose report is still pending despite the legal deadline set by the Chamber's Rules of Procedure having now passed.

⁷ The HRDs are demanding that AMB SA comply with their social obligations.

In Africa, this dynamic of corporate-state collusion was evident in many environments. The destruction of forests was particularly painful as, for many Indigenous tribes, particular forests [represent](#) “places of worship and communication with ancestors, spirits and deities, to ensure their benevolence or seek their advice through ceremonies, prayers and rituals. Respect for sacred forests is governed by prohibitions and taboos that regulate access to resources.” Those who try to protect them in the face of resource extraction face serious risk. In **Guinea-Bissau**, Fanta, a Spirit Forest Protector defending the sacred forests of Simboree against rosewood trafficking, survived a knife attack and attempted murder in May, following a sustained campaign of intimidation that included the arson of her crops and the torture of her livestock. In **Madagascar**, **Félicia**, coordinator of the organisation ‘Anjava Sakatia’, faced threats of arrest and eviction by local authorities for opposing the land claims of the private company Green Mada Land. Across these regions, defenders opposing extractive and agribusiness projects face judicial harassment and lethal force, often without access to protection mechanisms or the resources to navigate complex legal systems.

In the **Occupied Palestinian Territory**, a hybrid system of control is evident where [state authorities and private sector actors](#) operate in mutually reinforcing ways. Surveillance and incarceration technologies have evolved into tools for the large-scale monitoring of Palestinians, including defenders, journalists, and activists. Reporting by Palestinian and Israeli journalists on Microsoft’s engagement with Unit 8200 had raised concerns that such blanket surveillance would allow Israeli authorities to find potentially incriminating information on virtually [any Palestinian](#), which could then be used for all manner of purposes — including blackmail, administrative detention, or retroactively justifying killings. In this context, economic [activities](#) linked to [security](#) and defence sectors intersect with systems of territorial control and population management, shaping the environment in which defenders operate and are exposed to risk.

ESCALATING CRIMINALISATION AND JUDICIAL HARASSMENT AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Criminalisation continued to be used systematically to silence human rights defenders and disrupt entire movements. Governments weaponised the judicial system to stigmatise, harass, and imprison defenders, regardless of the specific human rights they uphold. In cases documented by Front Line Defenders in 2025 where criminal charges were brought against HRDs, 17.8% of the charges related to national security or sedition, 15.6% to defamation or insulting the state or damaging national unity and 14.4% to spreading fake news, rumours or propaganda. Criminalisation enables authorities to present the repression of dissent as lawful governance, while exhausting defenders emotionally, financially and organisationally through prolonged legal processes.



30 April 2026, Pesaro, Italy — Italian environmental and human rights defenders Roberto Malini and Lisetta Sperindei outside Pesaro Courthouse, awaiting the second hearing of the SLAPP defamation lawsuit against them.

© Steed Gamero / EveryOne Group.

Whether through [lèse-majesté laws](#) in **Thailand**, charges of “insulting the judiciary” in **Morocco**, [articles introduced during the military dictatorship](#) in **Argentina**, [rebellion charges](#) in **Cameroon**, or [Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation](#) (SLAPPs) in **Italy**, the outcome is consistent: defenders face the erosion of legal protections, the destruction of their livelihoods, and a lack of recourse in systems that prioritise state security over judicial fairness.

The continued abuse of National Security and Anti-Terror Laws was observed globally. States continue to support and invest in the proliferation of counter-terrorism frameworks and security legislation, while reducing funds for human rights work, advocacy and paying lip service to curbing abuse of anti-terror structures. In **Germany**, as part of a wave of repression targeting solidarity with **Palestine**, intelligence agencies labelled Jewish Voice for Peace,⁸ the BDS Movement, and Palestine Speaks as “extremist movements,” exposing their members to heightened surveillance, criminal charges, and police violence.

8 On 27 April 2026 the Berlin Administrative Court ruled that the listing of Jewish Voice for Peace as “confirmed extremist” by Germany’s Federal Ministry of the Interior in its Domestic Intelligence Report was [illegal](#) and must be removed.

Overly broad national security or counter-terror legislation continued to be used to devastating effect to detain HRDs for prolonged periods. The State Security Department of the **UAE** Federal Supreme Court [upheld](#) a 25 year prison sentence on terror-related charges handed down in 2024 to Mohamed Al-Roken. This is despite the fact that the HRD had completed a ten year prison sentence in 2022 on similar charges linked to his human rights work after a grossly unfair trial. On completion of his sentence he was not released, a decision based on the deeply objectionable anti-terrorism law of 2014, which allows prisoners to be detained after the end of their prison terms under a pretext of “counselling and rehabilitation”. National security charges were instead filed against him, once again, and 43 other detainees in a case known as the UAE84. **Bahrain**, meanwhile, continued to imprison a number of activists, including former Front Line Defenders Protection Coordinator [Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja](#) and fellow human rights defender [Abduljalil Al-Singace](#), both of whom are serving life sentences on widely criticised terrorism related charges.

In **Pakistan**, Baloch WHRDs, [Mahrang Baloch](#), [Gulzadi Baloch](#), [Beebow Baloch](#) and human rights defender [Beebarg Zehri](#), remain jailed under regressive public order and anti-terror laws. The state has filed multiple criminal cases or First Information Reports (FIRs) against the defenders due to their work on Baloch rights, against enforced disappearances and extra judicial killings in Balochistan. Pashtun human rights defenders also faced systematic targeting, with HRDs linked to the [Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement](#) — a peaceful collective for Pashtun rights banned in October 2024 — being targeted repeatedly with surveillance, mass arrests, and false accusations of militancy.

Multiple HRDs in **India**, some of whom have been jailed since 2018, remained incarcerated. In Indian-administered Kashmir, [Khurram Parvez](#) and [Irfan Mehraj](#) have been [jailed](#) since 2021 and 2022 respectively, under the UAPA, due to their documentation of [human rights violations](#). In Delhi, HRDs protesting against the regressive Citizenship Amendment Act including [Umar Khalid](#), [Sharjeel Imam](#), [Meeran Haider](#), [Gulfisha Fatima](#) and [Shifa Ur Rehman](#) have been jailed since 2020-2021 under the UAPA. The latter three HRDs were granted bail in January 2026, but [Umar Khalid](#) and [Sharjeel Imam](#) remain imprisoned and were denied bail.

The **Chinese** government continued to target HRDs under charges without any clear definitions. One such catch-all charge is “picking quarrels and provoking troubles”, a charge which [emerged](#) from the Mao-era crime of ‘hooliganism’. Under Xi Jinping, the charge has been used extensively to silence critical voices. WHRD [Zhang Zhan](#) was [sentenced](#) to an additional four years in prison in September on such a charge. Zhang had completed in May a previous four year sentence on the same charge, related to her reporting of the authorities’ handling of the Covid pandemic in early 2020 in Wuhan. In February, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders [wrote](#) to the Chinese authorities expressing her concern over the imprisonment of seven human rights defenders serving prison sentences of ten years or more, and their conditions of detention. She also expressed concern over the continued disappearance of [Gao Zhisheng](#), whose whereabouts have remained unknown since 2017.

TARGETED FROM EVERY ANGLE

By SUARAM Malaysia

In **Malaysia**, HRDs remained subject to investigations and charges for exercising their own rights or facilitating others' exercise of constitutional freedoms of expression and assembly.

Authorities weaponised arrests as a first-line response, circumventing voluntary cooperation. This was typified by the Sedition Act arrests of student activists **Fadhil Kasim**, **Aliff Danial**, **Sabir Syarafuddin**, and **Sudirman Arshad** while at police stations on unrelated matters. **Abdul Qayyum** was arrested at home for online criticism and **Aliefah Bobby** at her workplace for her #JusticeforZara speech. Beyond arrests, police used extra-legal “intelligent statements” against student activists in Sabah to bypass Criminal Procedure Code protections. While Fadhil, Aliff and Sabir managed to refuse upon legal advice, Aliefah was denied counsel and subjected to the process in isolation. In a significant escalation, Suara Rakyat Malaysia's (SUARAM) **Sevan Doraisamy** and **Azura Nasron** were charged under Section 5 of the Protected Areas and Protected Places Act (PAPPA) for facilitating a scheduled memorandum submission at the Home Ministry — an act that initially led to Sevan's arrest. Following public scrutiny, their charges were postponed.

HRDs who were manhandled by police during protests were subsequently investigated under the Penal Code. Student activist **Ahsanul Akmal Sulam** was investigated for alleged use of force (Section 353) after an officer tore his shirt while seizing a flare. Similarly, Parti Sosialis Malaysia's **S. Arutchelvan** was investigated and arrested for alleged use of force and mischief (Section 427), despite being pushed to the ground by officers. During the Papan village forced evictions, 13 activists — including Arutchelvan and SUARAM's Jernell Tan — were arrested for alleged obstruction (Section 186) while peacefully defending residents' homes. In a separate pro-Palestinian protest, police arrested two HRDs under the same provision, despite video evidence showing officers feigning contact while one HRD attempted to de-escalate. Aside from being denied timely access to counsel in the early hours of detention, both HRDs' privacy and presumption of innocence were further violated when the police posted a video online of them being 'advised' while detained.

In 2025, HRDs faced persistent reprisals for activism. [Mukmin Nantang was investigated in February](#) under Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act regarding his exposure of the forced evictions of the Bajau Laut community. [Fadhil Kasim was charged that](#) same month under Section 9(5) of the Peaceful Assembly Act and Section 509 of the Penal Code for an anti-corruption protest, later withdrawn following outcry. Political artist **Fahmi Reza** faced a [Sabah](#) travel ban in May and [travel restriction to Singapore](#) in June, with both movement restrictions linked to his satirical artwork on the Sabah Governor.



20 April 2024, Tbilisi, Georgia — Women take part in a march against the proposed “foreign agents” law in Tbilisi.

© Guram Muradov / Civil.ge.

The abuse of national security and public safety legislation remained the primary tool for repressing dissent in the **Russian Federation** with over 1,000 individuals and organisations [designated as “foreign agents.”](#) “Undesirable organisation” laws have been used to prosecute defenders for receiving foreign funding, with digital leaks of donor information sparking further harassment and arrests, including the detention of [Aleksy Sokolov and Roman Kachanov](#) and WHRD [Larisa Zakharova](#).

In **Iran**, the situation [deteriorated](#) significantly, with HRDs, journalists, and artists facing acute risks of criminalisation. In August Iran’s Supreme Court (Branch 39) [upheld](#) the death sentence handed down to labour rights activist and WHRD [Sharifeh Mohammadi](#) on the charge of “Baghi”, or ‘the rebelling against the just Islamic ruler(s)’. In late October, the Chief Justice commuted the sentence to thirty years’ imprisonment. In September, [Dr. Abolfazl Ranjbari](#), a lawyer and professor in Tabriz, was [charged](#) via remote hearing with “espionage for the Republic of Azerbaijan” — a charge later interpreted as “Corruption on Earth”, punishable by death. This charge reportedly stemmed from his participation in an academic conference in Baku seven years prior. In September 2022, following the [nationwide protests sparked by the](#)

[killing of Mahsa Amini](#), [Dr. Abolfazl Ranjbari](#) was among 70 Iranian jurists who signed an open letter calling for the abolition of the “morality police” and the creation of an independent fact-finding commission to investigate human rights violations.⁹

In [El Salvador](#), well-known lawyer, member of [Cristosal](#) and WHRD [Ruth López](#) was arrested in May and charged with embezzlement, linked to her work fighting corruption. Shortly after her detention, prosecutors changed the charge to ‘illicit enrichment’. At the time of publication, she had [spent](#) over a year in pre-trial detention and, despite precautionary measures issued in September by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, has also been denied regular prison visits. Her pre-trial detention order was extended by six months in December and is due to expire in June 2026.

