

# ANNUAL REPORT 2020







**“WE ASPIRE  
TO A WORLD**

*in which fundamental human rights and fundamental freedoms are **universally recognized and respected by all, and where everyone has the right to defend these rights and freedoms** without fear of threats or attacks.”*



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**WE DEFEND**  
the right  
to defend  
**HUMAN**  
**RIGHTS**



**A** lot can change in a year, and 2020 has been an unprecedented time for Protection International (PI) – as it has been for the world. The challenges that we and the human rights defenders (HRDs) we accompany have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic have tested our resilience and adaptability. We have had to change our practices rapidly, cope with unexpected developments, and respond quickly to crises.

Like many other organisations, we have had to be nimble and creative. From the start of the outbreak, we knew that we had to act quickly to meet the evolving needs of defenders, especially those who have suffered disproportionately from the pandemic because of their social, political, and economic contexts.

Our 2020 annual report highlights PI's responses during the pandemic, which include:

- ◆ **Activating networks and serving as a liaison between defenders and emergency response organisations in order to ensure that urgent health and safety needs are met;**
- ◆ **Vamping up advocacy and communications with key stakeholders in order to bring visibility to the current threats facing defenders;**
- ◆ **Re-working the means and methods of PI's capacity building activities in order to adapt to the current context and ensure the security of defenders and partners;**
- ◆ **Investing in new tools, human resources, and wellbeing support services in order to overcome additional barriers that coincide with the implementation of confinement measures; and**
- ◆ **Building solidarity by focusing on responses that are gender- and diversity-inclusive and guaranteeing that all actions are carried out with psychosocial support as a priority.**

What we have accomplished over the past months was only made possible by the swift and agile response of our supporters, who have demonstrated unwavering commitment to us and the defenders we accompany. Their flexibility and adaptability have been crucial for our ability to swiftly adjust our ways of working. We are thankful for their extraordinary support during times of such uncertainty and we are committed to continue standing with defenders through the ongoing pandemic in order to build a better world.

We have observed how COVID-19 has caused an overall increase in the human rights violations committed against defenders and their communities. And while a number of proportionate and time-bound measures have been necessary to contain the pandemic outbreaks, the current situation has allowed governments to take advantage of the crisis by issuing blanket emergency decrees that further curtail freedoms and heavily reduce oversight of government and corporate abuse watchdogs. COVID-19 and measures to contain it have also made defenders and their communities more vulnerable—in relation to food, healthcare needs and access to justice—and the lack of government attention and protection of defenders has worsened in every country where PI operates.

Over the past year, PI as noticed the following main trends:

- ◆ **An imposing presence of security forces within defender communities.**
- ◆ **Defamations, arbitrary arrests and assassinations.**
- ◆ **Weakened social movements, with greater restrictions on physical groups meetings.**
- ◆ **An increase in domestic violence and femicide.**
- ◆ **Emergency decrees giving more power to the authorities to oppress defenders who attempt to exercise their rights regarding the protection of land and natural resources, making it harder for rural communities to participate in the consultation and oversight processes for development projects.**
- ◆ **Criminalisation of those that criticise or speak out against the governmental responses to COVID-19.**

As we continue to face the insecurities and uncertainties caused by the pandemic, we must remain vigilant in monitoring the security and protection of defenders and act in a timely way so that the right of everyone to defend human rights is respected, protected and fulfilled. We hope you will enjoy reading this Annual Report, which offers a glimpse of the work we have done towards achieving this aim in 2020.

Warm regards,

**ALICE NAH**  
Chair of the Board of Protection International AISBL



# 1

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND MANAGEMENT**



**ALICE NAH**  
*Chairperson*

Alice Nah is a lecturer at the Centre for Applied Human Rights at the University of York. Alice conducts research on the security and protection of human rights defenders at risk, as well as trends in asylum and migration in Asia. She leads an international research project that examines how human rights defenders navigate risks, manage security and receive protection support in different countries.

**JACCO SMIT**  
*Treasurer*

Jacco Smit is an independent advisor to the maritime industry with a focus on strategy, finance and restructuring. He served as treasurer on the board of Amnesty International Netherlands and on its international board in London, with a focus on improving the planning & control cycle, transition management, and strengthening Amnesty's financial position.

**PAULINE ALVAREZ MARTIN**  
*Member*

Pauline Alvarez Martin is a qualified Associate Integral Coach with experience of working with individuals and teams on developing their leadership skills, especially women working in front line roles with NGOs and social movements. She has over 35 years of professional experience working on human rights, refugee and social development issues with a number of international NGOs.

**MAHMOUD ABURAHMA**  
*Member*

Mahmoud AbuRahma is a human rights activist from Gaza, Palestine. He is currently a member of the European Network Against Racism in Brussels, where he is working on promoting equality and anti-racism in Europe and working on mitigating the risks and threats faced by HRDs in the anti-racism movement.

**YULIA SUGANDI**  
*Member*

Yulia Sugandi is an independent educator and researcher whose main interest is in supporting organic social change and social-ecological justice. She has over 19 years of experience working on development programmes through employment as a Director, Coordinator, Consultant and Board member of various projects and combines this with teaching and researching social equity, inclusive development, positive peace and human ecology.

**LILIANA DE MARCO COENEN**  
*Executive Director*

Liliana joined Protection International in 2014 and became its Executive Director in 2016. Together with the global management team, she is responsible for strategic direction and implementation of PI's mandate across different regions. Liliana is passionate about social justice and brings vast experience in human rights policy and advocacy to her leadership role. She holds an LL.M in international human rights law from the University of Essex.



# 2

**WHERE  
WE WORK  
IN KEY FIGURES**



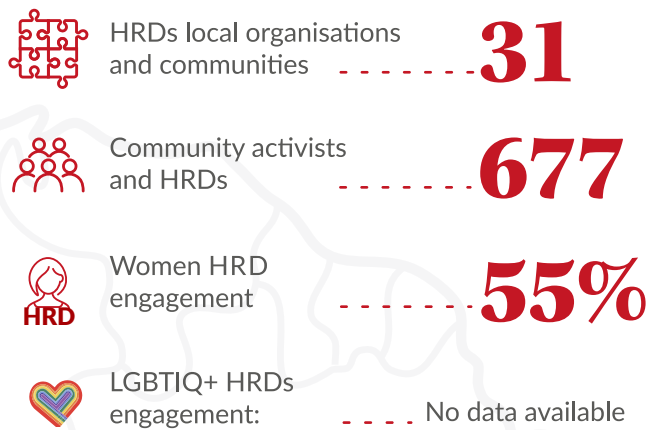
Across the world, PI is committed to serving human rights defenders, their communities and local organisations at the grassroots level. In each municipality, country and region we tailor our approach to the context of the defender or group of defenders at risk.

## EUROPE

BELGIUM  
NAVARRA

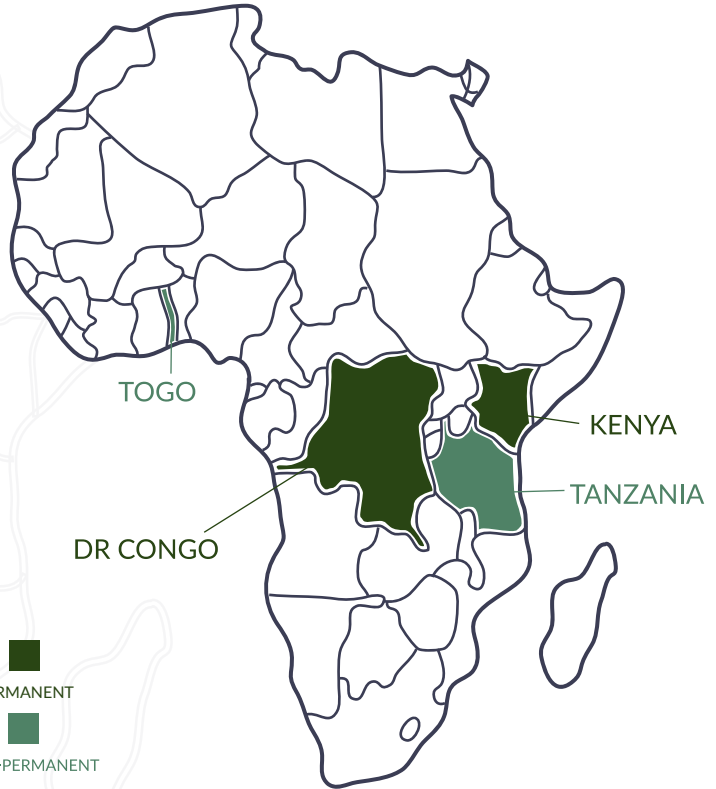


## CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA





## AFRICA



HRDs local organisations and communities

63



Community activists and HRDs

734



Women HRD engagement

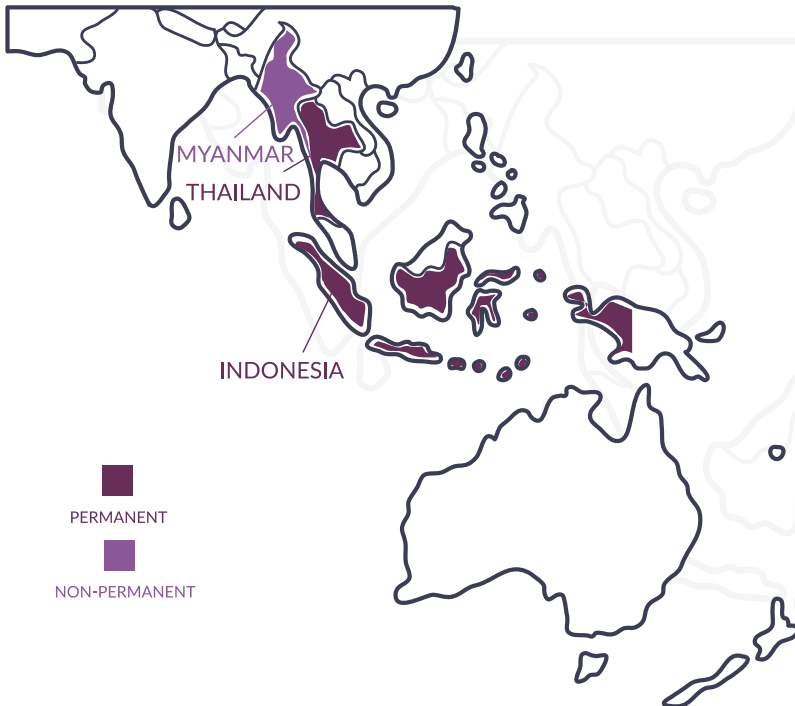
49%



LGBTIQ+ HRDs engagement:

