

# THIRD DUBLIN PLATFORM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

## October 13–15 2005

### Conference Report

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The Third Dublin platform for Human Rights Defenders took place in Dublin Castle, at the invitation of the Government of Ireland, on October 13–15 2005. One hundred human rights defenders from 70 countries listened to one another's experiences, charted the threats and opportunities facing them, exchanged information about the European Union Guidelines on human rights defenders with diplomats and officials, and considered other ways in which human rights defenders can improve their security and the quality of their work. The meeting was hosted by Front Line, which launched a new computer service for the protection of human rights defenders, "NGO in a Box; Security Edition". The participants were addressed by Mr Dermot Ahern TD, Ireland's Minister of Foreign Affairs, who opened the meeting, by Mr Conor Lenihan TD, Ireland's Minister for Overseas Development & Human Rights, who closed it; by Michael Matthiessen, Personal Representative on Human Rights for Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the EU Common Foreign & Security Policy; and by Hina Jilani, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders.

We are very grateful to Robert Archer, Executive Director of the International Council on Human Rights policy, for synthesising and drawing together the many strands from the discussions in Dublin into this report. He has succeeded in capturing the substance of the discussions in a manner which stimulates further reflection on the issues. Any errors which have crept into the report remain the responsibility of Front Line.

### ABSENCES

In her opening speech of welcome, Mary Lawlor recalled those who were absent – the human rights defenders who have died protecting human rights since the last Platform took place in September 2003. We remembered in particular Pascal Kubungulu, Secretary-General of Héritiers de la Justice, murdered in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of the Congo, on July 31, 2005; Teresa Yarce, shot down in the street in Medellín, Colombia on 6 October 2004; Murad Muradov of "Save the Generation", who disappeared in Grozny on 15 April 2005; Munir, poisoned on

an aeroplane on 7 September 2004 while flying from Indonesia to the Netherlands; Sr Dorothy Stang, assassinated in Anapu, Brazil, for defending the rights of the poor; and also Frank Jennings, a colleague at Front Line, who died of a brain tumour shortly before the conference began. We also remembered those who had been prevented by governments from attending the Conference: Mohammed Abbou, Tunisia; Mutabar Tojibaeva, Uzbekistan; Khalida Jarrar, Palestine; Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadehof, Iran; Ibrahim Al Mugaiteeb, Saudi Arabia; Ali Tamek Ali Salem, Western Sahara; Razan Zaytouneh, Syria; and Petemat Tokaeva, Chechnya,

*“Though you never know when you will be arrested....  
Though you know your children may be targeted.  
Though there is always the possibility of sexual violence against you...  
Though the work you do is emotionally painful and you have  
nightmares...  
Still you never give up, in spite of your fear, your self-doubt, your  
exhaustion.”*

Mary Lawlor

## A. THREATS

*“Our situations are different. Yet we all have a State, we all have police that arrest us, judicial authorities that do not protect us, prosecutors that fail to see misbehaviour by State officials... And we all refer to international laws that describe how States and State institutions should behave.”*

HRD Chechnya

*“There is hope. For hope to materialize we have to make sacrifices. Thousands of people are working to protect others by sacrificing their own lives.”*

Dr Mudawi Ibrahim Adam

As in the previous two Platforms, many human rights defenders spoke movingly and forcefully about their experiences. In doing so, they revealed the numerous threats they face. Many are familiar to human rights defenders, but others are new and less well-understood. In this report, we give particular attention to new threats that are emerging – and also to the problems faced by women human rights defenders. Their needs were identified during the 2003 Platform and the 2005 meeting highlighted the work that has been done since to support women human rights defenders and strengthen their protection.

In his own testimony, Kailash Satyarthi suggested a typology. He said human rights defenders face physical threats and assault; moral and mental harassment; and social, financial, and legal attacks. In the testimonies, we heard practical examples of all these kinds of threat.

Many kinds of intimidation and violence were described. They included the rape of Shan women, the mutilation of women and the murder of human rights defenders in Iraq, detention and ill treatment of HRDs in India, violence against gay men and those who defend them in Jamaica, intimidation, massacre and torture in Uzbekistan, systematic harassment and intimidation in Zimbabwe, Tunisia, and Syria, arbitrary killings in Darfur and Chechnya, attempted assassination in Somalia.