This type of disregard for legal due process, fair trial principles and a transparent justice system was visible across regions. [Togolese](#) HRD [Foly Satchivi](#) was arrested in connection with his peaceful human rights work for the third time in July, by masked, armed men in civilian clothing. After five days in detention, he was transferred to the civil prison in Lomé. The charges against him, based on a video in which he called on the population to mobilise and participate in demonstrations in June, include “spreading false news,” “disturbing public order,” and “inciting revolt,” charges frequently used to criminalise dissent. Despite having been in detention for several weeks, he was not brought before a judge, and remained in pre-trial detention without a clear legal basis until his release on bail on 31 December.

The ongoing judicial repression of HRDs in [Egypt](#) was personified by the case of [Ahmed Douma](#), who was repeatedly subjected to arbitrary arrest, surveillance, and prosecution on vague charges such as “spreading false news” as a result of his writing on human rights violations in [Egypt](#). In July 2025, he was [summoned](#) by the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP). After a lengthy interrogation, he was released on bail, but his case remains ongoing.¹⁰

The misuse of the legal system against HRDs continued to be the main barrier for the right to defend rights in [Ecuador](#). The majority of criminalisation cases occurred within the context of socio-environmental conflicts where mining projects are imposed on communities without their free, prior and informed consent. In February three community leaders were [sentenced](#) to four years’ imprisonment. [Wilfrido E.](#), [Fausto A.](#), and [Guilberto T.](#) were found guilty of violating private property, due to a complaint made by individuals connected to the Curimining S.A., the mining company that has operated the controversial Curipamba project, also known as the El Domo deposit, in Bolívar province since 2006. The criminal trial was marred by irregularities and failed to take into account the HRDs’ arguments and key evidence. The judge also restricted online participation of external observers, including national and international human rights organizations, during the final hearing.

⁹ In May 2026, he was [sentenced](#) to 22 years in prison and temporarily released on bail.

¹⁰ He was [detained](#) again in April 2026.

CONTINUED DETERIORATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION IN TUNISIA

By The Tunisian League of Human Rights¹¹

In 2025, **Tunisia** witnessed a marked deterioration in the protection of HRDs, in a context characterised by rising authoritarianism, the centralisation of executive power, and the use of the judicial and security systems to silence independent voices. The [annual report](#) of the Tunisian League for Human Rights documented this trend as a structural development that threatens the safety of defenders and undermines their ability to carry out their legitimate work.

One of the most prominent trends recorded is the criminalisation of peaceful human rights and political work, including in what have been referred to in the media as [“conspiracy” cases](#). These prosecutions have targeted HRDs, lawyers, political activists and trade unionists from various backgrounds, with harsh sentences handed down without respect for fair trial guarantees, creating a climate of fear and self-censorship within human rights circles.

The report also noted a dangerous escalation in the targeting of journalists and media professionals who are key actors in defending freedom of expression and the right to access information. Violations included imprisonment, judicial proceedings outside the legal framework governing the profession, and harassment. The [dissolution](#) of the Access to Information Authority further deprived journalists of a fundamental institutional mechanism for protection, and increased the fragility of the independent media working environment. In the same context, defenders of the rights of migrants and asylum seekers have been subjected to multiple violations for documenting serious human rights abuses against [migrants](#), especially those from sub-Saharan Africa. Violations include security threats, arbitrary detention, [criminalisation](#), and restrictions on their activities. Discriminatory and racist [official](#) media discourse has contributed to inciting hatred and increased the risks faced by these defenders.

The report documented systematic restrictions on human rights organisations and trade union associations, in an attempt to weaken their monitoring roles. This includes the [suspension](#) of their activities and the prosecution of their members on charges of financing or undermining public order, as was the case for the Tunisian General Labour Union which was subjected to smear campaigns and [attacks](#) in the context of general hostility towards trade union action. At the Tunisian institutional level, the absence of a constitutional court, the continuation of the state of emergency, and the politicisation of the judiciary have exacerbated the fragility of legal protection for defenders. Tunisia’s decision to withdraw its recognition of the jurisdiction of the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights also represented a serious setback for regional protection mechanisms and avenues of redress available to victims of human rights violations.

¹¹ In April 2026, the Tunisian League for Human Rights and Avocats Sans Frontières had their activities suspended for 30 days under Article 45 of Decree-Law 88-2011.

Defenders were also targeted through Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), where civil defamation and damages lawsuits were used to drain resources and induce self-censorship. In **Chile**, environmental defender [Gonzalo Pavez Sepúlveda](#) was declared guilty of defamation against a real estate developer in May 2025, after publishing a video highlighting negative impact of the company's activities on public health and responsibility of the head of operations, a case that triggered further legal processes against him and his colleagues.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the public energy company Elektroprivreda BiH filed a SLAPP lawsuit against defenders [Adi Selman](#) and [Nedim Musić](#), seeking compensation for alleged reputational damage after they warned of environmental risks from a thermal plant relating to plans to burn large amount of rubber. Although the case was eventually dismissed, the legal process itself served as an effective tool of harassment.

SUPPRESSION OF PROTEST

2025 saw multiple crackdowns on peaceful protest in dozens of countries, characterised by lethal violence, prolonged arbitrary detention, and the systematic criminalisation of dissent. [Peaceful protesters who hold](#) opposing viewpoints were treated as 'enemies' or 'criminals' amidst a wave of repression targeting demonstrators. The right to peacefully protest is a key mechanism which HRDs use to promote and defend a range of other human rights, and through it they can gain visibility, foster solidarity and enhance their legitimacy. However, successive steps have been taken in recent years to narrow the parameters of what is considered acceptable form of protest.

These restrictions have been institutionalised through new, sweeping legislation. States enacted laws that explicitly redefine peaceful assembly as a threat to national security or public order. In **Benin**, *Law No. 2025-19* introduced penalties of up to one year's imprisonment for organisations that hold any "political stance". Incitement to 'insults' or 'sedition' is also punishable. An *Interministerial Order* issued in **Côte d'Ivoire** in October imposed a blanket ban on all public meetings and demonstrations for two months leading up to the presidential election, while **Ecuador's** *Organic Law of National Solidarity* broadened the definition of "internal armed conflict" to include all social mobilisations, legally permitting the state to treat protesters as armed combatants. In **Peru**, a *State of Emergency* declared in October suspended freedom of assembly and authorised the deployment of the Armed Forces to patrol streets, a measure mirrored in **El Salvador** where the prolonged state of emergency has facilitated nearly 85,000 arbitrary detentions. These legislative shifts are not merely regulatory adjustments but strategic tools designed to delegitimise protest before it occurs, transforming the act of assembling from a fundamental right into a prosecutable offense.



12 October 2025, Quito, Ecuador — A military truck patrols the streets during a demonstration on the 20th day of Ecuador’s 2025 National Strike, held in protest against the government of Daniel Noboa. The march was organised as a peaceful demonstration by various social groups. Thousands of people responded to the call and gathered at the Villaflores roundabout in southern Quito.

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DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN A STATE OF EMERGENCY

By Vivian Idrovo, Alianza por los Derechos Humanos del Ecuador / Alliance for Human Rights in Ecuador

In 2025, **Ecuador** experienced deep setbacks on human rights guarantees. This is evidenced by the promulgation of unconstitutional legislation violating rights; military operations suppressing social protests, particularly those against indigenous peoples during the recent national strike; arbitrary detentions; abusive criminal laws; shortages of hospital supplies that have contributed to a severe public-health crisis; a failing militarised social-rehabilitation system where hundreds have died in custody; extrajudicial executions; enforced disappearances; and widespread impunity.

For over one year now, the country has been under a declared state of [“internal armed conflict”](#) where states of emergency are used in a manner allowing the state to use lethal force and arbitrarily detain individuals. This has created a permanent securitised environment where rights are suspended, leading to 2025 as a year of extreme violence in the history

of the country. Both criminal elements and the state apparatus have become sources of violence, corruption and repression in the current system. HRDs are not collateral damage but primary targets, facing a sophisticated, multi-fronted assault.

The executive has weaponised the legal system, using laws and investigations as tools to control those defending human rights, effectively compromising the independence of the judicial system. Laws created to combat terrorism, organised crime and money laundering such as the Social Transparency Law are instrumentalised to criminalise HRDs. Defenders face [baseless investigations](#) for “terrorist financing” and “unjustified enrichment,” alongside bank account freezes. This is a strategic use of the state’s legal power to stifle dissent. In 2025 HRDs — particularly indigenous, environmental, and protest leaders — were threatened, subjected to state surveillance, and killings, with no hope of justice. Criminalisation of environmental defenders such as those in [Las Naves](#) and [Palo Quemado](#), as well as the targeting of the anti-mining movements, demonstrates that the defence of land and the environment is treated as an economic and security threat by powerful state and corporate criminal interests. Despite this oppressive ecosystem, human rights defenders demonstrated crucial agency in 2025, notably in two key moments. Firstly, the “fifth river” of Azuay, a march with over 100,000 people in Cuenca, [showed](#) that mass mobilisation can still halt state-backed corporate mining projects. Secondly, the defence of the 2008 Constitution during the referendum on a new Constituent Assembly, was a direct democratic check on the authoritarian drift, [proving](#) that public action can defend the legal framework for rights.

In [Ecuador](#), HRDs are caught in a difficult context, where their work is framed as a threat to national security or economic interests, placing them in acute danger.

In addition to legislation, the use of excessive violence — including vehicle assaults, live ammunition, and tear gas — was a notable trend and resulted in the deaths and arbitrary detention of thousands. Despite these risks, a surge in public mobilisation occurred, driven in several countries by Gen Z, which refused to accept a status quo which they do not believe provides them with adequate life opportunities.

In Africa, the determination of some heads of state to prolong their rule caused resentment amongst a largely young population, who saw only the past on offer, rather than a future. The Gen Z movement in [Togo](#) mobilised huge demonstrations in June in response to growing frustrations with governance. Constitutional changes made in 2024 allowed for the creation of the Fifth Republic in May 2025, which in turn, permitted Faure Gnassingbé to extend his 20 year rule by assuming the position of ‘President of the Council of Ministers’, a role with no term limits. The protests were [met](#) with internet blackouts and a violent crackdown including arbitrary arrests, beatings, and reports of extrajudicial killings. In [Madagascar](#), Gen Z protests driven by widespread dissatisfaction with the economy, led to a military coup and many cases of police



4 October 2025, Antananarivo, Madagascar — A protester appeals to security forces not to fire tear gas during the seventh day of demonstrations in Anosy, Antananarivo. The protests, led by Gen Z youth, university students, artists and influencers, called for the resignation of President Andry Rajoelina.

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brutality, while in **Côte d'Ivoire**, ahead of the October elections and the decision of 84 year old President Alassane Ouattara to run for a fourth term, an Interministerial Order banned public meetings and demonstrations for two months. The following day, at least 237 people were arrested at protests.