9%

## SOUTHEAST ASIA



HRDs local organisations and communities

21



Community activists and HRDs

702



Women HRD engagement

63%



LGBTIQ+ HRDs engagement:

7%

PERMANENT

NON-PERMANENT





# 3

**ENGAGING  
WITH PARTNERS  
AND NETWORKS**

# DIGITALISATION: STEPPING UP TO SECURITY CHALLENGES IN TIMES OF COVID-19

## ➤ Launch of a new cross-regional, interdisciplinary team to combat the rise in digital security threats and improve organisational IT infrastructure

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, it became immediately clear that both Protection International (PI) staff and human rights defenders (HRDs) would need additional support to conduct their work during confinement. Public health measures requiring social distancing meant that nearly all activities PI was carrying out with defenders and partners would suddenly need to take place online. However, because of this shift in communications modes, many HRDs, communities and organisations are now further exposed to online harassment and hate speech, doxing, hacking and censorship.

The pandemic also brought a considerable increase in phishing attacks, as well as an increase in attacks on tools and services that suddenly everybody needed to use, such as Zoom. Not only are some defenders explicitly targeted, but large-scale, corporate data breaches and security incidents have indirectly affected us and our partner organisations. In April 2020, approximately 86% of staff reported that they were concerned about the risks imposed by the increased use of digital platforms.

Since the pandemic began, our staff have experienced numerous digital security incidents, including internet throttling in Kenya, at least four cases of online harassment from uninvited virtual meeting attendees and heightened instances of phishing attempts across multiple institutional email addresses. Our partner organisations experienced at least 20 digital security incidents since the start of the pandemic, seven of which affected our team's work in Indonesia. Our Indonesian partners' websites have been hacked more often, making digital security a serious threat for our colleagues from PI Indonesia.

In order to stay close to defenders during this critical time, we set up a Digitalisation Task Force to operate remotely, safely and securely. The team's two main aims are, first, to improve organisational digital security policies and best practices, and, second, to ensure that teams are equipped with the necessary infrastructure and tools to stay connected with HRDs. The task force purposefully includes IT and digital security specialists, senior advisors, communications officers and protection officers from across the organisation to make sure that its work plan adequately reflects the needs of staff within varying contexts and disciplines.

After launching a diagnostic survey to identify needs and concerns arisen from the COVID-19 outbreak, we ensured that urgent cases received support as soon as possible. We then designed a PI 2020+ Digitalisation Plan, with a clear timeline to address immediate, medium term and long-term needs for the organisation. Meanwhile, we provided insights and suggestions for all team members to make informed, autonomous decisions about what is best for adapting their office cultures to confinement conditions. We organised discussions about remote support, capacity building and preserving protection networks. We drafted suggestions for remote work and remote team management and provided tips for work-life balance online.

The outcome of all these activities is a new IT library of digital security resources and multimedia content. Through video tutorials, podcasts, webinar recordings, infographics and publications, the IT library spans from the most basic tools, including password management and videoconferencing platforms, to more complicated matters, such as secure ways to organise public online meetings and to react in case of attacks or incidents during online meetings. *"They are really fun and alternative materials for us to engage with,"* noted a member of PI's staff. *"The Digitalisation Task Force's videos and podcasts focus on 'evergreen' issues!"* All these elements proved to be helpful for PI staff, who promptly integrated them when carrying out online workshops, trainings,

### THE TWO MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE TASK FORCE ARE TO:

- 1) Improve organisational digital security policies and best practices;
- 2) Ensure teams are equipped with the necessary infrastructure and tools to continue supporting HRDs throughout the pandemic and beyond.



and meeting with partners and HRDs. While new tools, pedagogical materials and policies are being developed for the immediate needs brought on by COVID-19, all solutions are being developed with a longer-term vision in a way that is consistent with our 2019 – 2023 Global Strategy.

Thanks to the Digitalisation Task Force, we managed to find new, safe ways to stay with defenders, test new IT tools and reinvent our work in a sustainable way. We also established a new working culture that can survive the pandemic. We have noticed that more HRDs are asking questions about digital security and demonstrate a greater understanding of digital threats due to the work of our colleagues, who are directly and indirectly raising awareness about this topic.

“*Clearly, the pandemic has led us to be more creative in finding ways to work collectively online. It is visible that the Digitalisation Task Force has contributed a lot of effort, and there have been improvements such as the increase of explanatory materials for IT issues and the additional webinars to share info on how to reduce our data footprints and navigate digital platforms in a safer way.*”

**82%**  

 Of PI staff have switched to using more **secure communications tools** since **COVID-19**

**19**  

 Staff members are using the **Digitalisation Task Force** products and materials

**93%**  

 Of staff say they are interested in learning even more about **digital security**

**100%**  

 Of PI teams reported that HRDs they work with are **interested in learning more about digital security**



# VAMPING UP SERVICES AND REMOTE SUPPORT

## 1. Trainings à la carte

➤ **Tailored onsite and online capacity building trainings support communities, organisations and individual HRDs on security management and protection.**

2020 posed extraordinary challenges for human rights defenders (HRDs), many of whom saw their rights further infringed, often under the pretext and guise of restrictions imposed to confront the pandemic. Every year, Protection International (PI) is contacted by civil society organisations and request our support—outside our programmatic work—and this year was no exception. Restrictions on travel and movement required that we intensify the development and use of our online support tools to assist incoming requests for support beyond our ongoing projects.

Through our services and training offerings, PI's senior advisors reached more than 100 HRDs based in over 15 different countries. We collaborated with nine partners to intensify our outreach and connect with HRDs beyond PI's in-country presence networks.

For example, PI collaborated with the [Friedrich Naumann Foundation](#) to support political start-ups in Ukraine and various African countries, with a focus on mitigating risks in the digital space. While digital security has always been an important element in protection, it has taken an even more prominent role in our work during the pandemic. Securing data and communications and countering online surveillance have been a major concern; particularly where online meetings and collaboration dominate the working context of HRDs. PI interventions therefore included recommendations on how to navigate the online space securely and adopt practical, easy-to-use secure digital tools for political organising and activism.

In an innovative project, PI collaborated with the [Martin Roth Initiative](#) to develop a series of webinars and an e-learning course tailored to the needs of artists at risk who are hosted by their shelter programme. With this, we assisted the Martin Roth Initiative in designing and delivering capacity-building support to help artists understand and navigate the risks they encounter as cultural activists. The online course was complemented by thematic webinars on digital security and addressing risk situations linked to detention or interrogation.

In Colombia, PI piloted a blended learning approach, through a mix of onsite and online workshops, in collaboration with [PAX Colombia](#) and its regional teams. We developed security plans adapted to the specifics of each team by building upon situated context and risk analyses, and established prevention and response measures to mitigate the identified risks. This represents a substantial step in the right direction, particularly for staff working in still unstable and conflict-ridden regions of the country.

In cooperation with [Women's Fund Asia](#), PI supported HRDs in Sri Lanka through a comprehensive protection approach. This included trainings on physical and digital security as well as psychosocial well-being, ultimately determining how they interrelate with the practices and behaviours of defenders in their day-to-day work. The intervention worked to help defenders adequately identify risks and threats, develop strategies to confront them and create a safer space to carry out their activism activities.