*“The last five years have been so awful that we are not afraid any more. When they cannot see that we are afraid, when they do not see fear in our eyes, they will become afraid of us.”*

Lawyer, Chechnya

HRDs also described the psychological pressures that they and their colleagues live with: the phone threats to their children, in India; prolonged interrogations, including threats of physical violence and deprivation of food and access to washroom facilities, in Zimbabwe; 24 hour surveillance and harassment over long periods, in Tunisia. Efforts may be made to isolate HRDs socially. We heard, for example, that a middle aged woman activist from Uzbekistan had not been able to attend the Platform because she had been arrested in the middle of the night by 20 armed police, some with balaclavas and heavily armed.

*“Why so many, why at night with so much noise, to arrest an elderly lady who lives alone? They do it to show the neighbours. They want everyone to be afraid.”*

HRD, Uzbekistan

In Tunisia, human rights lawyers are subject to exhausting harassment simply for upholding the law and defending their clients. *“My colleague was kidnapped at home because he published an article on the Web that criticized judicial corruption... My office has been broken into and turned over. The Tunisian authorities refuse to provide documents I need to prepare cases... HRDs are often libeled, accused of being traitors to the nation. I am under 24 hour surveillance, tailed wherever I go, my mail is intercepted, my phone tapped. I think the owner of my office has been asked to make me leave... I received death*

*threats by phone. Initially I didn't complain, but eventually reported them. Again the complaint was ignored...."*

*"All this leaves me in a very precarious situation... in Tunisia we experience a situation of complete impunity..."*

Lawyer, Tunisia

Roma activists suffer particularly from defamation, as do HRDs who work with Dalits in India or with other minorities that suffer systematic discrimination. They are accused of dishonesty; their information is dismissed. "Gypsies in Russia can still not use their own language and can be arrested easily... in our country law is corrupt and we cannot trust it to support our rights. We had to become clandestine. Now that needs to change."

*"We have to show that we are not to blame. No-one ever believes us. All the information about us is negative..."*

Roma, Russia

*"We are entitled to have our views heard but when we speak up it is considered by the government to be an offence."*

HRD, Maya

Infiltration of NGOs, and the creation of false NGOs, was identified as an issue. A number of governments – including Tunisia and the Yemen – infiltrate informers into NGOs, to monitor their activities, putting staff at risk and endangering those that work with them. Others create artificial NGOs to discredit and counter the work of legitimate Human Rights Defenders. Officials in some countries try to corrupt human rights defenders, as well as judicial officials and civil servants who are witness to violations of rights.

*"We need a clearer definition of what are 'real' and what are 'fake' NGOs."*

Censorship and self-censorship were also raised. In Zimbabwe the Government has introduced new laws that enable the government to prevent journalists from reporting news unfavorable to the government. In Armenia, state control over the media prevent public information or debate about human rights violations from being aired, making all human rights work more dangerous. In Iraq, the menace of retaliation – from parties on all sides of the conflict – cause HRDs to publish information very cautiously, almost always anonymously.

Among the HRDs who spoke, several were journalists. In Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen journalists are witnesses and often, because of this, themselves victims.

Many HRDs face financial harassment. We heard that the Uzbekistan Government recently detained six human rights defenders on allegations of extortion, thereby simultaneously defaming them and exposing them financially; they have also been accused of being in the pay of the West. In Colombia and a number of other countries, governments are restricting the access of NGOs to international funds. They often claim to do so in support of international efforts to restrict terrorism, but the main effect is to restrict the independence of civil society organisations.

HRDs working in Palestine suffer particular obstacles because it is made so difficult for them to travel. The Palestinian and particularly the Israeli authorities have often prevented Palestinian HRDs from travelling abroad for peaceful and legitimate purposes; even when permits are obtained, the logistics of travel are exhausting.

These stories highlighted an important general point, that governments are inventing many legal and bureaucratic methods for harassing and restricting the activities of human rights defenders. Violence, intimidation and physical abuses of authority continue to occur; but abuses of authority that are less obviously are becoming more frequent. Those who are working to protect human rights, and to protect human rights defenders, need to give close attention to these more subtle forms of repression.