In **Kenya**, youth-led demonstrations broke out in June, marking the anniversary of 2024's protests against tax rises in which dozens of people were killed by security forces. The 2025 protests were also triggered by the death in custody of **Albert Ojwanga**, a blogger and teacher who had been arrested for criticising a senior police officer. Anger at the perceived unaccountability of the security forces, alongside economic grievances, fuelled the protests which, once again, were [answered](#) with deadly force, mass detentions, media blackouts and the arbitrary arrest of HRDs, including **Mark Amiani**, **Mulingwa Nzau** and **Francis Mutunge Mwangi**. In a July report, the Independent Police Oversight Authority (IPOA) documented 65 deaths, as well as the injury of 342 civilians and 171 police officers. The [report](#) highlighted “significant breaches of constitutional policing standards, including use of disproportionate force, lack of professionalism, and failure to uphold public safety and rights”. It further pointed

to the use of ‘goons’ to infiltrate the process, which “undermined the principles of peaceful assembly and contributed to escalation of violence, injuries, and fatalities.” In a comment which raises questions about the openness of the political establishment in **Kenya** to thoroughly investigate events and address allegations of excessive use of force by police, the Cabinet Secretary at the Ministry of the Interior rejected the criticisms in the report, [stating](#) “I am warning IPOA against passing judgment before investigations conclude.”

Between August and September, thousands of young **Indonesians** took to the streets to call for higher minimum wages, stronger job security, fair labour and tax reforms, and the passage of key laws to protect workers’ rights and democratic participation. The protests — which spread across 18 provinces and 39 subdistricts — were [marked](#) by police brutality and unlawful crowd-control tactics. The crackdown resulted in at least 10 civilian deaths, over 400 severe injuries, and approximately 4,000 arbitrary arrests. In the months following, HRDs accused of fomenting the protests, including [Adetya ‘Dera’ Pramadira](#) and [Fathul Munif](#), were faced with targeted repression, red-tagging, digital surveillance, and baseless criminal accusations. They were [arrested](#) under vague and overly broad provisions, such as “incitement” under Article 160 of the Criminal Code and ‘hate speech’ under the Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE) law.

Youth-led protests also erupted in **Morocco** across Rabat, Casablanca, Agadir, Oujda, Tangier, and Fes, protesting the deterioration of social and economic rights. The state response was [brutal](#): security forces employed vehicle assaults against crowds, killing some protesters, while thousands of young people, including minors, were arbitrarily detained. In **Occupied Western Sahara**, a number of peaceful assemblies in Laayoune were [violently dispersed](#) by the Moroccan authorities, including an attempted peaceful protest on International Human Rights Day on 10 December.

Protests triggered by inflation, the collapse in the value of the rial and the price of food began in **Iran** in late December, with the demonstrations spreading to dozens of cities by year end. The millions who would gather in the streets by mid-January 2026 would be met with one of the most brutal crackdowns in Iranian history, leaving tens of thousands of people dead or injured and thousands more arrested.

In **Peru**, massive demonstrations in October led to a 30-day state of emergency in Lima, authorising the Armed Forces to patrol streets; the crackdown resulted in dozens of injuries, the death of one protester, and the targeting of journalists covering the unrest. During a national strike in **Ecuador**, civil society [documented](#) over 473 injuries, 206 detentions, and 16 temporary disappearances. At least three people were killed, including Kichwa indigenous leader [Efrain Fierrez](#), farmer [Jose Alberto Guamán Izam](#), and [Saraguro woman Rosa Elena Paqui](#), who died of cardiorespiratory arrest caused by tear gas inhalation. The repression of protests extended to the press, with journalists facing targeted violence and legal persecution. At least 55 journalists were attacked during the national strike, including indigenous reporter [Edison Muenala](#), who was shot by the armed forces. In **Guatemala**, arrest warrants were [issued](#) in April against indigenous leader [Héctor Chaclán](#) and three other leaders of the 48

Cantones de Totonicapán, an indigenous Mayan organisation and legitimate authority of the people of Totonicapán in western **Guatemala**. The HRDs were accused of sedition, terrorism, illicit association, and obstruction of justice in charges which were widely viewed as a reprisal for their legitimate exercise of the right to protest and peaceful resistance.

2025 also saw waves of popular mobilisations in **Argentina**, marked by police repression and criminalisation of protesters and social movements. One such group were retirees who held weekly demonstrations in front of Congress to demand an increase of their pensions that would compensate for inflation and the decline in purchasing power. These demonstrations — held every Wednesday — generated significant public attention but no engagement by the government. Instead, Javier Milei’s administration responded with institutional violence, ordering a heavy police presence and controls around Parliament on the grounds of maintaining public order. On several occasions demonstrations were broken up by the police, with more than 100 protesters arrested and dozens of older participants hurt. Several journalists and photojournalists were injured by pepper spray and other projectiles while covering the protests.

In **South Asia**, the administrative proscription of organisations including the **Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM)** in **Pakistan** and the **Moolvasi Bachao Manch (MBM)** in **India** has created a legal framework where association with a human rights movement or engaging in peaceful protests leads to serious negative legal and administrative consequences. These include bans on travel, difficulties in accessing banking services and restrictions of other civic rights without judicial review. In Pakistan, prominent defenders linked to the **Baloch Yakjeeti Committee** were listed under the *4th Schedule of the Anti-Terror Act*, an administrative process that renders individuals devoid of basic civic rights. **Beebarg Zehri** was detained during a violent home raid, while Gulzadi Baloch faced extreme violence during her arrest. Meanwhile in **Bangladesh**, student protesters continued to be charged, even under the transition government.

The legislative assault on the right to protest in Europe has taken a distinctly technological, administrative quality. In the **United Kingdom**, the *Crime and Policing Bill* introduced in February further narrowed the scope of lawful protest by criminalising specific actions such as climbing war memorials, using flares, or concealing one’s identity in police-designated areas, with penalties of up to one month’s imprisonment. In **Italy**, *Security Decree No. 1236*, approved by the Senate in June, introduced stricter penalties for non-violent offences during protests such as property damage or road blockades, and granted greater impunity to police. In **Germany**, Berlin’s amendment to the *General Security and Order Act* has authorised police to use AI software to analyse video data and identify “suspicious behaviour patterns” during protests, intensify digital surveillance (including access to end-to-end communications), and install monitoring software on devices — effectively merging protest policing with mass surveillance. In March, the Munich Public Prosecutor’s Office filed a criminal case against five members of climate action group Last Generation under Section 129 of the German Criminal Code, accusing them of forming a criminal organisation. Concerns about the use of this ‘disproportionate’ charge against peaceful climate activists and its potential to cause “a wider

criminalising and chilling impact on climate justice activism as a whole” were [raised](#) by UN human rights experts with the German government. The European human rights [framework](#) and the Human Rights Committee’s [interpretation](#) of the right of peaceful assembly both make clear that protest is a protected democratic right, and that restrictions must be exceptional, lawful, necessary, proportionate, and limited to legitimate aims.

The repression of protests in 2025 was not applied uniformly; it was deeply intersectional, with women, Indigenous peoples, LGBTIQ+ defenders, and youth facing disparate and compounded forms of violence designed to exploit their specific vulnerabilities. WHRDs bore the brunt of gendered violence, particularly in custody. In **Italy**, seven female defenders were [subjected](#) to degrading gender-based abuse, including being forced to undress and squat with doors open under the supervision of male officers. In **Mexico**, WHRD **Estela Hernández Jiménez** [suffered](#) physical and sexual violence by police while documenting the arbitrary detention of youths. In **Türkiye**, [reports](#) emerged of sexual abuse and harassment against female protesters. Indigenous defenders were targeted with a specific intensity aimed at erasing their territorial rights and cultural existence; in **Ecuador**, indigenous leader **Efraín Fúerez** and **José Alberto Guamán Izama** were [killed](#) during the national strike, while in **Panama**, Ngäbe-Buglé communities [faced](#) house-to-house persecution and pellet gunfire designed to repress legitimate protests against the potential reopening of the Cobre Panamá mine. A one-year-old indigenous girl [died](#) from tear gas inhalation. In **Pakistan**, the state employed “collective punishment” as a tactic against Baloch and Pashtun defenders, [arresting](#) and disappearing family members — including the fathers of **Beebow Baloch** and **Dr. Sabiha Baloch** — to coerce silence, while **Dr. Mahrang Baloch** was [denied](#) medical treatment in prison.

ONLINE RISK: DIGITAL ATTACKS, SURVEILLANCE AND HARRASSMENT

HRDs were targeted online through a sophisticated ecosystem of surveillance, algorithmic manipulation, and cyber-violence. States and non-state actors increasingly relied on digital tools to fabricate evidence, smear defenders, and justify their arrests. This trend was characterised by the convergence of artificial intelligence (AI), restrictive legislation, and the deliberate disruption of connectivity. The most common violations reported by HRDs through Front Line Defenders’ digital protection programme were: online surveillance or censorship (12.8% of all recorded digital violations); threats/harassment on social media (12.3%); phone surveillance (11.2%); threat of confiscation or interrogation (10%); and confiscated or destroyed devices (7.9%).

Front Line Defenders supported many cases in which deepfakes were used to damage the reputation of defenders, depicting them in fabricated scenarios such as sexually explicit situations, associating them with radical political statements, implicating them in financial fraud, or portraying them as agents for foreign influence. Across all regions, women, LGBTIQ+

defenders and indigenous human rights defenders were disproportionately targeted with sexualised or identity-based deepfakes designed to shame, discredit, or isolate them within their communities. Generative AI has allowed hostile actors to orchestrate defamatory campaigns in split-seconds, which can cause a break in trust between the targeted HRD and their current and potential audiences. Across all regions, content manipulated by AI is being used to undermine HRDs and the positions they defend, yet they most often do not have the resources to counteract such campaigns.

In **Kazakhstan**, WHRD [Bakhytzhana Toregozhina](#) was charged with ‘disseminating false information’ in relation to a series of Facebook [posts](#) in which the WHRD raised concerns over the deteriorating health and ongoing hunger strike of a political activist. Whilst in the process of being [criminalised](#), a number of AI-generated images that mocked her appearance and portrayed her in a derogatory manner were posted online. The attackers falsely claimed to have evidence of her requesting financial incentives for her human rights work from a potential beneficiary. LGBTIQ+ defender [Ardzh Tursynkan](#) was also subjected to a smear campaign where AI-generated content was created to mock and degrade him in an effort to undermine his credibility.

[Martha Lía Grajales](#) was targeted in **Venezuela** by a [defamation campaign](#) aimed at discrediting her human rights work and justify her arbitrary detention and ongoing criminal case against her. As part of the defamation campaign, a video created with artificial intelligence was published to support the narrative that her human rights work is merely a cover for plotting against the government. The video was widely shared on social media and WhatsApp, with its dissemination amplified by coordinated networks of digital actors carrying out and amplifying such attacks.

In **Türkiye**, youth and LGBTIQ+ human rights defender [Enes Hocaoğulları](#) [faced](#) a widespread smear and hate online campaign after participating as **Türkiye’s** youth delegate to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, where he delivered several speeches. The campaign was marked by intersectional hate targeting both his activism and his sexual orientation, with attackers labelling him a traitor and foreign agent, and accusing him of seeking to “spread LGBTIQ+ ideology.”

Beyond disinformation, the digital space became a site of coordinated harassment and doxing, often inciting offline, violence particularly against WHRDs, indigenous and LGBTIQ+ defenders. In **Syria**, the Facebook account of WHRD [Hiba Ezzideen Al-Hajji](#) was hijacked or mimicked to launch a [defamation campaign](#) that urged followers to burn down her organisation’s centre and harm her family. In **Bangladesh**, research commissioned by Front Line Defenders revealed that online harassment had evolved from isolated incidents into systemic, coordinated campaigns targeting defenders of women’s, indigenous, and LGBTIQ+ rights following the 2024 political transition. In **Guatemala**, community media outlets *Prensa Comunitaria* and *Ruda*, made up of individuals of Mayan origin, [faced](#) sustained cyberattacks, including attempts to access reporters’ private data and delete journalistic content, most likely as a result of their

work exposing structural violence, violence against women, racial discrimination and forced migration. Co-founder of *Prensa Comunitaria* [Nelson Rivera](#) was specifically targeted with intimidation and calls for his detention.