9

Partners



132

HRDs supported via services

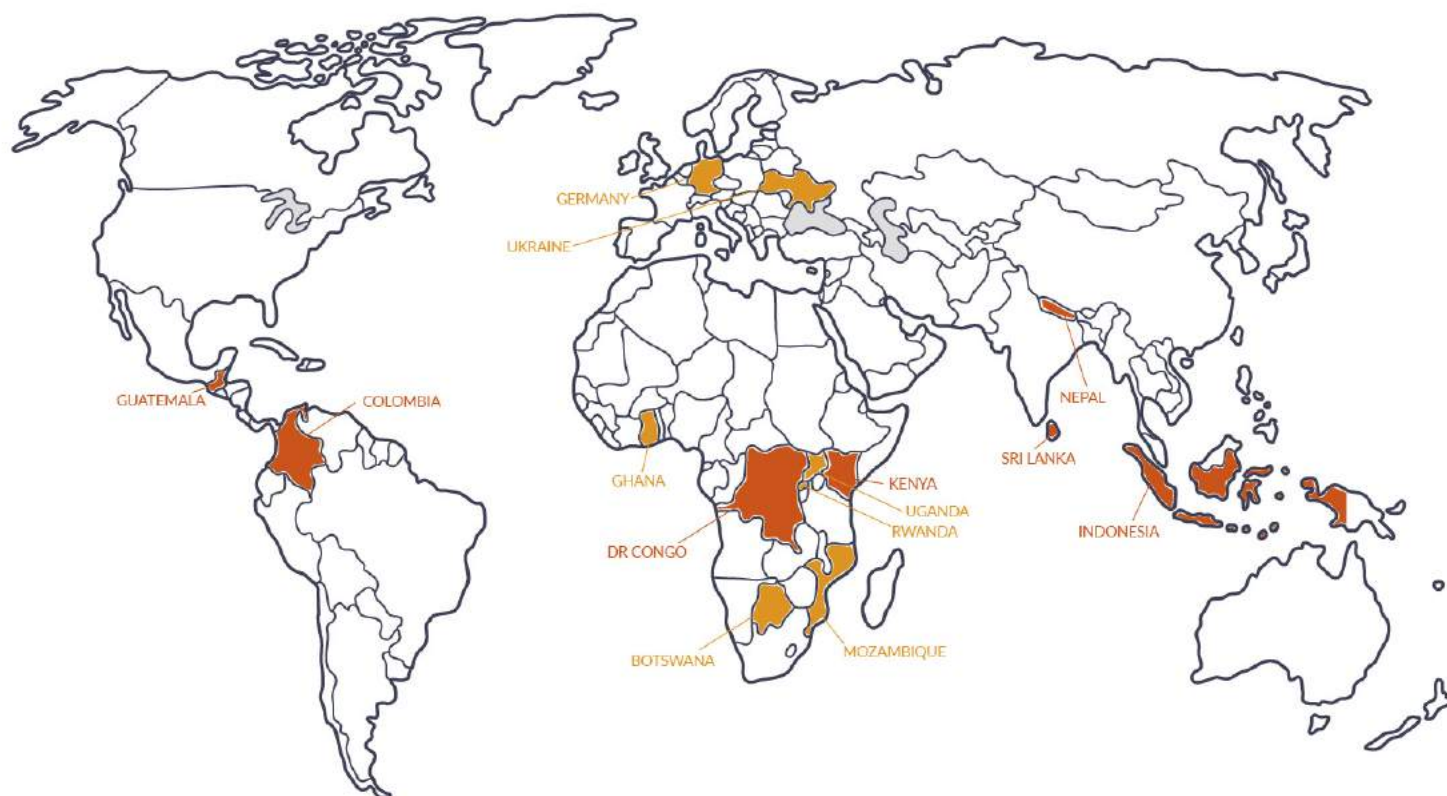


26,4%

Women human rights defenders



## COUNTRIES WHERE WE PROVIDED SERVICES IN:



## 2. E-learning programme

### ➤ Online Training: Security and Protection Management for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and Social Organisations

Our online course [Security and Protection Management for Human Rights Defenders and Social Organisations](#) is organised three times per year and available in English, French and Spanish. The course aims to develop the skills, capacities and strategies of HRDs in analysing risks, responding to risks and managing security. Those who complete the course and pass the final evaluation obtain a certificate.

Participants, taking the course either individually or as part of a team, came from a wide array of

organisations and local communities active in the field of human rights and environmental protection—among others.

Compared to last year's editions of the e-learning program, there was an increase in the number of participants by 17%—from 69 people in 2019 to 81 people in 2020—despite the reduced number of sessions. In 2019, we ran eight online training sessions and only seven training sessions were offered in 2020.

In 2020,  
we ran

**2** Courses  
in **English**  
**3** Courses  
in **Spanish**  
**2** Courses  
in **French**

**53%**

Of participants  
were women



**60%**

Of participants  
were awarded  
certificates



**27**

Countries were  
represented



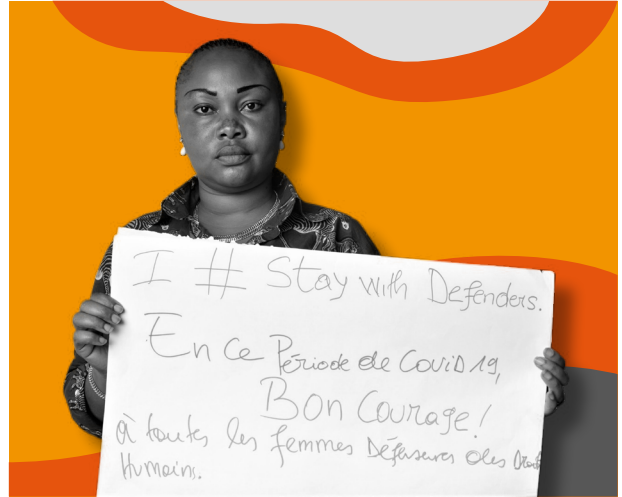
# ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH

## 1. #StayWithDefenders | A Global Campaign on the Right to Defend Human Rights in Times of COVID-19

➤ **Calling for international solidarity and recognition of human rights defenders (HRDs) who are now further exposed to risk for standing for the right to defend human rights (RDHR)**

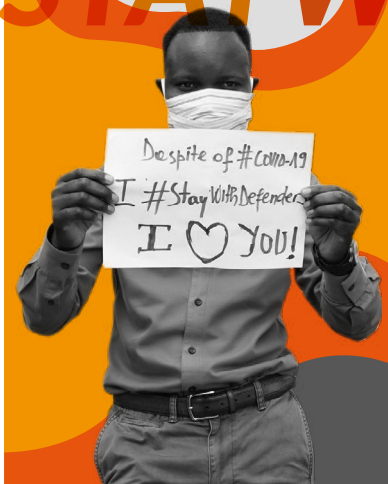
In May 2020, we launched “[#StayWithDefenders in times of COVID-19](#)”, a global campaign on the right to defend human rights during these difficult times. The COVID-19 virus has produced long-lasting effects that impact societies from all corners of the globe. However, the consequences of the pandemic have affected some people and groups more than others.

Many lack access to basic needs and services such as clean water, medical care and hygiene supplies, such as soap, masks or hand sanitiser; all the while medical services come under severe pressure. Detainees—including political dissidents and human rights defenders—are at high risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 due to the tightness of their enclosed quarters, a situation causing increased psychological distress. Migrants, refugees and stateless persons have suffered from increased acts of xenophobia and racism worldwide, due to baseless fear that the virus is being carried by certain groups. The global increase in gender-based and domestic violence is another alarming consequence of COVID-19, with figures showing that demand for support services have rapidly increased across the world, particularly in the economies worst hit by the pandemic. These are just a few of the many situations created by the spread of COVID-19 worldwide.



This new landscape is also severely affecting the lives and work of human rights defenders (HRDs), especially in those settings where they are most at risk. With this #StayWithDefenders campaign, we have been calling for international solidarity and recognition to all human rights defenders, be they individuals or collectives, who are working under conditions crisis and uncertainty. We also raised awareness about the increasing risks that many HRDs face within this context in order to remind decision-makers and the general public that HRDs’ security and protection must be reinforced in order to address the new challenges that have arisen from the pandemic.

# STAYWITHDEFENDERS







**f** 74 posts  
29,116 reach

**t** 95 tweets  
115,366 views

States' reactions are, more often than not, having a negative impact on human rights and the Right to Defend Human Rights. In various contexts, emergency measures adopted by governments have been denounced as disregarding international human rights standards, which is a worrying trend deserving our collective attention. We must stop the spread of the pandemic, not of the enjoyment of human rights.

Although we are living in hard and complex times, it is essential that governments respond to the needs and protection of civil society in a timely and humane manner, acknowledging the essential role they play in coming out stronger after this crisis subsides.

Governments must refrain from using state measures to curb the spread of the virus as an excuse to crack down on human rights defenders and their collectives. All responses to the crisis

must be evidence-based, legal, proportionate, non-discriminatory, time-limited to the pandemic duration and respect human dignity. Emergency measures that mandate unwarranted surveillance, intimidation, aggression or repression directed against human rights defenders must be disbarred.

Therefore, we have been asking to all those who support human rights to join us in showing solidarity with human rights defenders worldwide by sending messages of support and photos on social media. We want HRDs to see that, even if we are physically distant, we are not far away.

Our ultimate goal is to give strength and lift up the spirits of HRDs, especially those who are currently more vulnerable, marginalised and discriminated, so that they can keep up with their important and necessary role and fully enjoy their right to defend human rights.

**MANY MORE PEOPLE JOINED,**  
INCLUDING PROMINENT FIGURES SUCH AS:



**Michel Forst**  
Former UN Special Rapporteur  
on the situation of HRD



**Miguel Urbán Crespo**  
Member of the European  
Parliament



**Passy Mubalama**  
Founder of Aidprofen,  
WHRD

## 2. Winds of Change in 2020 for Germain Rukuki

2020 marked three years of imprisonment for Burundian human rights defender (HRD), Germain Rukuki

For our friend, former partner and well-known HRD Germain Rukuki, the year 2020 brought many unexpected twists and turns. Germain is a Burundian HRD who is currently serving the longest prison sentence ever imposed on an HRD in Burundi: 32-years. Since 13 July 2017, when Germain was arrested at home and imprisoned, he has been separated from his wife and three children, the youngest of whom he has never met. His case is emblematic of the institutional attacks made against HRDs, where criminalisation is used to silence those who defend human rights.

Four years have now gone by with Germain sitting behind bars, and his legal proceedings and final sentence are still hanging in the balance. In April



# GERMAIN RUKUKI

2020, a Supreme Court hearing on Germain's case took place, lasting only a few minutes. Two months later, the sudden death of outgoing president Nkurunziza fast-forwarded the inauguration of newly elected president, Évariste Ndayishimiye, and the international community looked on with interest and in suspense. During his inauguration speech, President Ndayishimiye voiced a promise "to build Burundi on solid foundations, namely: good governance, respect and protection of human rights." Afterwards, a hesitant optimism hung in the air. In this new Burundi, could Germain and other imprisoned HRDs finally be recognised as citizens to be praised rather than imprisoned?