Some of the stratagems being used have already been mentioned above. Some governments are adopting laws designed to restrict legitimate activity. The Zimbabwe government is an obvious case: we learned that it has recently passed a Public Order and Security Act that impedes freedom of expression, assembly and association; a law that prevents meetings of more than two people without police approval; a law that restricts freedom to report and publish; and a private organizations bill (as well as an NGO Bill which has not yet passed into law) that restrict the activities of civil society organizations. This is only one example: many other governments, now and in the past, use law to restrict freedom. The Syrian government, for example, has imposed a State of Emergency on the country for many years, providing it with wide legal powers to arrest and detain.

*“We are intimidated, persecuted – we have a State of Emergency and can be thrown into prison without a trial. We are often beaten when we hold meetings, and legally we cannot meet.”*

HRD, Syria.

HRDs in other countries – Russia, Chechnya, Egypt – complained of the failure of courts to challenge bad law, and their willingness to apply bad law. In many

countries judicial officials are subject to bribery, or are intimidated from carrying out their duties. One HRD organization reported that when it attempted to create an independent association for judges and lawyers, the Government of the United Arab Emirates forced judges who supported the proposal into retirement. HRDs emphasized that, wherever the judiciary are not independent or are corrupt, those who defend human rights are inherently vulnerable. In many countries, impunity remains a major problem.

*“I work with children who are bought and sold like animals, who are child slaves. Those who use children in this way are often powerful people, often mafia... In many cases the perpetrators have connections with the police, with political authorities– they can act without fear.”*

Kailash Satyarthi, India

Inappropriate regulation of NGOs and civil society organizations is a particular concern for HRDs. Many participants referred to it, coming from Egypt, Armenia, Iran, Nepal, Zimbabwe, Tunisia, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan and other countries. Some governments restrict access to funding from abroad. Others require NGOs to register with the authorities but withhold approval of organizations that are independent or critical. In a number of countries, such as Saudi Arabia, independent NGOs have no legal identity and therefore cannot operate within the law.

*“The government denigrated me. It claimed NGOs were a threat to national sovereignty. It claimed NGOs were dependent on foreign money. It passed new laws limiting NGO activities....*

*In parallel, Maoists seized my family’s land while I was in prison.”*

Krishna Pahadi, Nepal

The trend to tighten regulation of NGOs worries many HRDs, both because governments are extending and exploiting anti-terrorist laws to suppress civil liberties, and because they are borrowing bad laws from one another, causing improper forms of NGO regulation to spread. Too many HRDs would agree with the words of a speaker from Egypt:

*“The law is like an octopus with tentacles everywhere. But violence against NGOs escapes those tentacles. Despots are stifling all freedom of expression, all creativity. Moreover, Egypt exports its law on NGOs to other countries in the region. We cannot organise meetings without permission, but this law that stifles social creativity and expression is signed by the same officials that signed CEDAW and other international human rights covenants.”*

HRD, Egypt

Three quotes end this section. The first reminds us of the fundamental importance of justice and fair law to the achievement of human rights objectives. The comment is powerful because it was made by a woman who lost her children, her husband and many relatives in the mass killing at Srebrenica, the tenth anniversary of which occurred shortly before the Platform.

*“My message is this. Please do not forget Srebrenica.  
Help us achieve peace. Without justice there is no freedom.”*

HRD, Bosnia

The second reminds us of the disorder and confusion that surround and threaten the work and lives of many human rights defenders. Laws and institutions that are expected to protect them do not work. They face charges and attacks that are incomprehensible. Their fate, and sometimes their survival, are often chaotically unpredictable. This quotation was also powerful because its author was Dr Mudawi Ibrahim Adam, the first winner of Front Line’s Human Rights Defenders’ Award. He is describing the reasons why he was not able to travel to Dublin to receive the award.

*“I was detained in 2004, interrogated for two days, imprisoned, went on hunger strike, eventually I got into court, facing five charges carrying the death penalty. The charges were dropped. I was rearrested and held in solitary. Then I was charged with attempted suicide...”*

*I don’t know whether I deserve this prize. I see so many people taking risks to help the people, trying to help them, but they are not known.”*

Dr Mudawi Ibrahim Adam,  
Sudan Social Development Organisation

The third underlines the unshakeable determination that many HRDs show when they are bureaucratically harassed, physically intimidated or threatened by death. This remark was made by a woman whose husband was arrested and then murdered because he protected the rights of rural workers in Brazil. She continues the work in which he was involved.