There remains a significant gap in sustained and meaningful engagement between technology companies and the communities affected by their platforms. Although some channels exist for human rights organisations working with HRDs at risk, direct dialogue between companies and affected communities and human rights defenders is largely absent. This limits companies' understanding of the real-world impacts of their systems on HRDs and undermines the effectiveness of risk mitigation measures. In this context, civil society organisations are often placed in a role of informal intermediaries, providing support to HRDs in, for instance, restoring accounts hacked or suspended, or trying to take down defamatory posts. However, responses from platforms may be delayed, generic, or entirely absent, and in some cases, interpretations of platform policies may be influenced by political considerations. This further complicates access to remedy and effective protection.

Furthermore, the [rollback](#) of Diversity, Equality and Inclusion policies in Big Tech has narrowed support avenues available for HRDs exposed to online harassment, as entire teams in major social media platforms have been diluted or disbanded. In addition to fewer channels of support, there is also now [less expertise](#) on human rights and, in particular, human rights defenders. Context-blind automated moderation frequently removes human rights documentation, images, videos, and testimonies of abuses, while leaving up coordinated harassment and hate campaigns targeting defenders.

Advanced surveillance and tracking was widely used, with state and non-state actors alike dedicating significant resources to track human rights defenders. While **China** is [widely known](#) for its use of AI-enhanced tools to identify dissenters and ethnic minorities, emerging reports suggest that other states, including **India**, are utilising AI-driven mapping technologies to systematically identify and track human rights defenders, creating a digital “panopticon” effect where the mere act of organising online becomes a risk. In India, security forces have started [using](#) software that predicts where crimes may occur and who the perpetrators may be. This practice, as highlighted by [Tripti Bhushan](#), is deeply problematic because it “reallocates discretionary authority from the judiciary and police to impenetrable algorithms with no accountability”.

Intelligence cells from **Nicaragua** operating in **Costa Rica** and elsewhere [intercepted communications and conducted digital surveillance](#) on exiled defenders, including those supported by Fundación Sin Límites, to map and monitor their transnational networks. Crucially, these tactics extend to the infiltration of supposedly secure communication channels. In the **United States**, the FBI [infiltrated](#) a private Signal group chat used by migrant rights defenders in New York City to monitor immigration cases. Confidential information extracted from this encrypted channel was subsequently used in law enforcement reports that labelled these

defenders as “extremist actors”, demonstrating how state actors are bypassing technical security measures to compromise the safety of those relying on digital tools for protection.

Many HRDs and human rights organisations have no choice but to use equipment that has stopped receiving technical support due to planned obsolescence policies of technology companies. This situation places them in a state of critical vulnerability to digital threats, aggravated by the difficulties they face in obtaining funding for the purchase of new hardware or software licenses.

This digital surveillance apparatus is particularly lethal in conflict zones and for defenders in marginalised communities. In **Sudan**, the ongoing conflict saw both warring parties establish dedicated electronic units to monitor social media, hack emails, and spread disinformation. Defenders were frequently accused of “supporting the enemy” based on innocuous online posts, while fake pages impersonating them were used to publish private photos and incite hate speech, exploiting defenders’ lack of digital literacy and outdated devices. Defenders like **A.A.** (a trade union activist) and **M.A.** (a defender in Kampala) were targeted based on intelligence gathered from their digital footprints, with militias routinely checking phones at checkpoints to extract data on victims and collaborators.

The boundary between physical and digital surveillance often blurs in the spaces where human rights defenders are operating, with raids often resulting in the seizure of critical digital tools. In **Morocco**, security forces [raided](#) the homes of **Sahrawi defenders** from **ASVDH** and **CODESA**, confiscating documentation equipment to disrupt their monitoring work. In **Guinea Conakry**, a journalist going by the pseudonym of **Sally** had her home broken into and her phone confiscated, cutting her off from her networks and exposing information regarding the communities she serves.

The role of technology firms further illustrates this convergence. In 2025, a list of companies aiding **Israel’s settlement enterprise** and [military actions](#) in the **OPT** was published by the United Nations. It was identified that human rights defenders working to document violations, challenge dispossession, or support affected communities were often perceived as disrupting these systems and may face surveillance, harassment, arbitrary detention, and other forms of retaliation. Partnerships involving companies, including Palantir Technologies, highlight how data-driven tools are being integrated into security operations.

Internet shutdowns and infrastructure attacks were used by states to isolate defenders and prevent documentation. The civil society [#KeptOn](#) coalition [recorded](#) 52 states where internet shutdowns occurred in 2025. In **Togo**, data confirmed a deliberate filtering of content on YouTube, Facebook, and Signal during the June protests, [obstructing](#) activists from coordinating safe passage or documenting police violence. In **Sudan**, telecommunications were disrupted in RSF-controlled areas, [forcing](#) reliance on Starlink, which was reportedly controlled by RSF intelligence, effectively censoring the reporting of violations.

A CRISES OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR VIOLATIONS PERPETRATED AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN ESWATINI

By Swaziland Human Rights Defenders Network

Across Eswatini, the period 2024–2025 has been marked by an intensification of state repression against human rights defenders, particularly those organising around governance, justice, women’s rights and digital freedoms. Swaziland Human Rights Defenders Network’s (SHRDN) monitoring through our Early Warning Mechanism [report](#) show that civic space continues to shrink, with defenders increasingly targeted through arbitrary arrests, trumped-up charges, warrant-less home raids, and persistent surveillance by state security agencies.

One key trend is the entrenchment of digital repression. HRDs are routinely subjected to the monitoring of phones and social media accounts, confiscation of digital devices, and coercive questioning about online activities. The Computer Crime and Cybercrime Act (2022) has been used formally and informally to intimidate defenders, with police officers demanding access to private communications during raids and interrogations. Women HRDs, in particular, face gendered online harassment, including threats aimed at silencing criticism of state abuses.

Defenders documenting protests or politically sensitive events have continued to face violent reprisals. Several HRDs reported being shot with rubber bullets or assaulted while monitoring demonstrations, echoing past patterns of militarised policing. SHRDN documented multiple instances of home raids without warrants, often involving armed officers who seize devices, interrogate family members, and link defenders’ work to “subversive activities.” These attacks create a climate of fear that disrupts legitimate human rights monitoring.

Another emerging concern is the criminalisation of community-level defenders, especially those advocating for land rights, accountability, and participation in local governance structures. These grassroots HRDs often lack visibility and face threats from both state agents and powerful local actors. Their cases are under-reported yet form one of the highest-risk groups in the country.

Despite these challenges, HRDs continue to demonstrate resilience through informal protection networks, rapid-response support, and strengthened peer-to-peer security practices.

WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS (WHRDS): INTERSECTIONAL THREATS AND COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE

WHRDs working across multiple issues continue to face intersecting and distinctively gendered threats. In 2025, these attacks were associated with significant democratic and rights setbacks, where governments and corporate interests increasingly acted in ways that undermined protections for women's and minorities' rights. Fuelled by organised anti-gender movements and the profit-driven expansion of extractive and tech industries, state and non-state actors have deployed a coordinated arsenal to silence WHRDs challenging the status quo. Across the globe, WHRDs were subjected to sexual violence, rape, and sexualised harassment both online and offline as tools of intimidation, punishment, and economic dispossession.

Indigenous women and those defending minority rights face intersectional violence that combines racism, sexism, and the defence of territory. In **Guatemala**, women from the Chirrix Tzul community, including members of the [Comité Campesino del Altiplano](#) (CCDA), have been subjected to sexual assault, forced eviction, and criminalisation by armed groups linked to land grabbing. In **Argentina**, the government has rolled back women's rights while judicially harassing WHRDs defending indigenous peoples' rights. This occurred amid a wider pattern of criminalisation of the Mapuche Tehuelche people, which intensified when a judge ordered 12 simultaneous raids on communities and private homes in the Andes Mountains of Chubut Province. In a violent operation involving up to 200 officers, numerous abuses and irregularities were committed, culminating in the [arrest](#) of WHRD [Victoria Núñez](#) at the Pillañ Mahuiza Mapuche community. Núñez, the only person to be arrested in the raids, was detained on fabricated charges of participating in an arson attack, despite GPS data and witness testimony proving she was 80 kilometres away from the incident site at the time.

In **Afghanistan**, **DRC**, and **Sudan**, WHRDs were at the forefront of resistance, paying a heavy price for their courage. In conflict-affected regions, WHRDs face the dual burden of generalised violence and targeted gendered attacks, often serving as the sole providers of humanitarian aid and documentation where international mechanisms are absent. In the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, the escalation of conflict since January 2025 has placed WHRDs on the frontlines of a humanitarian catastrophe. Six WHRDs from a grassroots peace organisation in Fizi and Mwenga were arrested, interrogated, and later abducted by the Twigwaneho armed group; the WHRD [Nabwija Furaisha](#) was executed in front of her colleagues April. In **Sudan**, WHRDs faced threats of kidnapping their children and sexual violence by security forces; a young woman human rights defender who was supporting people with disabilities and facilitating their relocation between villages in Aljazera and Wed Madani was targeted by the RSF. As she moved from village to village distributing aid, an RSF officer detained her and raped her several times. This case is emblematic of how WHRDs are accused of supporting one warring faction (SAF) when in one territory, and the opposing



2025, Nouakchott, Mauritania — Human rights defender and anti-slavery activist Warda Ahmed Souleimane in a cell at Nouakchott Women's Prison.

© Private

faction (RSF) when in another, with their bodies becoming extensions of the [battlefields](#).

Similar patterns are evident in **Myanmar**, where WHRDs documenting ethnic cleansing and military atrocities face arbitrary detention and sexual violence by armed groups. In **Afghanistan**, four years after the Taliban takeover, HRDs, especially women, continue to find ways to engage in human rights work and speak out against Taliban policies. As [reported](#) by the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan, “one of the most visible manifestations of Taliban repression has been the systematic targeting of women human rights defenders, lawyers, protesters, journalists and their allies through harassment, arbitrary

arrests, detention and ill-treatment.” WHRDs operating underground face the total erasure of their rights and the risk of extrajudicial killing by the Taliban. Afghan defenders have also been forcibly deported from **Pakistan** and denied visa extensions, despite documented violence and risk of reprisals in Afghanistan, especially against women and girls.

Beyond the physical violence, WHRDs faced criminalisation, harassment and intimidation. In **Mauritania**, anti-slavery activist [Warda Ahmed Souleimane](#) was [arrested](#) following a call for peaceful mobilisation against systemic discrimination. Journalist and writer [Pham Doan Trang](#) [marked](#) her fifth year of a nine-year sentence in **Vietnam** for “anti-state propaganda” in relation to an [investigation](#) she published on the circumstances around a land dispute which resulted in a deadly police raid on a village near Hanoi in 2020. In **Serbia**, [Ljiljana Nešić](#), president of the women's rights organisation Žene Za Mir (Women for Peace), [faced](#) a targeted home invasion and ransacking in Leskovac in December. The attack occurred days after she appeared on television highlighting the number of femicides in Leskovac and Jablanica districts, and the failure of authorities to protect women and combat gender-based violence. Unidentified individuals broke into her home, and ransacked it, but stole nothing, indicating the attack was a deliberate act of intimidation rather than a burglary. This incident forms part of a sustained pattern of harassment against Nešić and her colleague [Marija Trajković](#), which over the years has included cyber-attacks, smear campaigns, physical stalking, and non-verbal threats such as damaging their vehicles and making their pets disappear.