Nevertheless, at this same time the COVID-19 virus was making its mark on Burundi, with reports of an 'unidentified virus' rippling through the overcrowded Burundian prisons. These reports brought severe psychological and emotional anguish to Germain, his family and all those advocating for his release.

Thankfully, Germain was not affected by the virus while in prison, and gradually new developments in his legal proceedings began to take form. On 30 June 2020, The Burundian Supreme Court announced the

rejection of the Appeal Court's decision to uphold Germain's 32-year sentence, ordering the appeal hearing to be re-held, citing irregularities in his right to a fair trial. This announcement ricocheted throughout Burundi and abroad, granting Germain a new opportunity to defend himself as an innocent man in the Courts.

The following months saw various actions calling for Germain's release: a [letter](#) was sent to President Ndayishimiye by five United Nations Special Procedure mandate holders; Germain was featured in Amnesty International's [Write for Rights](#) campaign; and an [open letter](#) addressed to ACHPR and UN mandate holders, signed by 89 organisations, asked for the immediate and unconditional release of Germain and other imprisoned HRDs.

All of these actions added to the growing international call for Germain to be freed and for a new chapter to begin for the people of Burundi. Protection International wishes to extend its gratitude to all those who continued to advocate for Germain, especially during such a challenging year as 2020. **We hope to see 2021 bringing winds of change for Germain, as a free man!**

**UPDATE:** Since writing this article, we are pleased to report that [Germain Rukuki has been freed on 30 June 2021](#)



# 4

## 2020 PUBLICATIONS AT A GLANCE



# THE RISK ANALYSIS AND PROTECTION PLAN PRINCIPLES: REDEFINING THE RISK APPROACH

❖ **15 years since the first manual on applying the risk approach to the protection of human rights defenders (HRDs), practitioners work together on a new set of standards**

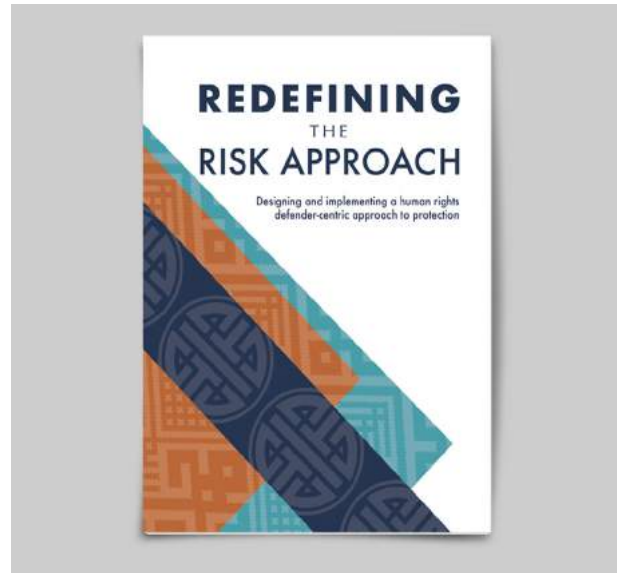
The risk approach has become an integral tool for addressing the protection of HRDs around the world. It is repeatedly used and considered by defenders, the United Nations General Assembly, UN Rapporteurs, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Inter-American Court, regional human rights organisations, as well as constitutional courts in various countries. It has been included in numerous manuals, applied by public policies for the protection of HRDs in several countries, and is being used by a growing number of practitioners and consultancies.

Luis Enrique Eguren and other Protection International researchers first conceptualised and elaborated the idea back in 2005, which marks 15 years since the launch of the [first manual on the risk approach for HRDs](#).

Its adoption has been very rapid since, among other reasons, the Risk approach offers simple and easily applicable tools for conducting a situated analysis for HRDs under threat, which informs effective decision-making. However, its widespread use has also shown the shortcomings and limitations of its implementation. Often, risk analyses are very general, not contextualised within defenders' real situations, and lack a gendered and intersectional approach.

Instead of acting as a step towards what really matters for HRDs, which is setting a plan of action or a protection plan, the risk analysis has often become an objective in itself. In other words, a diagnosis is made, but no treatment is given.

In countries where Protection Mechanisms exist, HRDs are given a "quantification of their level of risk", with arbitrary figures created within spreadsheets that reduce the complexity of reality into one-dimensional numbers that subsequently determine the action or inaction of the State. In these same processes, HRDs are sometimes subjected to "information extraction", where they are forced to show evidence of being at risk as if they were subject to a criminal investigation.



“PI was a pioneer in developing and applying the risk approach for the protection of human rights defenders. Fifteen years ago, the concept of risk had already been applied within other social fields, and without a doubt that facilitated its transition to the protection of human rights defenders. Today, a decade and a half later, at PI we are aware of the strengths, but also the weaknesses of the risk approach, and that is why we want to celebrate this anniversary by proposing Principles for its more effective application.”

**LUIS ENRIQUE EGUREN**

Senior Advisor for Protection International and one of the original researchers who began applying the risk approach to protection work.





✦ **WE REALISED** that it was timely to revitalise how the risk approach is understood and implemented, taking into consideration all of the lessons learned from the past decade and a half. We seized the 15-year anniversary of the first manual as an opportunity to reflect critically on how the risk approach is being applied in practice by organising a consultation to work on new standards.

✦ **WE CREATED** a diverse panel of 65 experts, including members of civil society, protection mechanisms, intergovernmental bodies, HRD observatories, HRD national or regional networks, and academics—covering the Americas, Africa, Europe, MENA, and Southeast Asia.

The ultimate goal was to produce a set of agreed-upon principles about risk analyses and protection plans for defenders, which can be used as a reference (or “minimum standard”) and benchmark for HRDs, State and government officials, civil society organisations and all other actors contributing to the protection of HRDs.

✦ **WE MODERATED** the whole process by organising asynchronous, online consultations, surveys and live virtual meeting sessions to engage experts across continents and time zones, accumulating their lived experiences, unique specialities and bringing their perspectives and cultural contexts to light.

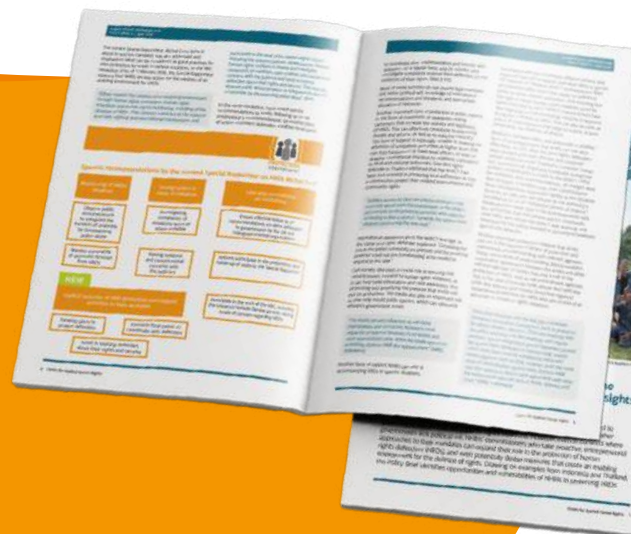
✦ **WE WORKED** together to review, edit and ultimately produce a list of universally applicable principles—publicly presented and discussed during a virtual launch event on 27 January 2021— and we intend to engage with key stakeholders at different levels to influence the way they approach risk moving forward.

By revitalising how risk approach is understood and implemented, these carefully crafted statements offer pragmatic, realistic, inclusive, yet diversely applicable, principles for institutions, organisations, and defenders to follow when developing or implementing a risk analysis or protection plan.



## Whom are these standards for?

- **State protection mechanisms**, providing guidance on the bare minimum standards for HRD-centric risk analyses and protection plans.
- **Human rights defenders and human rights organisations** in general, offering them a concrete reference for what they should be expecting from the State.
- **Human rights practitioners**, who can advocate for improved legislation and national standards for public policies that are HRD-centric.
- **International organisations and consultants** that work within the human rights defender protection field so that they can advocate for and apply best practices that are HRD-centric when they also participate in these processes.



# NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS AND THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS: INSIGHTS FROM THAILAND AND INDONESIA

➤ Drawing on examples from Southeast Asia, our publication identifies opportunities and vulnerabilities of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in protecting HRDs.

In May 2020, in collaboration with the [University of York](#), Protection International published “National Human Rights Institutions and the protection of Women and Men Human Rights Defenders (HRDs): Insights from Thailand and Indonesia”, the ninth issue of a Policy Brief series organised by Human Rights Defender Hub. NHRIs are independent institutions established by law and mandated to protect and promote human rights at the national level in accordance with international human rights norms and standards. NHRIs are not always equipped or designed to be effective and to comply with their mandates, but they can still expand their role in the protection of HRDs.

NHRIs that comply with the Paris Principles are in a unique position to guide and advise governments on their human rights obligations, including their duty to protect human rights defenders. Even if their mandate may be limited on paper, there is a wide range of actions they can undertake to contribute to fostering an enabling environment for HRDs in their country. Drawing on examples from Indonesia and Thailand, PI’s policy brief identifies opportunities and vulnerabilities of NHRIs in protecting HRDs.

## Actions NHRIs Can Undertake

According to the recommendations set by the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs, there is a wide range of actions NHRIs can undertake to play a prominent role in HRD protection. For instance, they can promote awareness about the right to defend rights,



thus contributing to legitimising HRDs’ efforts. They can monitor the situation of HRDs by observing the handling of public demonstrations and documenting police abuse when applicable. They can gather concerns raised by national CSOs and put them forward in regional and international mechanisms. Whenever their mandate allows, NHRIs can receive and investigate complaints of violations, through which they can identify and raise systemic concerns with the judiciary and with other national bodies. And these are just a few examples, of many.