*“I am now under threat and have round-the-clock protection because I raised the case of my husband and other workers. But I carry on my work. I am not alone. “*

Chair of the Rural Workers Union,  
Para, Brazil



## B. WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

*“I have faced arrest, restraint on my movements; my vehicle was attacked when I worked for the UN because I refused bribes; and an attempt was made on my life... I received threatening phone calls. Many of my colleagues who are HRDs faced burnout or had psychological difficulties. In some cases their marriages broke down.”*

HRD, Somalia

*“We work for the families of the disappeared. I am the widow of a journalist who disappeared. I did not choose the human rights movement: it chose me.”*

HRD, Algeria

The previous section indicated that women face the same threats as male HRDs. In addition, they face distinctive dangers. This was recognised in 2003 at the second HRD Platform in Dublin, where Hina Jilani suggested that specific attention should be given to the needs and problems of women human rights defenders. Her call led to an international conference of Women HRDs in Colombo in November 2005, and the emergence of much new work in this area.

Immediately before the 2005 Dublin Platform, Front Line convened a workshop for women HRDs to review progress and discuss ways of strengthening protection. The Workshop’s rapporteurs briefed the conference about their general recommendations, and identified several issues that are of special relevance to women HRDs.

In some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Saudi Arabia, women are not legally recognized as equal persons. In Pakistan and Syria, women are killed or maimed to satisfy notions of family “honour”; they are especially subject to enslavement in Mauritania; and across the world they suffer domestic violence.

*“Women’s bodies are regarded as property of the family. She can be killed for honour. We want more equal laws. Men can marry who they like and are not charged for adultery – whereas women can be killed.”*

HRD, Syria

*“Women face particular risks when they take on traditional practices and are often repressed by social actors as well as governments.”*

Hina Jilani,  
Special representative of the UN Secretary  
General on Human Rights Defenders

The rapporteurs noted that women suffer additional forms of discrimination, as women, over and above the discrimination they may suffer because they are HRDs, or members of minorities or poor. Women are more likely to be illiterate than men and as a result are less well able to inform themselves about their rights. Where women are members of groups that suffer institutional discrimination (like the Dalits in India) they suffer double or even triple discrimination. In many societies, women are also unusually exposed to risk and poverty because they are not granted inheritance rights.

Some participants noted that financial support for women's rights, and women HRDs, has been falling and that some governments have actively reduced the availability of resources for human rights work on behalf of women. In Colombia, the conference heard, at least 2000 have died in the conflict since 1998, most of them at the hands of official forces. The number of women victims has been rising, and most of those who have been displaced are women and children. Many are Afro-Caribbean women who have become increasingly active advocates for their rights. Yet funding for work on women's rights has fallen by 50 per cent in recent years, as the government has tightened control over the transfer of funds from abroad.

Women speakers emphasized throughout the conference the particular contribution that women make to sustaining families, raising children, and maintaining social relationships during conflicts and stress. Women HRDs are especially vulnerable because their work challenges their ability to carry out these roles in society, and places great strains on them and those close to them. They and their families may be ostracized because people fear being seen with them. Their children may suffer discrimination; their schooling may be disrupted; they may have to cope with the arrest or house arrest of their mother. In the worst cases they even become street children. Several HRDs reported that women had been forced to drop their work to protect their families, or send their children to places of greater safety because of risks to them.

*"Men often divorce their wives because they don't want to put up with the harassment they will experience. When a woman becomes an*

*HRD, it is a very serious and conscious decision, because she is aware of the consequences for her family."*

HRD, Democratic Republic of the Congo

### C. CHALLENGES

In the course of the meeting, participants raised a number of issues – unresolved problems, emerging challenges, questions – that were not explored in any detail. They are listed below because perhaps they are likely to provide elements of the human rights agenda in the years ahead.

*Lesbian, Gay and transsexual rights.* Two speakers talked of their experience of working on behalf of gay men and with lesbian women. A HRD from Jamaica described violent public attacks made against gay men, and both spoke about the extreme social exclusion that gay and lesbian people face.