TARGETING AND RETALIATION AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN WESTERN SAHARA

By Association for the Protection of Saharan Prisoners in Moroccan Prisons (LPPS)

The Moroccan authorities continued their reprisals against Sahrawi human rights defenders, who are the only witnesses to the human rights violations taking place in the occupied territory of **Western Sahara**. This is particularly significant as the authorities continue to [close](#) the territory to foreign missions.

Sahrawi defenders and activists have been subjected to arbitrary arrests and detention. The latest example of this targeting was the arrest of Sahrawi students **Salah al-Din al-Sabbar** and **Ibrahim Babit** in Agadir, **Morocco**, on 5 December 2025, in retaliation for their student activism. On 17 December 2025, the two students were sentenced to eight months in prison. They join 31 other imprisoned Sahrawi HRDs scattered throughout Moroccan prisons who have received prison sentences ranging up to life imprisonment. Among the detainees are 18 HRDs known as **the Gdeim Izik prisoners**, who have been the subject of numerous international and UN reports documenting the violations they have endured, including arbitrary detention, inhumane treatment, and torture.¹² This situation extends to other detained HRDs and their families, who are often subjected to discriminatory and retaliatory measures when visiting prisons.

The Moroccan authorities continue to criminalise freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and association in **Western Sahara**. In the few cases where Sahrawi defenders and activists are able to take to the streets to demonstrate, they are met with [excessive force and violence](#) by Moroccan police forces and other groups in plain clothes. Many Sahrawi women human rights defenders and protesters have been targeted during demonstrations, a practice condemned by eight UN Special Rapporteurs in a [joint communication](#) sent to the Moroccan authorities in March 2025. The Moroccan authorities also continue to deny Sahrawi HRDs the right to organise and establish associations. The few organisations that had been allowed to operate, such as **ASVDH**, have been [shut down](#), prevented from working, and had their executive offices raided. The organisation **CODESA** was recently [prevented](#) from holding its general meeting, had its president's house [attacked](#), and its members harassed.

Economic reprisals are a source of great concern for Sahrawi defenders, as the Moroccan authorities continue to retaliate against them by preventing them from working. This is the case for Sahrawi HRD **Mhamed Hali**, winner of the Front Line Defenders [Award](#) for HRDs at Risk in 2025, and who Moroccan authorities continually have prevented from practising law despite international [condemnation](#). In addition, many defenders have been dismissed from their jobs with the complicity of the Moroccan Judiciary. This includes the case of defender **Abdelrahman Zio**, President of the League for the Protection of Sahrawi Prisoners, who was dismissed from his job at the Moroccan Ministry of Housing and prevented from retiring, a decision upheld in a ruling by the Administrative Court of Rabat on 29 July 2025.

¹² <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=30219>

LGBTIQ+ RIGHTS DEFENDERS

LGBTIQ+ defenders continued to face threats for advocating for the right to live openly and freely. This also impacts on how they engage in advocacy and report attacks against them; multiple cases of attacks against LGBTIQ+ defenders occurred in 2025 which Front Line Defenders cannot publicly report on due to the risk the defenders still face.

Across the globe, states deployed a coordinated strategy of criminalisation and erasure, increasingly [labelling](#) international LGBTIQ+ movements and members as “extremist” or “foreign agents” to delegitimise their work and justify the dissolution of local organisations. This narrative is weaponised alongside restrictive foreign funding laws, which unduly frame international solidarity as a threat to national sovereignty, leading to the forced closure of NGOs, the freezing of assets, and the detention of LGBTIQ+ defenders under the guise of combating “foreign interference”.

“Pro-family” rhetoric and morality laws are being used to dismantle the critical work and legal existence of LGBTIQ+ defenders and their organisations. This trend represents an expansion beyond social stigma to include state-sanctioned criminalisation, where the mere act of organising or advocating for gender diversity is framed as a threat to national security or public order. In **Türkiye**, the government declared 2025 the “Year of the Family” to combat “genderlessness”, leading to the court-ordered [dissolution](#) of the organisation Genç LGBTI+ on grounds of “obscenity” for social media illustrations, while in **Hungary**, Pride marches were effectively banned through legislative amendment. In **Romania**, the Oradea City Hall refused to authorise a Pride march for the third consecutive year, blocking activists with security forces and issuing fines. In the **United States**, nearly 200 state-level bills restrict gender-affirming care, while the elimination of federal protections has emboldened conservative actors to target defenders with impunity. In **Burkina Faso**, the new *Code of Persons and the Family* explicitly criminalises “homosexuality and related practices” with prison terms of up to 10 years, creating a legal framework that legitimises violence against the community. In **Kazakhstan**, efforts to adopt a law against so-called “LGBT propaganda” [moved forward](#), with the Lower House of Parliament voting through legislative amendments in November. These amendments would ban the “dissemination of information containing propaganda of non-traditional sexual orientation and paedophilia” in the media and online. The debate and voting process lasted a total of 15 minutes. The bill is currently pending in the Senate.

*These legal frameworks do not exist in a vacuum, and the rollback on protections has also been reflected in the high level of physical violence faced by LGBTIQ+ defenders, characterised by extreme brutality, torture, sexual violence, and [trans-femicides intended](#) to erase trans identities and deter collective action. A stark example is the case of [María Mendoza Lucas](#), a trans woman, dancer, and Indigenous land defender in Oaxaca, **Mexico**, who was [disappeared](#) in October 2025 for six months. Her targeting highlights the intersectional risks faced by trans Indigenous women who challenge extractive economies and are denied rights based on their trans identities. Since 2016, the Human Rights Defenders Memorial has documented 55*



28 June 2025, Budapest, Hungary — People march during the Gay Pride parade. Despite a law introduced by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán banning it, thousands of members of Hungary’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex LGBTQ+ community paraded to celebrate diversity.

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trans-femicides of (W)HRDs in Latin America, with cases in **Mexico**, **Colombia**, and **Honduras**, among others.

In **Ghana**, the defender **Texas** faced an arson attempt on his home and eviction threats after staging a demonstration against the Anti-LGBTIQ+ Bill. In **Türkiye**, activists participating in banned Pride marches faced police violence, arbitrary arrests, and reports of sexual abuse and harassment in detention, illustrating the role of state forces in physically punishing sexual and gender minorities.

The digital realm has become a primary battlefield where LGBTIQ+ defenders are targeted with doxing and deepfakes to delegitimise their work before physical attack or criminalisation occur. In **Tunisia** in February, trans WHRD **Mira Ben Salah** was subjected to a smear campaign and doxing that extended to her family, yet state authorities failed to provide protection against the incitement of violence. In October the organisation she works for, Damj — the Tunisian Association for Justice and Equality, declared a ‘Queer State of Emergency’ following the arrest of 71 LGBTIQ+ persons, “most of whom are transgender women”.

Despite the escalating risks, national protection mechanisms frequently fail to recognise the specific vulnerabilities of LGBTIQ+ defenders, leading to institutional exclusion and police complicity in violence. Such defenders are often forced to rely on their communities for protection from violence and support, especially in instances where national protection mechanisms do not cater to their specific needs and risks. Across the globe, the absence of public policies that recognise LGBTIQ+ people as rights-holders, combined with the systematic denial of their identity by state institutions, leaves defenders without legal recourse or safety guarantees.

TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION AND REFOULEMENT

The reach of states across borders to harass, intimidate and harm HRDs remained a notable trend last year. Sudanese defenders fleeing to neighbouring countries continued to be targeted, with nearly all requesting anonymity for fear of further reprisals. In Kampala, **Uganda**, an exiled defender was left unconscious after an attack by unknown assailants who threatened to kill him if he continued his work. In another case, a WHRD received threats from RSF-affiliated group that her daughters would be kidnapped. In **Chad**, a founder of a human rights initiative was detained on fabricated charges and, upon release, received death threats from RSF security officers. Another women's rights defender was arrested in **Chad** and taken to El Geneina by the RSF, where she was interrogated and beaten. In December [Hisham Ali Mohammad Ali](#), also known as Husham Ali (Wad galeba), was [stabbed](#) twice in Addis Ababa, **Ethiopia**, in what appears to be a targeted attack because of his vocal criticism of the human rights violations perpetrated by both sides in the conflict.

TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION IN EUROPE

By Basma Mostafa, Law and Democracy Support Foundation

Transnational Repression (TNR) is increasingly used by repressive states to silence human rights defenders (HRDs) and journalists in exile. At the Law and Democracy Support Foundation (LDSF), we document [Egypt's multi-layered](#) TNR practices. The following cases illustrate the [central](#) patterns:

- **Ahmed Salem**, Director of the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights and a **UK**-based HRD, has been [targeted](#) since February 2024 following his organisation's reporting on military activity and the construction of a fortified zone in North Sinai. State aligned media accused him of espionage, while intermediaries close to Egyptian security agencies warned he would be "brought back to **Egypt**," with a government-aligned Sinai clan leader asserting he "is not far from reach even abroad." His family inside Egypt remains at risk.



4 December 2025, Brussels, Belgium — Egyptian WHRD Basma Mostafa of Law and Democracy Support Foundation addresses the European Parliament on transnational repression,

© European Parliament, courtesy of LDSF

- **Karim Abdelrady**, a Berlin-based human rights lawyer and Executive Director of LDSF, has also been targeted through proxy retaliation, with a relative in **Egypt** arbitrarily detained for nearly 18 months in direct reprisal for his human rights work. After participating in a peaceful protest against President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s 2022 official visit to Berlin, Abdelrady was subjected to surveillance, and later received direct threats, including warnings that his children could be harmed.

- **Basma Mostafa**, a Berlin-based HRD and Director of Programs at LDSF, has faced one of the most extensively documented TNR campaigns. Before fleeing **Egypt** in 2020, she survived repeated arrests and an enforced disappearance for reporting on police abuses. After exile, she was interrogated, surveilled, and faced attempts at forced return in **Lebanon** and **Kenya**. In **Germany**, she endured physical assault, stalking, doxing, digital attacks, and gender based threats. A German police report [linked](#) her 2022 attacker to an Egyptian diplomat, providing rare contemporaneous evidence of embassy linked intimidation on German soil. Her case has been officially recognised in an [allegation letter signed by five UN Special Procedures mandate holders](#), who described her situation as “continued harassment and transnational repression by Egyptian State agents or actors operating on their behalf or with their acquiescence.”

Threats [escalated](#) after her attacker's 2025 [arrest](#) in the **UK**, including messages promising “punishment” and kidnapping. In June 2024, while conducting advocacy with UN bodies in Geneva, she was followed to her hotel and directly threatened with arrest by a man claiming to be a police officer, an incident reported to **Swiss** authorities and cited by UN mandates as part of her transnational repression case. Her case was later included in the [UN Secretary-General's reprisals](#) report, confirming that she was targeted for engaging with UN mechanisms.