## Insights from Thailand and Indonesia

Thailand and Indonesia are two case studies that show how, despite the limited legal mandates and the sensitive political environment, both countries’ NHRIs have found avenues to provide some sort of support to groups and individuals who engage in human rights defence.

Available in [English](#), [French](#), [Spanish](#), [Bahasa Indonesia](#) and [Thai](#), this policy brief summarises insights and reflections on the role NHRIs have played in HRDs’ protection based on interviews held with commissioners and staff of these institutions, as well as with individual HRDs in both countries.



# TAKING CARE OF US: A MANUAL FOR THE COLLECTIVE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN RURAL AREAS


PI Mesoamerica releases a new guide aimed at the collective protection of rurally based human rights defenders (HRDs) while integrating a psychosocial and gender perspective.


In February 2020, we unveiled the new version of the manual *Taking Care of Us*, or “*Cuidándonos*” in Spanish. This publication is the result of more than 13 years of work in the field and involved a process of compiling the methodologies and lessons learned of our seasoned Protection International Mesoamerica (PI Mesoamerica) team.

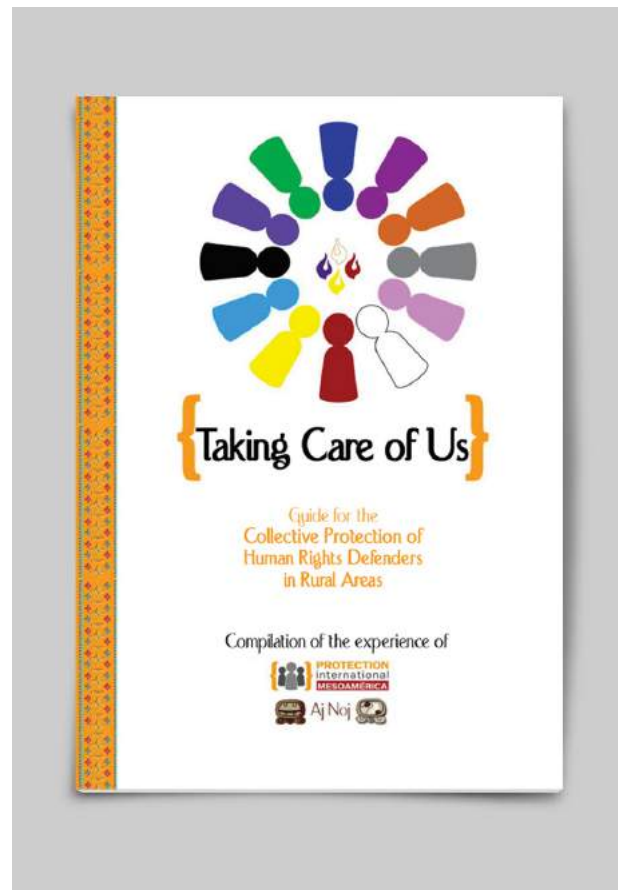
This publication presents an update of PI Mesoamerica’s approach to protection, based on their experiences in the accompaniment and training of HRDs and their collectives in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras.


The new “*Taking Care of Us*” aims to serve as a tool to support the accompaniment of individuals and groups of defenders facing threats in rural areas. The guide is firmly committed to the collective protection approach, and is based on the strengthening of protection networks to confront threats, while incorporating a psychosocial and gender perspective throughout the process.


These are some of the key elements upon which the approach proposed in this guide is based:


 **The community** – the collective subject and community organisation are considered to be foundational for strengthening collective practices and actions for the protection of the community;


 **Collective protection** – For protection to be effective, it must take a collective approach that properly incorporates the relationship between the individual(s) and their organisation, their community and their relationship to their territory;



 **Protection networks** – which can be used as a strategy for strengthening collective protection, and should be focused on the internal ties and cohesion of the collective and the external ties with solidarity networks, as well as on strengthening social practices that have an impact on protection;

 **Territory Control Dispute** – defined as an analysis of the forces and powers at play in correlation with control of the territory;

 **The psychosocial approach** – a way to address protection by taking into account the impacts and traumas of violence, as well as the cohesion of the group and communities to improve their protection practices. The guide explains how PI Meso uses group dynamics and psychodrama techniques to encourage spontaneity and creativity in groups facing violence;

 **Gender mainstreaming** – based on community feminism, provides an intersectional understanding of various forms of oppression experienced in the region and advocates for the deconstruction of the unequal relations generated by these oppressions, as well as for the decolonisation and depatriarchalisation;



**Communication to confront the threat** – with communication understood as a fundamental tool to break the isolation of human rights community organisations, dissuade the aggressor network as well as persuade the public and duty bearers to respect and protect the right to defend human rights.

PI Mesoamerica’s methodology is rooted in experience, participatory research and constant communication with HRDs. This continuous and close work with the defenders has allowed PI Mesoamerica to develop new approaches based on the care of people, their collectives and the territories in which they live. The focus on “trauma sensitivity” has led to the incorporation of the psychosocial and gender perspective into the protection approach, which has become the backbone of PI Mesoamerica’s work.



**Taking care of ourselves and our territories.** Taking care of ourselves as individuals and collectives. Taking care of relationships and loved ones, acknowledging the damage caused by aggressions perpetuating a history of structural violence with long episodes of repression.

The new “Taking Care of Us” guide is organised in seven chapters that explain PI Mesoamerica’s approach and methodology for the accompaniment of defenders and collectives:

- Point of Departure
- Threat Analysis
- Protection networks and social practices
- Disputed Territorial Control
- Communication for Threat Confrontation
- The Psychosocial Perspective and Psychosocial Support
- Protection of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs)

NEW!







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**CENTRAL  
AND SOUTH  
AMERICA**

# UNTOLD STORIES: COMMUNITY COMMUNICATOR WINS AWARD FOR CAPTURING QUARANTINE IMPACT

Human rights defender (HRD) and member of the Mataquescuintla community communication network, Leonel Rodriguez, wins award at local film festival

Leonel Rodriguez, a member of the Community Communication Network, took second place in the 8th Film and Video Exhibition in Defence of Life and Territory for his documentary [Sobrevivencia Campesina](#), (“Peasant Survival”).

The exhibition was organised by the [Tz’ikin Network](#), a community communication initiative by filmmakers, audio-visual collectives and community video groups from the Mayan and Ladino Indigenous Peoples of Guatemala. Since 2012, they have been carrying out different activities aimed at decentralising, democratising and decolonising audio-visual production media. Protection International is a trusted partner of the network and avid supporter of its projects. Furthermore, both organisations have common collaborating communities in the country, such as Resistencia Pacífica de la Puya or Resistencia Pacífica de Santa Rosa.

In 2019, Leonel participated in a training on how to use your cell phone to create short videos, which is part of our workshop “*Communication for Threat Confrontation*”. He is also a member of the Community Communication Network, which was established as part of Protection International Mesoamerica’s methodology for the strengthening collective protection. Although Leonel already had some video editing knowledge, the workshop not only earned him recognition as a community communicator but also allowed him to upgrade his skillset by learning how to create impactful content with limited resources.

Leonel Rodríguez’s short film captures the intimate life of a farmer couple afflicted by the harsh effects of COVID-19 confinement. The success of this story, like others told by community communicators, lies in its creation—by the community for the community. The video had more than 6,500 views and more than 174 shares, proving once more how social media can be a powerful channel for raising awareness about communities that are confronted with multinational extractive projects. His award-winning documentary is also proof of the measurable difference that capacity building can make—helping talented people to realise their vision.

Communication, culture and cinema are key to spreading positive narratives about HRDs that are

often stigmatised. Mainstream media are overlooking many stories from indigenous and rural communities, especially now that the pandemic has limited access to remote areas. Through social media and other channels, PI Mesoamerica broadcasted a [series of videos](#) in Spanish and the Mayan languages of Mam, Qeqchi and Qanjobal, in which fictitious characters highlighted the psychosocial and gendered struggles that HRDs have been facing during the pandemic. By telling these stories, the series aims to reduce the HRDs’ feeling of isolation, both physical and perceived, and carry a message of solidarity to hard-to-reach places.



“*Because of the unique opportunity of capturing the intimate life story of a peasant couple affected by the harsh effects of the quarantine. This short film reveals a local reality and a universal message in times of pandemics. We particularly appreciated the film’s ability to record an out-of-the-ordinary event through the personal account of the woman peasant, as she claims her rights with absolute dignity.*”

Jury of the Defence of Life and Territory Film Exhibition’s.



# “WE ARE ISOLATED, BUT NOT ALONE!” NEW WAYS OF WORKING REMOTELY WITH COMMUNITIES

## ➤ Strengthening protection networks in rural Colombia despite COVID-19 confinement

Within the municipality of La Primavera, located in the eastern plains of Colombia, in the Orinoquía Region, Protection International works with the Trompillo Indigenous settlement as well as La Llanura and La Pascua Indigenous reserves, which make up of approximately 28 communities. We implemented new ways of working remotely with young people, women and Indigenous guards from the three different areas, who have been confined within their territories throughout the year due to COVID-19.

The Indigenous peoples of Orinoquía have faced, for centuries, situations of injustice, inequality, and persecution, under which their rights have been systematically violated. Faced with this reality, they have become human rights defenders, strengthening their organisational processes as communities and creating support networks to protect their rights and territories. Now, COVID-19 has made it even harder for these highly vulnerable communities to enjoy their right to defend human rights.

Compliance with public health measures has not come without its difficulties for communities that, even before the COVID-19 outbreak, have been dealing with limited access to food, drinking water and other basic supplies—coupled with little to no access to information, poor communication infrastructure and high unemployment. Although the territory of La Primavera is predominantly flat, as part of the Orinoquia region in the Llanos plains, it is hardly accessible, as it can only be reached by air, via the Meta River or by land during the dry summer months.