*"When it comes to lesbians and gays, Uganda is hell. I lost friends and family and my family even asked me to change my name. I have been beaten and thrown out of buildings. I was forced to become homeless. All because I was lesbian. Men tried to teach me to be straight. I went to the best schools in my country but have not been able to find jobs..."*

*Please understand us. Nobody here has fainted because they sat next to a gay or lesbian. No-one has gone hungry for that..."*

HRD, Uganda

*Minorities and indigenous peoples.* Several speakers emphasised the particular difficulties that they experienced as minorities or indigenous people. Minorities, notably the Dalits and Roma, suffer systemic discrimination, while indigenous speakers spoke movingly about their relationship to the land and the violence against them that often occurs when government ministries or incomers seek to exploit local economic resources.

*"We wish to live on the land we grew up on and tilled and where we formed bonds of affection – yet we become military targets"*

HRD, Colombia

*"The Government is trying to sell off our traditional sites in order to set up large infrastructural projects... We see the re-emergence of the Maya spirit of resistance, in favour of our water, our woods, our rivers."*

Maya HRD

Both groups find that they often cannot use the law to protect themselves, and suffer legal as well as social exclusion and discrimination.

*“There are often good laws. But laws are different when they reach the villages and people who are unprotected...”*

HRD, Colombia

*“Indigenous people are constantly attacked for defending their land or rights; and priests and others who have supported them likewise.”*

HRD, Bolivia

They also highlighted threats to the *environment*. One speaker from Darfur noted the links between violence and discrimination against indigenous people and stress on the environment. “Indigenous groups are targeted in Darfur – individuals belonging to an ethnic group can be killed in the street. Moreover the environment has changed: the land is dry and is no longer fruitful. Animals have died. The Government uses ethnic polarisation to divide and rule.” A speaker from Mexico described the persecution of her family because they sought to protect the environment from logging.

*“Loggers’ leaders accused us of supporting armed groups and in 1998 the army was sent against us... We went to live in a cave with our children: still no-one knows where we were living . [Later] in 2004 my husband was arrested and charges brought by the loggers’ leader.., He is under house arrest – but has received threats to his life from the loggers... The Government is allowing itself to be manipulated by people with money.”*

HRD, Mexico

*Economic, social and cultural rights.* Several participants described work they are doing to promote economic, social and cultural rights, and the dangers they face as a result. An HRD described campaigns in the United States to change the government’s priorities and reduce poverty: although it is the world’s richest country, a large number of Americans are poor, and lack basic social protection such as health insurance. A speaker noted that El Salvador had achieved a peace agreement, but formal democracy had not been enough: economically and socially, the situation had deteriorated. Corruption was widespread, and children die of hunger just as they did before the war. In Bahrain, efforts to raise the issue of poverty were repressed.

*“in 2004 we published a report on ESC rights. I presented a paper asking why half the people of Bahrain were living in poverty when the country was so rich, and criticised the government’s leaders for corruption. I was*

*arrested and my centre was closed... I was sentenced to one year of prison but released the same day. I was later beaten by police forces, and still have damage. I was again assaulted by police with balaclavas."*

HRD, Bahrain

*Corruption.* Corruption was identified as a problem in many countries. Found in the judiciary, in government, in the police, in business, it underpins impunity and undermines law. It is often a factor in the land struggles in which many indigenous people are engaged. A number of speakers also raised the role of *business*, and their attempts to make private businesses properly accountable when they act illegally or violate rights.

*"Without mass support, we do not believe you can have a big impact on private actors. Media coverage can help influence business attitudes. Getting the support of political leaders – and international institutions – can also be vital. Above all, you have to empower the victims, the children, the workers, the women..."*

Kailash Satyarthi, India.

*Regional issues.* A number of participants requested Front Line and other HRD networks to give more attention to regional issues. Participants from several Middle East and Arab countries emphasised the specificity of their problems, noting particularly the combination of lack of legal protection, the prevalence of judicial corruption and co-optation, the influence of religion in political life and on the legal system, and the absence of strong democratic organisations that are able to resist entrenched authoritarianism. HRDs from Central Asia face a similar situation, while Azerbaijan noted the challenge of working in countries where the rule of law and democracy were only superficially in place. For their part, HRDs from Eastern Europe noted that their governments are unusually open to advocacy on human rights because they want to be seen to conform to European Union standards of governance.