Beyond HRD cases, LDSF has documented broader patterns targeting [political opponents](#), [academics](#), and [researchers](#) through proxy intimidation, digital harassment, surveillance, smear campaigns, consular obstruction, and the weaponisation of in absentia trials producing terrorism-related sentences without due process. **Egypt's** *Terrorist Entities Law (Law No. 8/2015)* has also become a central legal tool in this system of Transnational repression, applied not only inside Egypt but increasingly against defenders in exile. The law enables authorities to place individuals on terrorism lists, impose renewable [three-year](#) blacklisting, freeze assets and civil registry status, and obstruct access to passports and essential documents turning what was presented as counter-terrorism legislation into a punitive mechanism targeting Egyptians abroad as well as those inside the country. We further note that Egyptian diplomatic missions have been misused as operational [hubs](#) for TNR, in parallel with cross border [security cooperation](#) with **Lebanon**, **Tunisia**, **Kenya**, and **Türkiye**. As a founding member of the [Coalition Against Transnational Repression](#) in Germany, LDSF contributed to securing the German government's first ever acknowledgment of TNR in its [May 2025 coalition agreement](#) and co-authored a [policy paper](#) outlining concrete protection and accountability measures for host states. While these recommendations were designed for **Germany**, they are applicable to any European country hosting exiled human rights defenders.

Meanwhile, states increasingly abandoned applying the principles of *non-refoulement* for defenders, in favour of a transactional approach to transnational repression. Once regarded as sanctuary for defenders at risk, **Thailand** has increased its cooperation with governments in the region. This was starkly illustrated by the refoulement of Vietnamese HRD [Y Quynh Bdap](#) from Bangkok in November. He faces a 10-year prison sentence on terrorism charges linked to his work promoting the rights of Montagnard indigenous peoples. This protection gap was also mirrored across South Asia, where **India** has escalated threats against Rohingya refugees through [forcible deportation](#), and **Pakistan** has [returned](#) Afghan defenders to **Afghanistan** where they face imminent risk of arbitrary [arrest](#), torture and imprisonment under the Taliban.

Compounding these regional webs is **China's** use of “long-arm jurisdiction”, which extends its repressive reach beyond borders through surveillance, harassment of defenders' families, and diplomatic pressure to silence overseas critics, ensuring that even physical distance offers no sanctuary. In December, Carmen Lau, a pro-democracy campaigner from **Hong Kong**, based in the **UK**, was [targeted](#) by a sophisticated and gendered smear campaign in which deepfake pornography was sent to her neighbours.

Collaboration among states to target defenders was also seen in July when **Beninese** journalist and HRD **Hugues Comlan Sosoukpe** was arrested in Abidjan, **Côte d'Ivoire**, and handed over to the Beninese authorities. The HRD had held refugee status in **Togo** since 2021 and was detained while participating in an event organised by the Ivorian government to which he had been invited. He remains in detention, facing charges of inciting rebellion, inciting hatred and violence, harassment through electronic communication, and apology for terrorism.

CRIMINALISATION OF SOLIDARITY

The continued practice of criminalising solidarity manifested in both the targeting of migrants' rights defenders and of pro-Palestine activists.

MIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

HRDs working for the rights of asylum seekers and people on the move were targeted in a number of countries, including **Poland**, **Latvia** and **Bulgaria** in a context of securitisation. As governments intensified efforts to build both physical and legal barriers at their borders, HRDs providing life-saving humanitarian assistance or legal support were subject to harassment, smear campaigns, fines, arrests, judicial harassment and often charged with organising or aiding persons to illegally enter the country (human smuggling). In **Bulgaria**, authorities increased their pressure on border solidarity groups who provide humanitarian aid to people stuck at the **Bulgaria-Türkiye** border. HRDs working in an organisation active at the border reported to Front Line Defenders that their rescue teams were repeatedly stopped and their equipment seized by the border police. They were detained, sometimes without access to a lawyer for 24 hours, and were effectively prevented from reaching people in distress.

In North America and the Caribbean, migrants rights defenders were criminalised and publicly stigmatised. In August, founder of the Centre for Human Dignity A.C., **Luis García Villagrán**, was arrested in Chiapas in **Mexico** and detained for six days, linked to his work in defence of the human rights of migrants. The day after his detention, the Mexican President stated that the HRD was "not an activist", and is "linked to human trafficking". In their ruling against bringing charges against the defender, the Supervisory Judge of the Federal Criminal Justice Centre in Tapachula stated that Villagrán was not part of a criminal organisation, but someone whose work focuses on defending human rights. In the **Dominican Republic**, **Epifania St. Chals Lichardo**, the co-founder of **Reconocido**, a movement that campaigns for citizenship rights and equality for all Dominicans of Haitian descent, was **physically attacked** by state agents during an illegal intrusion of her home in February. In the **United States**, the federal administration surveilled migrants rights defenders, **stigmatised** their work and linked them to a migrant crisis in the country. After the deployment of the National Guard in the **USA** in Washington D.C., Los Angeles and Chicago, defenders shared experiences of repression, arrests, raids, and the pointing of guns at them, while federal authorities deployed tear gas, smoke bombs, and pepper spray in communities, outside schools, and even against minors.

Furthermore, the reduction of protection mechanisms during migration and asylum processes impacted HRDs working, studying or seeking protection in the **United States**. The revocation of humanitarian parole programmes, along with the suspension or cancellation of visas, work permits, and identification documents, left many people, namely as **Nicaraguan** and **Afghan** defenders, without legal status. This put them at risk of deportation and, in some cases, effectively rendered them stateless. This was despite facing serious risks if they were returned to their countries of origin. In **Mexico** and Central America, these policies resulted in the increased militarisation of migration routes, accelerated deportations, abuse in detention centres, and tighter border controls, which hindered the ability of human rights defenders to document abuses, access migration stations, and support asylum and refugee procedures.

In **Poland** and **Latvia**, there was some judicial recognition of groups performing vital work in protecting migrants' rights. In January, the trial of five HRDs, known as the [Hajnowka Five](#), started at the Hajnowka district court in **Poland**, after almost three years since their initial arrest in March 2022. They were charged with aiding illegal border crossing under Article 264a of the Polish Criminal Code, for providing life-saving assistance to an **Iraqi** family with seven children and an older **Egyptian** man near the **Polish-Belarusian** border. Four of them were accused of organising an illegal crossing attempt and were detained for 72 hours. More than a year later, in December 2023, another local border solidarity activist was included in the same file and the charges were changed from organising to aiding. In September, the Court acquitted all defenders on the basis that they had no personal gain in helping the people in distress. The Prosecutor has appealed the acquittal. In **Latvia**, a Court ruled in favour of [Ieva Raubiško](#), who had been on trial since the beginning of 2024 for assisting a group of asylum seekers to avoid being pushed back to **Belarus** at the border. Despite the prosecutor seeking an 18 month sentence, the Court ruled that she had acted on humanitarian grounds, but nevertheless gave 200 hours of community work for supporting the intentional illegal crossing of individuals over the state border. The case initiated a public and parliamentary discussion on the need to amend law to create a distinction between humanitarian work and human smuggling in **Latvian** legislation.

SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINE

In several countries in Europe, people who took to the streets to protest the genocide in **Gaza** were subjected to police violence, arrests, criminal proceedings, house raids as well as cutting of funds or removal from employment. Governments of the **UK**, **Germany**, **Italy** and **France** introduced new controversial administrative and legal measures restricting the right to freedom of assembly and protest. In July, the **UK** government banned [Palestine Action](#) under the Terrorism Act 2000. It added the organisation to the proscribed list of “dangerous terrorist groups”, alongside the violent, neo-Nazi and ultra nationalist ‘Maniacs Murder Cult’ and the Russian Imperial Movement, making it one of three additional associations newly designated under the measure. Members of Palestine Action had broken into private weapons factories and a Royal Air Force base, damaging equipment and spray-painting an aircraft to protest the alleged British involvement in the genocide in **Gaza**. The ban meant that “wear(ing) clothing or



1 June 2025, Catania, Italy — Activists of the Freedom Flotilla Coalition board the Madleen boat ahead of setting sail for Gaza from the Sicilian port of Catania, Italy.

© AP Photo / Salvatore Cavalli

carry(ing) articles in public which arouse reasonable suspicion that an individual is a member or supporter of a proscribed organisation” was a criminal offence.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights [voiced](#) serious concerns that “counter-terrorism laws are being applied to conduct that is not terrorist in nature and risks hindering the legitimate exercise of fundamental freedoms across the UK”. Shortly following the ban, a major protest campaign, “[Lift the Ban on Palestine Action](#)”, began where activists silently sat with banners reading “I oppose genocide. I support Palestine Action” in London. As a result of showing support for the group, [more than 2,700 people were arrested](#) under Section 13 of the Terrorism Act, and around 250 individuals charged. In February 2026 the High Court ruled that the ban was unlawful but it would remain in place while the government appealed the decision.

Pro-Palestinian movements across North America also faced a growing range of reprisals, including criminalisation, administrative restrictions, academic sanction, smear campaigns, surveillance, and threats to residency and immigration status. Their criticism of **Israeli**

state policies and the genocide was frequently misrepresented as “support for terrorism,” undermining their rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

In this context, in the **United States**, **Mahmoud Khalil**, affiliated with Columbia University and a lawful permanent resident, was detained in his student housing by immigration authorities in what UN human rights experts [described](#) as a “dangerous escalation in the U.S. Government’s crackdown on student activism and censorship of pro-Palestinian voices”. An immigration judge later ruled that he could be deported on the basis of alleged risks to United States foreign policy; whilst a federal judge subsequently ordered his release, this decision was later overturned on appeal, reopening the possibility of renewed detention and removal in 2026. In addition to [Columbia University](#), other third-level institutions targeted students for expressing pro-Palestine sentiment, including the [University of California](#) and the [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) (MIT). Front Line Defenders is also aware of a US-based HRD and doctor who has assisted in the collection of evidence for proceedings related to the alleged genocide and who has been subjected to sustained harassment, including repeated, intimidating phone calls.

In **Canada**, such patterns were mirrored through courtordered precautionary measures restricting proPalestinian demonstrations in university spaces, as well as police raids and criminalisation campaigns against defenders linked to organisations stigmatised as “terrorist” for their criticism of **Israel**. These practices contributed to a chilling effect on proPalestinian human rights work, discouraging defenders from engaging in legitimate advocacy.

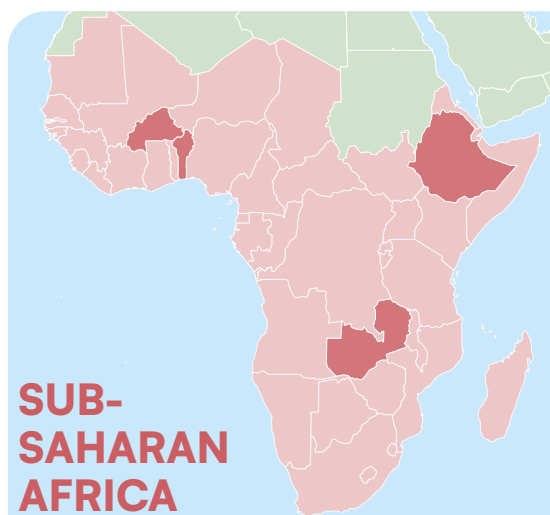
In June, **Egypt** detained and deported dozens of activists and human rights defenders participating in a citizen-led [Global March To Gaza](#), which departed from **Tunisia**. The initiative called for an end to the illegal Israeli siege of **Gaza**, an immediate ceasefire and access for humanitarian aid. The Global Sumud Flotilla (GSF), a coordinated, non-violent fleet of mostly small vessels sailing from ports across the Mediterranean, was [targeted](#) in September as it attempted to deliver aid and lifesaving supplies to the Palestinian population. During the night of 23-24 September, GSF members reported sustained explosions and drone attacks against their boats in international waters off **Greece**, along with widespread communication disruption. These actions were accompanied by a disinformation campaign, perpetrated by the Israeli authorities which alleged that the unarmed civilians on the vessels, comprised of doctors, lawyers, parliamentarians, union workers, and human rights defenders, posed a threat to national security.