In confrontation with [increasingly harsh conditions](#), we did not want them to feel further abandoned even if it was difficult for PI teams to physically visit them. Together with the national human rights NGO Corporación Claretiana Norman Pérez, we developed different activities to keep in touch and work in collaboration with the communities. We organised regular follow-up phone calls with community members and leaders to discuss their



concerns in the midst of isolation, as well as ways for us to respond to their needs.

We spoke with the leaders at least once a week, and we arranged a collective phone call for each community in which ten of their members could discuss with our colleagues in Colombia. We provided facemasks, anti-bacterial gel and disinfectant to the Indigenous guards and leaders to help them monitor their territory safely.

We also supported the functionality of their communication channels by providing mobile top-ups to enable contact between the community and their support networks. We organised, when possible, a series of online meetings with Indigenous guards, young people and women to address human rights and, ethnic territorial rights as well as ways to claim and defend them.

We also provided food and delivered educational materials on human rights, ethnic rights and women's rights to ease their situation and provide them with supplies to organise their own meetings locally, so that they can more easily spread information to a greater number of people within their communities.

Despite isolation and distance, PI was a reliable resource for accompaniment in their human rights work and an ally to turn to for advice whenever their right to defend human rights was violated. The Trompillo, La Llanura and La Pascua communities felt supported, even from afar. The communities have managed to adapt to the new conditions imposed by the pandemic and their activities have not ceased. They are maintaining their advocacy work, as well as meeting internally and reflecting on their own struggles.

Through our online sessions, 36 Indigenous guards, 18 young people and 13 women began to deepen their knowledge about the defence of their rights and the advancement of collective projects related to Indigenous territorial expansion. This, in turn, allowed the groups to better promote, protect and preserve their cultures, traditions and ancestral wisdoms.



# “DOIS DEDOS DE PROSA”: ONLINE TALKS ON COLLECTIVE PROTECTION AND THE RIGHT TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS IN LATIN AMERICA

## ❖ Connecting human rights defenders in Latin America to exchange experiences and reflect

In partnership with [Associação de Advogados de Trabalhadores Rurais \(AATR\)](#), the Centro de Estudos e Ação Social (CEAS) and the [Coordenadoria Ecumênica de Serviço \(CESE\)](#), Protection International organised a series of online talks called “Dois dedos de prosa: a proteção coletiva e o direito de defender os direitos humanos na América Latina”.

Between September and November 2020, around 260 people from different organisations in Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, Guatemala and other South American countries discussed issues related to the collective protection of human rights defenders in the region. Literally translating as “Two fingers of prose”, a Portuguese expression meaning “a pause for a chat among friends”, these four webinars were great spaces for all friends of human rights in Latin America to discuss current issues, exchange experiences and reflect in the midst of the social and public health emergency caused by COVID-19.

A diverse array of defenders had the opportunity to discuss gender, intersectionality, race and ethnicity and gain deeper insights into how attacks on human rights defenders (HRDs) and collectives are somehow influenced by these elements—including women human rights defenders (WHRDs), activists from the black and feminist movements, environmentalists, members of peasant communities, Quilombola communities, fisherwomen and Indigenous peoples. The first session, for example, focused on human rights paradigms, and explored the relationship between class, ethnicity, race, territory and gender, all elements that collective protection processes need to consider and incorporate.

Participants to the second session, which focused on the violations to the right to defend human rights, agreed that attacks on human rights defenders in Latin America are largely due to a continent-wide scramble for land and natural resources. Black communities, Indigenous peoples, river dwellers, peasants, women and marginalised communities, as well as social groups defending human rights, are directly affected by this capitalisation of land and territories, which intensifies and diversifies their risks.

The third session revolved around communication as a dissuasive and persuasive strategy for the protection of human rights defenders. Communication in its different forms amplifies a group’s voice, enabling them to act as a network, to share information and transmit their own ancestral practices, diversity and multiculturalism – in which art plays an essential role.

The cycle closed with a discussion on the collective protection of defenders in relation to political emotions and pedagogy of care. Along with many ideas and proposals, the HRDs were reminded that practices of self-care include integrative therapies, creating spaces for community meetings and exchanges and stimulating the preservation of collective memory and ancestral knowledge.

Through these four virtual conversations, we produced shared knowledge on collective protection, the right to defend human rights and other elements, which are summarised in [key documents available on PI website](#). The attendees also produced four videos for with WHRDs who told us about their experiences in [Colombia](#), [Brazil](#) and [Honduras](#).

Thanks to the work that was elaborated during these exchanges, we were able to strengthen Protection International’s relationship and links with women human rights defenders’ organisations in Brazil, where we began our work in 2019. The peer organisations in Brazil stressed that the discussions opened new possibilities to come out of isolation, even given the limitations of virtual communication, to broaden their knowledge and identify powerful protection practices that can be adapted to different contexts.

As follow up to these discussions, we have held dialogues with at least four organisations close to Protection International in Brazil, and for 2021 we are planning training processes with grassroots human rights organisations that are facing great challenges while defending their territories. In addition, we plan to continually create exchanges between the HRDs from various countries in the region in order to facilitate the exchange of strategies, ideas and best practices.



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AFRICA

# A BRUTAL OUTBREAK: GRAPPLING WITH ESCALATED POLICE BRUTALITY IN KENYA AMIDST A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

➤ The brand new KAMWE Project achieved more than expected given the challenges of COVID-19

Yassin Moyo, a 13-year-old schoolboy, was [shot by a police officer](#) in Nairobi on 27 March 2020 while he was playing on his balcony after curfew. He later died in the hospital. Yassin, who was in his final year of primary school, is one of many people who were killed in the year 2020 as police brutality escalated during the COVID-19 restrictions, lockdowns and curfews. [The Missing Voices Coalition](#), a group of organisations committed to exposing extrajudicial executions in Kenya, recorded and verified 157 cases of extrajudicial executions (EJEs) and 10 cases of enforced disappearance while in police custody.

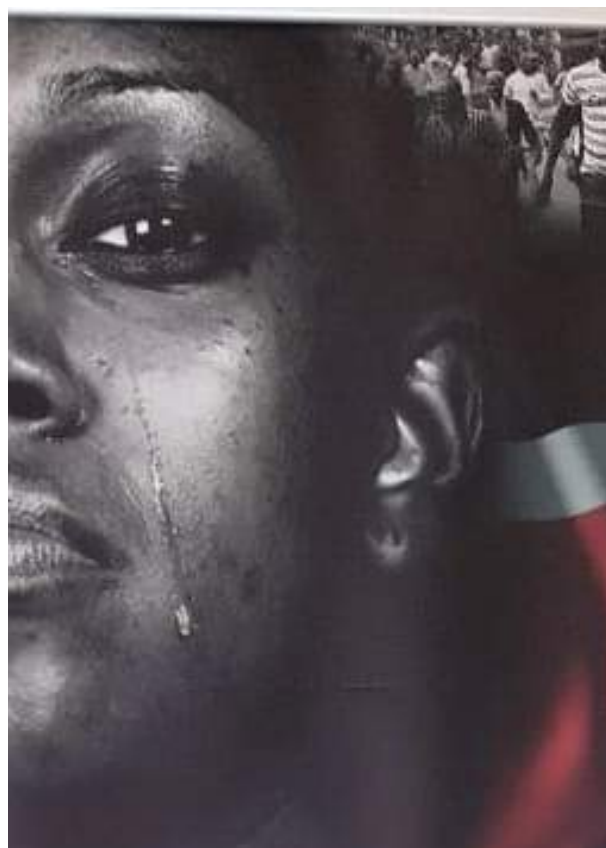
Human rights defenders (HRDs) in Kenya are constantly facing threats and attacks. Most of the time, perpetrators are not made answerable to their crimes and they continue these heinous acts with impunity. Of all the cases that were identified, [only 28 have been charged with a crime](#) to date. Although Yassin's killer was arrested and charged with murder, the case continues to drag on in court with no conclusion in sight.

For citizens who live in informal settlements in big cities, police brutality is a constant threat due to the criminalisation of poverty. The mantra seems to be that because they are poor, they are all criminals. One such informal settlement is the Mathare Slums, where the [Mathare Social Justice Centre \(MSJC\)](#) has been working to help survivors and victims of police brutality seek justice. Most survivors are mothers of victims since their adult and teenage children are the most targeted in extra-judicial killings. Young men are the most persecuted demographic in Nairobi's slums.

In 2017, a group of courageous women called the Mothers of Victims of Extrajudicial Executions, the majority of whom have lost their sons to bullets, published a report titled ["Who Is Next?"](#) denouncing the systematic extrajudicial executions of young males who were viewed as criminals solely because they live in informal settlements. These women human rights defenders (WHRDs) continue to peacefully fight against extrajudicial executions and seek justice for the murders of their children with the support of MSJC and other justice centres.

The KAMWE: Supporting WHRDs and their Grassroots Organisations to Document and Prevent Extrajudicial Executions in the Republic of Kenya Project (KAMWE Project) has been working with MSJC to support the protection of WHRDs in the area by empowering them as agents of EJEs prevention and pushing for national human rights institutions (NHRIs) to do the same. The project began in January 2020 and just as the project team had put everything together to start in-person capacity building and networking activities, COVID-19 arrived in Kenya. Lockdowns were announced shortly after and gatherings were prohibited.

Four months later, in July, the government announced a raft of eased COVID-19 restrictions including permissions for small gatherings. This created opportunities for minimalistic in-person capacity building and networking activities. The Protection International (PI) team greatly adjusted their methodologies in order to observe COVID-19 prevention protocols while also working to optimise output and impact.



Despite not achieving the pre-COVID-19 projections, the KAMWE project achieved more than was expected given the circumstances. PI worked to build capacities of 44 WHRDs (with the initial target being 50) on preventative protection, including the training of 10 security focal points. PI hosted three meetings that were focused on strengthening

the networks of 10 social justice centres and gave security training to 13 lawyers and 24 paralegals involved in human rights work. They also trained 14 lawyers and 23 paralegals on the documentation of EJE cases. KAMWE provided emergency protection to three WHRDs at risk by way of temporary relocation and subsistence support.



### PROJECT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Protection International Kenya (PIK) in partnership with Mathare Social Justice Centre (MSJC), the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), The Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI) and Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) are currently implementing an EU funded project titled “KAMWE: Supporting Women HRDs and Their Grassroots Organisations to Document and Prevent Extrajudicial Executions in the Republic of Kenya” with the objective of contributing to the protection of WHRDs and the promotion of their right to defend human rights in Kenya.

The intervention has two specific objectives: WHRDs and their grassroots organisations in Nairobi City County are empowered agents in their human rights work including advocating against EJES; and NHRIs and national authorities in Kenya support WHRDs’ work against EJEs, promote their right to defend human rights and NHRIs have operationalised the Marrakesh Declaration with positive results.





# COMMUNITY PROTECTION: A GLIMMER OF HOPE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Local community protection committees for women human rights defenders (WHRDs) are created in North and South Kivu for the first time

In the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), the level of violence remains very high. [According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#), 2,810 civilians were killed by parties to the conflict in 2020, which is more than double the number of fatalities in 2019 (1,359 victims). OCHA has determined that a 'fragile protection environment' is one of the five major elements of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the country, making it harder for HRDs to carry out their work. Local community members, especially women and girls, pay the highest price of two decades of war and conflict, where the war crime of rape is used

by combatants to destabilise and terrorise the population. Many women have had to stop going to the fields, to the market or to look for firewood in remote villages where armed groups are active out of fear of being raped or killed. In order to survive, local communities have tried to set up collective protection mechanisms, which have shown limited success

This worrying situation prompted Protection International to carry out a study in July 2020 on the situation of community protection in the provinces of North and South Kivu in order to identify and analyse existing protection practices,



**“** Before, we didn't know how to deal with the violence affecting our communities because we were not trained in community protection. Now, with PI training and through the creation of the CLPCs, we can find solutions to the problems we encounter on a daily basis

**Gulain Kalibanya**  
Head of the Bugore groupement in Kabara territory, South Kivu.



with a particular focus on the prevention of sexual violence. Findings from our research show a serious lack of effective frameworks for strengthening collective protection within communities. Existing mechanisms proved to be weak and most of their leaders never received human rights training and were not aware of collective protection.

In September 2020, Protection International accompanied the communities in setting up four Local Community Protection Committees (in French *Comités Locaux de Protection Communautaire*, or CLPC) consisting of 48 members with equal representation of women and men. Based on the number of protection incidents recorded against women human rights defenders and the needs identified in our study, four pilot sites – Kabasha and Musienene in the North Kivu Province, as well as Kavumu and Luvungi in South Kivu Province – now have their own protection committees. Other communities, such as Kiwanja (North Kivu) and Baraka (South Kivu), will soon be able to have their own committees, as there is potential to extend this model to other communities across the DR Congo.

These activities are part of the project “*Empowerment and Protection of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) to contribute to civilian crisis prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding in DR Congo*”, funded by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the ZIVIK programme and implemented by Protection International since 2018. More than 480 WHRDs from 44 civil society organisations in the provinces of North and South Kivu have been directly involved in this programme.

This project brings together a wide array of civil society members, community and religious leaders and local authorities to engage in collective protection of defenders and to encourage their own communities to commit to the fight against sexual violence, the promotion of human rights and the building of sustainable peace. Additionally, CLPCs work as early warning systems for the better protection of defenders and community members. They act as a relay between victims and structures or organisations providing support services for survivors. In addition, CLPCs are active as advocacy groups before authorities and duty bearers at the local level.

In October 2020, we trained the 48 members of CLPC in order to strengthen their capacities on physical security, gender issues and advocacy. Through these activities, these human rights defenders (HRDs) have acquired new competencies in terms of protection and security, as well as other skills necessary for the work of defending human rights. They can now respond effectively to the threats and incidents they face, and they are able, for instance, to develop their own security plan and to put early warning mechanisms in place to protect members of their communities from potential harm.

In addition to training, we also promoted dialogue between CLPC members and security forces, the judiciary, as well as political and administrative authorities, by facilitating roundtable sessions aimed at sensitising the local Congolese authorities to their obligations towards the protection of HRDs. Some of the authorities involved in these roundtables previously considered HRDs as their enemies, but thanks to these meetings, they have made a commitment to collaborate with defenders for the promotion of human rights.



# STAYING CLOSE WHEN THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD GETS HEAVIER: SUPPORTING WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN DIFFICULT TIMES

❖ Protection International Africa has adapted its programmes to continue accompanying women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in the Democratic Republic of Congo during the pandemic

The arrival of COVID-19 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) has acted as a powerful indicator of the inequalities and difficulties in access to human rights. Seclusion and confinement have affected many Human Rights Defenders both psychologically and economically, including those defending human rights and fighting against impunity.

In order to comprehend the magnitude of these effects on women human rights defenders' (WHRDs) work in eastern DR Congo, we submitted an online survey to 46 WHRDs from Protection International Africa's network. The results showed that COVID-19 measures have significantly hindered WHRDs' initiatives. For example, teleworking posed major challenges due to frequent and prolonged power outages, as well as poor internet connection.

The results of the survey also show that psychosocial support is greatly needed during this pandemic, as many HRDs have experienced trauma and depression due to the uncertainty of a better tomorrow. During the period of the pandemic, several human rights organisations suspended their activities and others had their funding cut by donors, due to either financial uncertainty or the need to redirect funds to address public health needs.

Furthermore, conflict-related sexual violence remained widespread in the North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri and Tanganyika provinces. In 2020, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) recorded [1,053 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, affecting 675 women, 370 girls, 3 men and 5 boys.](#) Women human rights defenders are at a heightened risk for sexual violence solely for being women in the DR Congo.

In 2020, Protection International recorded 17 cases of threats against women human rights defenders in the DR Congo, a figure that is relatively low compared to the 140 alerts of threats against men human rights defenders. These numbers, however, are not an indication that women experience less risk than men. Rather, this discrepancy is simply proof of the ineffectiveness and limitations of existing gender-blind alert management mechanisms. This phenomenon is also aggravated by the attitude of certain communities towards women, which means that many women, for fear of being ostracised, prefer to remain silent rather than denounce the violations of which they are victims.



Protection International in DR Congo has adapted its programme of activities to this new context. For instance, we organised a socially distanced gathering of 15 WHRDs on 24 June 2020, in order to listen to their needs and understand how their professional lives, as well as their physical and mental health, have been affected by the COVID-19 measures. During group work, the participants once again affirmed having felt isolated, and that COVID-19 has clearly influenced their psychological health and even their productivity.

In order to hold discussions in larger numbers, we created digital working groups in order to maintain contact with our WHRD partners. These working groups served as a space to break isolation, encourage knowledge sharing between WHRDs, and develop resilience against the harsh impact of COVID-19. This approach enabled us to accompany more than 400 HRDs between January and October 2020 in DR Congo despite the constraints of public health measures.



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*I was happy to attend the session on the impact of COVID-19 that PI organised for women human rights defenders in Goma. It was really important to meet again with colleagues to share experiences on how this pandemic affects us as well as our work, and how to deal with it.*

**LAETITIA MUTINGWA**

*One of 15 WHRDs who participated in PI's community gathering.*





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**SOUTHEAST  
ASIA**

# “RECLAIM THE CLIFFS AND THE FORESTS, RECLAIM OUR MOTHERLAND”: KHAO LAO YAI-PHA JUN DAI FOREST CONSERVATION GROUP TAKES BACK THEIR ANCESTRAL LANDS

Community human rights defenders (HRDs) of the Dong Mafai district in northeast Thailand finally achieve justice after 26 years of struggle

On 4 September 2020, around 300 HRDs from the local communities of the Dong Mafai Sub District, in the Nong Bua Lamphu Province of Thailand, marched to the nearby mining zone and occupied it. They performed traditional rituals and held rejuvenation ceremonies to revive their motherland back to its prosperous state.

After a 26-year struggle against quarry mining, HRDs from the Khao Lao Yai-Pha Jun Dai Community Forest Conservation Group have achieved a tremendous victory: they reclaimed a mining zone and proclaimed it a community forest zone.

The mining company who was exercising control over the land lost their forest utilisation permit for quarrying when it expired on 3 September 2020. After this date, the company no longer has valid legal permission to utilise the mining zone, forcing a halt to all operations. The mining operations occupied 175 Rai (28 hectares) of reserve forest on Huak Cliff, which lies within the Dong Mafai Sub District in the Nong Bua Lamphu Province of northeast Thailand.

The community HRDs of Khao Lao Yai-Pha Jun Dai Forest Conservation Group had opposed the mining operations for over two decades due to the negative impacts they had on locals' access to food sources in the forest, the damage to buildings due to debris caused by explosions at the mine and its consequential pollution. Between 1995 and 1999, four environmental HRDs from the conservation group were killed for their activism. So far, no perpetrator has been held responsible for the crimes, further feeding the vicious cycle of impunity.

Protection International Thailand has been working closely with the community HRDs through accompaniment, capacity building on risk assessment and security plan implementation, engagement with authorities for public protection mechanisms as well as public advocacy and campaigning.