The growing crackdown on expressions of solidarity stands in stark contrast to the rising participation in solidarity movements across continents. Galvanised by the situation in **Palestine**, yet extending far beyond it, these movements call on governments to uphold human rights consistently and to take strong stands against injustice wherever it occurs. In this struggle, HRDs often chart the course. It is past time for governments and institutions worldwide to heed the direction which they are pointing towards.

ANNEX

RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION

The proliferation of legislation designed to restrict the right to defend rights or tighten control of the state over civil society showed no signs of slowing down in 2025. Such laws are detrimental to the survival of independent civil society and civic activism, with a particular impact on those supporting gender equality and LGBTIQ+ rights. The below is a non-exhaustive list of legislation proposed or introduced by states in 2025, which Front Line Defenders encountered in its work.



BENIN

The Law on Associations, Law No. 2025-19, introduced on 22 July 2025 increases state control of associations' and organisations' affairs. Article 50 requires associations to contribute to "peace, harmonious coexistence, and good governance". Any 'political stance' or incitement to violence, insults, or sedition is prohibited.

BURKINA FASO

The Code of Persons and the Family (CPF) was adopted in September, giving authorities the power to revoke nationality in vague and ambiguous circumstances, including "when [citizens] have committed acts on behalf of a foreign state that are incompatible with their status as Burkinabe and prejudicial to the interests of Burkina Faso".

Article 210-3 stipulates that: "Homosexuality and related practices are prohibited". Any person found guilty of

engaging in homosexual acts or promoting 'homosexual practices' faces two years imprisonment and a hefty fine. In the event of a repeat offence, the penalties are doubled.

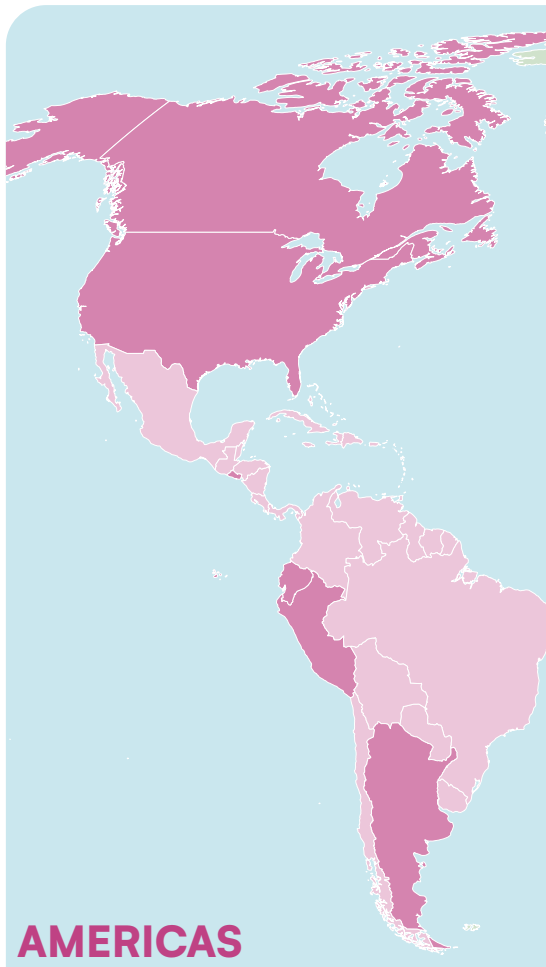
A decree enacted in November requires all approved NGOs to open and maintain their cash accounts exclusively with the state-controlled Treasury Deposit Bank. Failure to comply results in the withdrawal of accreditation and/or administrative and financial penalties

ETHIOPIA

Amendments to the 2019 Civil Society Organisations Proclamation were proposed by the Ministry of Justice which, among other measures, would restrict groups engaged in governance or electoral work from accepting foreign funding. Foreign and foreign-established organisations also would be barred from these activities.

ZAMBIA

The Cyber Security Act 2025 and the Cyber Crimes Act 2025 were enacted in April and gave government officials enhanced surveillance powers over online communications. The acts also raise concerns over restrictions on freedom of expression; Article 22 of the Cyber Crimes Act outlaws the dissemination of "information, statement or image, knowing the same to be false that — (a) causes damage to the reputation of another person; or (b) subjects another person to public ridicule, contempt, hatred or embarrassment".



ARGENTINA

The Milei government issued a number of decrees that [weaken](#) labour rights, including the right to strike, and weaken environmental legislation. This includes the Glacier Law, which [removes](#) the automatic protection currently afforded to glaciers and opens up the possibility of mining and other productive uses, putting the environment at risk, as well as local Mapuche indigenous communities that live in this ecosystem. The government also proposed removing important [safeguards](#) for the rights of women and diverse populations, such as removing the crime of femicide from the penal code.

CANADA

In June, Bill 5 (Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act) was approved by the Ontario Government despite widespread [condemnation](#) by environmental, indigenous and labour rights defenders. Bill 5 could open the door to the designation of the Ring of Fire, a mineral-rich region in Northern Ontario, as a “special economic zone”, ignoring environmental regulations, bypassing First Nations and increasing the presence of extractive projects.

ECUADOR

The Organic Law on Social Transparency was introduced and approved in less than 30 days, granting the administration broad supervisory powers with vague formulations that may enable mechanisms for monitoring, sanctioning or suspending NGOs under unclear criteria.

The *Organic Law of National Solidarity* broadened the definition of “internal armed conflict” to include all social mobilisations, legally permitting the state to treat protesters as armed combatants.

EL SALVADOR

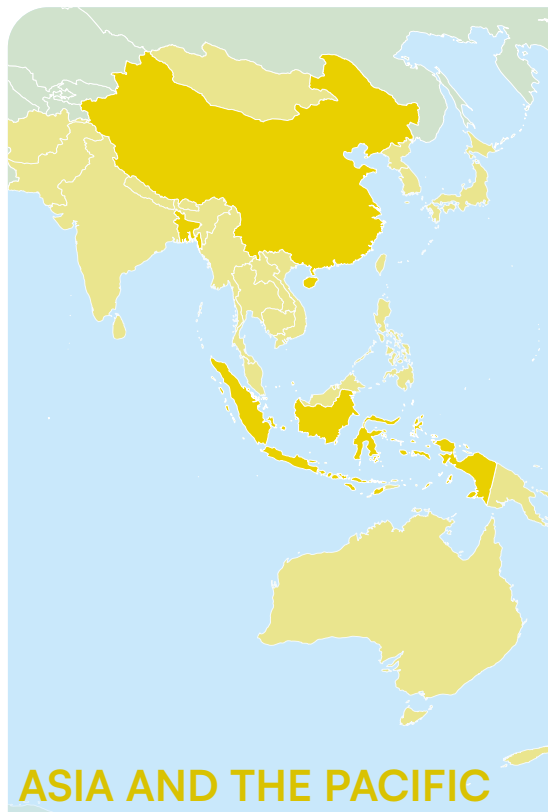
The Foreign Agents Law, which entered into force on 10 June, requires organisations and individuals receiving international funding to register as ‘foreign agents’ and pay 30 per cent tax on the funds received. In addition to containing language which stigmatises human rights work, it leaves the door open to provisions that could restrict the right to freedom of expression and association, as well as inhibit human rights work performed in the country.

PERU

The Ley APCI regulatory framework significantly [increased](#) state control over civil society organisations that receive international cooperation funds, shifting the role of the Peruvian Agency for International Cooperation (APCI) from one of coordination to one of pre-approval. It requires NGOs and other entities to register with APCI and obtain prior authorisation before implementing any plans, programmes, projects, or activities financed through international technical cooperation. The regulation classifies as a “very serious” offence the use of international cooperation resources to advise, assist, or finance legal, administrative, judicial, or international actions against the Peruvian State. This provision holds the potential to deter and penalise NGOs that provide legal support to victims, engage in strategic litigation, or challenge state actions through advocacy or judicial processes.

USA

In September President Trump issued the [Presidential Memorandum ‘Countering Domestic Terrorism and Organised Political Violence’](#), targeting ‘domestic terrorists’ and ‘anti-fascists’ whose common ideologies include ‘anti-Americanism, anti-capitalism, and anti-Christianity’. The memorandum stated that the financing networks of such vaguely defined groups — including ‘institutional and individual funders’ and ‘non-governmental organisations’ — would be targeted. In a similar vein, in June the [House Committee on Homeland Security and Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Accountability](#) [launched a probe](#) into more than 200 [non-governmental organizations](#), alleging that such groups were “providing services to inadmissible aliens”.



BANGLADESH

The draft [Cyber Protection Ordinance](#) (CPO), designed to replace the repressive [Digital Security Act](#) (DSA), was gazetted in May. While the [draft](#) removes the criminalisation of defamation, it retains the broadly worded clause criminalising speech that “publishes or promotes anything in cyberspace that incites religious or communal hatred or ethnic hostility, or that provokes violence, causes panic, or directs criminal activity”. This retention is concerning given the DSA’s history of being weaponised to silence human rights defenders and dissent. Furthermore, the CPO grants the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) sweeping powers to block content deemed to undermine “national unity,” “security,” or “religious values” upon law enforcement request, without judicial oversight.

CHINA

New Provisions on the Administrative Law Enforcement Procedures of State Security Authorities and the Public Security Organs Procedural Rules for Handling Criminal Cases have significantly expanded the Chinese state’s extraterritorial reach. They grant authorities the power to inspect electronic devices, monitor personal communications and criminalise contact with foreign organisations under vague definitions of “espionage”, “endangering national security” and “harm to national interests”. They apply regardless of where the alleged offence occurs or the nationality of the individual, effectively extending the 2023 Anti-Espionage Law beyond Chinese borders.

In Hong Kong in June, amendments to the [Trade Unions \(Amendment\) Ordinance](#) granted the local government broad powers to deny registration or dissolve unions deemed a “risk to national security”, prohibit individuals previously charged under national-security laws from holding union positions, and ban unions from receiving foreign funding without official approval.

INDONESIA

In November the House of Representatives passed the new Criminal Procedure Code (KUHAP) which entered into force on 2 January 2026. Article 240 penalises insults against the Government or State Institutions, prescribing a prison sentence of up to three years if the insult results in public unrest.



GEORGIA

The Law on Registration of Foreign Agents (FARA) was enacted in April, requiring individuals or organisations seen as acting in the interest of a foreign entity — often based on the receipt of foreign funding — to register as foreign agents.

GERMANY

In December, the Berlin House of Representatives amended the General Security and Order Act, giving extensive additional powers to the police. The amendment will allow police to use AI software to analyse video data to identify “suspicious behaviour patterns”, intensify digital surveillance with access to end-to-end communications and emails. Police will also be [permitted](#) to physically and secretly enter properties to install spyware or other software to monitor and extract communication data.

HUNGARY

Amendments made in March to the law on assembly in relation to the protection of children were used to ban Pride marches. A march in Budapest went ahead anyway and attracted 100,000 people after the Mayor of Budapest announced it would be held as a municipal event.

ITALY

In June, the Senate approved [Security Decree no 1236](#). The law contains stricter penalties for non-violent offences during protests, such as defacing property, and for the disruption of public order, including road blockades and sit-ins. A number of UN Special Procedures mandate holders [expressed](#) their concern that “[p]rovisions of the decree appear to limit the ability for individuals, including human rights defenders, to assemble peacefully for protests and demonstrations, and its vague phrasing could result in arbitrary prosecutions and harsh penalties with unduly severe consequences for people exercising their rights”.

KAZAKHSTAN

In December, the Senate voted to adopt legislative amendments that ban the “dissemination of information containing propaganda of non-traditional sexual orientation and paedophilia” in the media and online.

KYRGYZSTAN

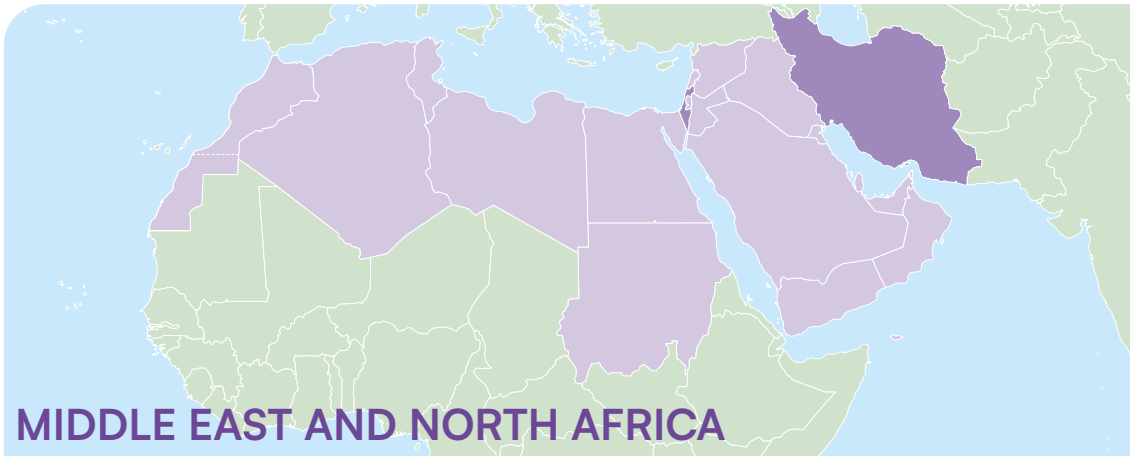
The law on Mass Media, which was signed into law in August, [grants excessive control](#) over media outlets and online platforms including mandatory registration for all media outlets and foreign ownership restrictions.

UNITED KINGDOM

In February, the government introduced a new Crime and Policing Bill to the House of Commons which, if passed, will further criminalise actions during protests. Climbing war monuments and memorials, use of flares and fireworks, and covering one's face in a way that would conceal one's identity in areas designated by police would be punishable by a fine of up to £1,000, and, in the latter instance, up to one month of imprisonment.

TÜRKIYE

An amendment was proposed to Article 225 (Indecent Act) of the Turkish Penal Code which would undermine the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons and increase the risks associated with the defence of such rights. The sentence for publicly engaging in "sexual relations or exhibitionism" would be increased to three years of imprisonment, though no definition of 'exhibitionism' is provided. Furthermore, a new paragraph is included which states, "anyone who exhibits an attitude or behaviour that is contrary to the biological sex at birth and public morality, or who publicly encourages, praises or promotes such behaviour, shall be punished with imprisonment from one to three years".



IRAN

In June, during the 12-day war with Israel, the Iranian Parliament voted to increase the punishment for charges related to “espionage” under amendments made to its Espionage Law. Any form of espionage for Israel, the US or other actors considered hostile is now punishable by death, while any propaganda activities considered hostile or to undermine Iran’s national security can be punished with up to 15 years in prison. If done in collaboration with an actor considered hostile to Iran, the death penalty can be handed down.

Additionally, the law [states](#) that “sending videos and images to hostile or foreign networks that, if published, would typically weaken public morale, create division, or harm national security, will be punishable by a Fifth-degree prison sentence [2 — 5 years of imprisonment], and permanent dismissal from government and public services, and illegal protests and gatherings during wartime will be punishable by a Fourth-degree prison sentence [5-10 years of imprisonment].”

ISRAEL

The [bill](#) to Prevent the Operation of Organisations that Receive Funding from Foreign Entities and Engage in Political Activity, was introduced into law in early 2025. The legislation prohibits organisations that receive more than a modest threshold of their funding from foreign governments from [engaging](#) in political activity, effectively criminalising core human rights advocacy such as litigation, policy critique, and public campaigning. The law strips these organisations of legal standing before the High Court of Justice, preventing them from challenging government actions or seeking judicial review, while imposing draconian registration and reporting requirements.

The [amendment](#) to the Entry into Israel Law, which entered into force in January 2025, grants the Minister of Interior broad discretionary powers to deny entry to foreign nationals and representatives of NGOs who are perceived to “incite violence,” support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, or campaign against Israeli policies.

The “ICC Law”, which [passed](#) a preliminary reading in the Knesset in February, imposes prison sentences of up to five years on any unauthorised information sharing with the ICC. If the information was classified, the culprit is liable to life imprisonment.

METHODOLOGY

FOR THE DOCUMENTATION OF KILLINGS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The HRD Memorial is a global initiative of 14 national and international human rights organisations committed to promoting the memory and improving data collection on HRDs who are killed in reprisal for their human rights work. HRD Memorial partners gather both annual data 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. HRD Memorial partners verify cases through interviews to local HRDs, organisations and families, exchange of information with regional and international organisations, and open source research.

The cases of killings documented by the HRD Memorial include murders, deaths in custody and post-custodial deaths. The latter refers to deaths of HRDs that occur after a period of arbitrary detention, once the HRDs are released, that are caused by the torture and ill-treatment, including medical negligence, they were subjected to while in detention.

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. All cases listed as “Anonymous” have been fully verified by HRD Memorial partners.

"The "Types of killings" of HRDs listed on page 12 are based on the HRD Memorial's internal Terminology Guidelines. Their definitions are the following:

- Accident in suspicious circumstances: Death reported as an accident by the authorities but amid circumstances which suggest that it might have been a staged accident or another type of killing.

- Asphyxiation: Death caused by deliberate asphyxiation of the HRD, including, but not exclusively, forced drowning, forced choking, asphyxiation using hands or any other body parts or any materials.
- Beaten to death: Death provoked by beating by one or multiple individuals.
- Bomb attack: Death as a result of a single bomb blast deliberately targeting the HRD, including car bombs.
- Death as a result of torture or ill-treatment: Death as a result of one or multiple instances of torture or ill-treatment while in custody, abducted, kidnapped or in the context of a protest. It includes instances of medical negligence under custody. Perpetrators might be state actors or non-state actors acting with the acquiescence of or the lack of prevention by the state.
- Death in custody: Custodial deaths of arbitrarily detained HRDs, the circumstances of which are unknown or unclear.
- Death reported as a suicide by the authorities: Suspicious suicide amid circumstances which suggest that it might have been a targeted killing of the HRD.
- Execution: Execution following an arbitrary death sentence by the judiciary.
- Run over: Death provoked by the deliberate running over of the HRD targeted by a vehicle.
- Shooting: Death as a result of a firearm attack on the HRD targeted.
- Stabbing: Death provoked by stabbing the HRD targeted.
- Targeted strikes: Deaths as a result of artillery shelling or drone strikes deliberately targeting the HRD or their place of work in the context of armed conflict and genocide."

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**; **IM-Defensoras** (Mesoamerica); **Karapatan** (the Philippines); **OMCT**; **El Programa Somos Defensores** (Colombia); **Red TDT** (Mexico); and **UDEFEQUA** (Guatemala).

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

For 2025, the HRD Memorial has counted on the invaluable support of the following organisations and individuals to verify cases of killings of HRDs:

Abdullah Abbas; **Alianza por los Derechos Humanos de Ecuador** (Ecuador); **Amaru Ruiz**, **Fundación del Río** (Nicaragua); **Committee to Protect Journalists, CPJ** (International); **Comissão Pastoral da Terra** (Brazil); **Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos, CNDDHH** (Peru); **Defence of Human Rights** (Pakistan); **Ekaale Epakan** (Kenya); **Fundación Periodistas sin Cadenas** (Ecuador); **Human Rights Watch** (International); **Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, HRCP** (Pakistan); **Libya Crimes Watch, LCW** (Libya); **Peace**

Brigades International (Nicaragua); **The Coalition of Somalia Human Rights Defenders, CSHRD** (Somalia); **ZMINA Human Rights Centre** (Ukraine).

The HRD Memorial is committed to continuing to develop and refine its methodology and verification processes to ensure that they 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, digital protection, and protection grants programmes. The statistics presented in this report are derived from 3,960 violations reported to Front Line Defenders, between 1 January and 31 December 2025. Of those, 2,739 violations were recorded under our casework and grants programme and they are presented together as they are recorded against the same list of violations, while 1,221 threats and violations were recorded under Front Line Defenders’ digital protection work.

Front Line Defenders often documents multiple threats and violations per case, digital support 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:

For the purpose of calculating the most reported violations against HRDs, the category “threats/ other harassment” was considered only when recorded as a standalone 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; | Climate Justice; |
| Abolition of Death Penalty; | Digital Rights; |
| Access to Healthcare; | Disability Rights; |
| Afro-Descendants Rights; Anti-Racism; | Disappearances / Enforced Disappearances; |
| Anti-Slavery / Anti-Trafficking; | Environmental Rights; |
| Children’s / Youth Rights; | Extractive Industries / Megaprojects; |
| Citizens’ Rights / Participation; | Freedom of Assembly; |

Freedom of Religion or Belief;	Peasant / Campesino Communities;
Food Sovereignty;	Poverty / Economic Insecurity;
Housing Rights / Forced Evictions;	Prisoners' Rights while in prison;
Human Rights Documentation;	Refugees / IDPs / Migrants;
Human Rights Movements;	Right to Education / Student Rights;
Impunity / Justice;	Self-Determination;
Indigenous Peoples' Rights;	Sexual & Reproductive Health and Rights;
Labour / Trade Union / Workers Association;	Sex Worker Rights;
Land Rights;	Torture / Police Brutality;
LGBTIQ+ Rights; Minority Rights;	Women's Rights / Feminism.
Peacebuilding;	

For the purpose of reflecting the most targeted “Areas of human rights defence,” the categories of environmental rights defenders, land rights defenders and indigenous peoples’ 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. For the purpose of reflecting on their work, “Human Rights Movements” refers to collective efforts or organisations to promote, protect, and advocate for human rights as recognised under international legal frameworks.

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 human rights defenders face on a daily basis.

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.

EXPERT CONTRIBUTIONS FROM HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The *Global Analysis* is further informed by contributions from HRDs as they reflect on the nature of their work and the major challenges they face. The reflective analyses included in this report were submitted to Front Line Defenders following an invitation to contribute to the analysis of trends of threats and risks faced by human rights defenders globally. Some light editing for clarity has taken place on the analysis pieces provided by HRDs in this report. As far as possible, their original language has been left unchanged.

We would like to extend our gratitude and appreciation to the following human rights organisations:

Alianza de Organizaciones por los Derechos Humanos del Ecuador;
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FDAPID (Foyer de Développement pour l'Autopromotion des Personnes Indigentes et en Détresse);
Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM) ;
Law and Democracy Support Foundation (LDSF);
SUARAM Malaysia;
Swaziland Human Rights Defenders Network;
Tunisian League of Human Rights.

FRONT LINE DEFENDERS

GLOBAL ANALYSIS

2025-26

The Global Analysis is directly based on Front Line Defenders' work with Human Rights Defenders globally as well as with the HRD Memorial partners over the course of 2025. Front Line Defenders would like to thank all donors who supported its work during the year.

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