As the group still occupies and organises blockades at the entrance of the mining site, they continue to face physical threats and harassment from various actors. Most notable is the [case of the environmental HRD Lertsak Khamkongsak](#), an advisor to the group who also runs the Network of the People



Who Own Mineral Resources. In September 2020, when a worrisome pattern of death threats against him emerged, we provided him safe relocation, we urged actors such as Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the diplomatic community to act and we rounded up allies from national and international human rights organisations to rally for the public’s attention on this case.

We also raised awareness about the important role of HRDs and the need to combat impunity for crimes committed against them by organising [a public](#)

[forum on 15 November 2020 at the Bangkok Arts and Cultural Centre](#). The event received widespread public attention and mainstream media coverage that reached an audience of approximately 3-4 million people. The panel featured high-profile figures such as Angkhana Neelapaijit, the former National Human Rights Commissioner of Thailand, and Thanathorn Jungrungrangkit, a former Member of Parliament who is now part of the Progressive Movement, as well as a Sorn Khamjam, a woman human rights defender and the wife of a HRD who was murdered.

# FOR THOSE WHO DIED TRYING

**A**round the same time, PD Thailand also organised the “*For Those Who Died Trying*” photo exhibition at the Bangkok Arts and Cultural Centre, from 3-15 November 2020. The exhibition was extremely well received among young people, as the mentions about [the exhibition went viral on twitter](#) with at least 43,000 [retweets](#) reflecting the society’s unwillingness to accept impunity for crimes committed against HRDs.



# ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT: OUR RECIPE FOR STRENGTHENING WOMEN’S MOVEMENTS IN A CONFINED THAILAND

Keeping the Community Women Human Rights Defenders Collective feeling engaged and supported in spite of the COVID-19 outbreak



COVID-19 pandemic forced us to find creative ways to continue supporting the personal and collective needs of community and grassroots women human rights defenders (WHRDs) – with an extra focus on the care and well-being of the most vulnerable WHRDs and their communities, such as LGBTIQ, mothers, young activists – and to sustain their participation in social movements.

The Community Women Human Rights Defenders Collective is a space for community women rights defenders to build and promote connections nationally. Founded in 2019 by a group of Thai WHRDs, its ultimate goal is to make the context in which they operate supportive and inclusive for all women, especially for those who defend human rights.

Together with [Empower Foundation](#), Protection International is one of the core forces in the creation and strengthening of the WHRD Collective, which currently gathers community and grassroots women human rights defenders (WHRDs) from seventeen different groups, representing various kinds of women human rights defenders.

However, the travel restrictions imposed by Thailand’s government during the COVID-19 outbreak made it almost impossible for Protection International Thailand staff to travel and physically accompany all these communities. However, we found ways to keep the WHRDs collective feeling engaged and supported. For example, we hosted quizzes and regular group communications through

mobile phone applications, we mailed each other products from our communities that represent love and care, and we documented the stories of the WHRDs impacted by COVID-19 and published them on our [WHRDs Power Facebook Page](#) to increase visibility of their work online.

[Shedding light on their lives during these difficult times](#), was not only inspiring, but sometimes also helpful for WHRDs. Thanks to the [stories of resilience](#) we published, national media’s coverage enabled some neglected WHRDs in obtaining the assistance they deserved from the State. As the [Women Human Rights Collective of Thailand](#) supports the call for reform of the 2017 Thai Constitution, we also supported the collective in [engaging with duty-bearing authorities and in raising awareness](#) about their campaign on proposed amendments to the Constitution, as well as in joining and promoting a [Global Campaign on Care Income](#).

By doing so, we managed to keep WHRDs regularly engaged and communicating with each other both digitally and analogically. We provided a safe space for women HRDs to learn about each other’s issues, protection strategies, and learning to care for each other within the network, as well as extending this to reach out to other movements working on other issues such as pro-democracy groups or youth movements. While we contributed to the protection of WHRDs at risk and their families, we also accompanied their national networks through the referral of cases to victim emergency funds, the running of urgent actions, and the sharing of other relevant communications.





# A PREVENTIVE APPROACH: SECURITY PLANS AS A STRATEGY TO DEAL WITH ATTACKS AGAINST WHRDS IN INDONESIA

## ❖ Creating safety and protection strategies for women human rights defenders (WHRDs)

In February 2020, the Legal Aid Foundation of the Indonesian Women's Association for Justice (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Asosiasi Perempuan Indonesia untuk Keadilan or [LBH APIK](#)) turned to Protection International for advice on how to proceed in the aftermath of an attack to their office, which was orchestrated by several police officers and other unidentified actors.

A clear indicator of the current situation of human rights defenders in Indonesia is the increasing number of attacks against them. According to the Human Rights Defenders Coalition, [at least 116 attacks](#) took place between January and October 2020. As many as 59 of these cases involved police violence. The types of attacks – all directed against individuals or groups who criticised the government – range from the seizure of property, arbitrary arrests, harassment and intimidation, to hacking, account hijacking and doxing, among others.

We suggested to immediately reach out to networks that are able to quickly provide aid, such as the Victim and Witness Protection Agency (Lembaga Perlindungan Saksi dan Korban or LPSK) and officially report the incident to the police. We also assisted LBH APIK with the referral of the case to victim emergency funds, in order to quickly mitigate the impact of the attack on the organisation's operational capacity.

At the request of LBH APIK and Indonesia's Anti Violence Against Women National Commission ([Komnas Perempuan](#)), we elaborated a risk assessment and a security strategy for LBH APIK and their client. We recommended LBH APIK to increase security efforts in their office and involve a wider network of actors in order to exert pressure on the Indonesian legal authorities investigating the perpetrators of the attack.

LBH APIK provides legal assistance and support to women who experience injustice, violence and various forms of discrimination. By guiding the organisation through their protection planning process, we were able to assist in the development of organisational security strategies and best practices, as well as to facilitate the adoption of security measures for women human rights defenders.

We also advised LBH APIK's client to adopt the following personal safety measures during their

travels: be accompanied on every trip, continually report back about location and identify different route options before travelling. As per the date of this publication, neither LBH APIK or their client have suffered from other instances of violence or intimidation, further than the initial attack.

Nevertheless, we continue to encourage LBH APIK to be vigilant and to try to access emergency funds in case of imminent danger, in order to quickly reinforce their security measures and prevent future harm.



Respect for human rights is not yet the norm in Indonesia, and fighting for basic rights remains a steep challenge for many. Human rights defenders play a vital role in assisting the government in advancing the enforcement of fundamental rights and freedoms, and yet they are repeatedly and deliberately targeted by malicious actors, and often victims of various forms of violence. During his first mandate, President Joko Widodo promised to address the recurring human rights violations and break the cycle of violence against HRDs. This is undoubtedly a promise he failed to keep. Instead, there is a dangerous normalisation of human rights violations due to the government's inability and unwillingness to effectively act. Upon re-election in 2019, the Jokowi Administration announced it would make the issue of human rights enforcement a priority again. However, a quick look at all the incidents described above already proves that human rights standards have clearly gone downhill since he assumed power.



# 8

## **FINANCIAL REPORT**

# PI AISBL PROFIT AND LOSS STATEMENT 2020 (€)

## INCOME

### REVENUE - CORE

Governmental Agencies	835,871
Trust and Foundations	1,436,632
Individual Donors	
Other Revenue	26,778
<b>Total core Revenue</b>	<b>2,299,281</b>

### REVENUE - EARMARKED

Governmental Agencies	1,271,830
Trust and Foundations	253,893
<b>Total earmarked revenue</b>	<b>1,525,723</b>

**Total income** **3,825,004**

## COSTS

Personnel and Related Costs	2,335,761
Programme Costs	648,412
Operating, Administrative and Finance Costs	342,558
Governance and Strategy Costs	242,605

**Total costs** **3,569,336**

## INCOME (DEFICIT) FOR THE YEAR

**255,668**

# PI AISBL BALANCE SHEET 2020 (€)

## LIABILITIES AND RESERVES

### LIABILITIES

Current Liabilities	149,737
Provisions	-
Deferred Grants	542,686

**Total Liabilities** **692,423**

### RESERVES

Social Liability Funds	113,744
Reserve Funds	752,937

**Total Reserves** **866,681**

## TOTAL LIABILITIES AND RESERVES

**1,559,105**

## ASSETS

Fixed Assets	35,829
Cash and Cash Equivalents	1,351,297
Debtors	98,594
Deferred Expenses	585
Grants Receivable - Governmental	71,800
Grants Receivable - Non-Governmental	1,000

**Total Assets** **1,559,105**



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Asociación de Pescadores Artesanales  
Comunidades Campesinas Los Cimientos  
Asociación Us Che  
Consejo Maya Mam de San Marcos  
El Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (COPINH)  
Movimiento Amplio por la Dignidad y la Justicia (MADJ)  
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Embajada de Alemania en Bogotá  
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The EU working group in Kenya

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GWL INA  
Suara Kita  
The Asia Foundation  
Women's Fund Asia  
PBI Nepal  
Nepal Monitor  
Khao Lao Yai-Pha Jun Dai Conservation  
Belantara Papua  
AMAN Sorong Raya  
PBHKP  
Workshop Committee for the Protection of  
Human Rights Defenders  
Anti-Violence Against Women National  
Commission/Komnas Perempuan  
National Human Rights Commission/Komnas  
HAM  
Child Protection National Commission/KPAI  
Witness and Victim Protection Agency/LPSK  
Ombudsman/ORI  
Indonesian Human Rights Monitor (Imparsial)  
Coalition of Women Human Rights Defenders  
Khon Rak Ban Kerd Group

Khon Rak Krokesomboon Group  
Thammasat University Student Youth Group  
United Front of Thammasat Demonstration  
Southern Peasant Federation of Thailand-  
Santi Pattana Community  
Southern Peasant Federation of Thailand-  
Nam Daeng Pattana Community  
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