*Religion.* Participants spoke about religion from different perspectives. An HRD from Iran called for a dialogue on the subject because differences of religious understanding stand in the way of democratic reform. Other speakers spoke of the dangers of religious intolerance. In Afghanistan, where HRDs may be accused of being anti-Islamic, no organisation exists to protect them or intervene on their behalf in such cases.

*"The most serious problems are religious intolerance and the use of religion as an excuse to attack HRDs."*

HRD, Yemen

*Demilitarising culture* Some participants spoke passionately about the effects of violence and war on their societies and the importance of demilitarising culture. This is a major issue in Somalia, Colombia, the former Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, Chechnya and many other countries that have experienced prolonged political conflict.

*“Chechnya reflects all the stories we heard today. Extermination. Shooting of innocent children and the old. The legal institutions that are forced to implement laws imposed from outside. Torture continues, as in the beginning of the war...”*

*Training the young is very crucial – those who have been brought up with murder and destruction. We are still involved in teaching human rights...”*

Lawyer, Chechnya

*“We meet people’s needs of all kinds, from alcoholism to dancing, with the objective of achieving peace. We say: all rights come with responsibility – and a person cannot demand their own rights without recognising this.”*

Bill Shaw, HRD, Ireland

*UN human rights reform.* Several contributors addressed the issue of UN human rights reform and the role that international and regional institutions should play in protecting and promoting human rights. Marit Gjelten, a diplomat of the Norwegian Government, introduced a discussion of this theme,, speaking very soon after states took several decisions concerning UN reform at a United Nations Summit meeting in New York. Without romanticising the outcome of the New York Summit, she noted that the plan to strengthen the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is a positive step; and that it will be vital to retain and adequately fund the UN Special Mechanisms and Procedures as well as ensure that a strong candidate succeeds Hina Jilani as UN Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders.

*“Openness and dialogue with human rights groups are not signs of weakness in a government. On the contrary, they are signs of strength and vitality that can create favourable conditions for the promotion and protection of human rights.”*

Marit Gjelten, Norwegian Foreign Ministry

*“We should press for better mechanisms at international level because the ones we have today are more political than legal. African mechanisms are ineffective because there is no enforcement.”*

HRD, Africa

Finally, in closing remarks on behalf of Front Line’s Board, Pierre Sané identified four challenges that UNESCO is addressing. The first related to scientific innovation and technological change: these broaden knowledge and can bring many benefits – but where might they cause human rights to be violated? The second concerned privatisation of public institutions and public goods, such as water, transport networks, and pension and social insurance systems. In human rights terms, privatisation is neither good nor bad: but what institutional and regulatory arrangements are needed to make sure that privatised services protect the rights of all users? The third was the media, whose concentration and commercialisation massively influence the values of democracy and the character of public institutions. How can one ensure that the media serve rather than subvert democratic and human rights principles? The fourth was migration and human movement. In a globalised world, all goods move freely – but people are not permitted to do so. What reforms to the economic and political environment would create conditions for equitable migration?

## D. PROTECTING OURSELVES

*“In Sudan, in Nyala, we have incidents and I am prevented from leaving my province. We face many constraints. I can never say I am a Human Rights Defender, I have to say I am in charge of protection. We cannot use the words ‘human rights’.”*

HRD, Sudan

*“You others are in the firing line: we are caught in crossfire. In Palestine, you have to drop human rights or commit completely. There is no other choice. I put my name to reports I write: we should claim ownership of these acts of courage...”*

*“Yet I am careful. I don’t tell my family everything, and I am very careful about coming home...”*

HRD, Palestine

HRDs are used to defending others, and too often fail to protect themselves. Unless they do so, however, they cannot do their job – and cannot provide the essential services they undertake. Moreover, if they do not take care of their own protection, they can put their colleagues, family and friends at risk. For these reasons, the Platform spent time looking at how HRDs can enlarge the space they have to work in and increase their security. The Platform looked both at what HRDs can do themselves to increase their security, and then at what allies and external organizations can do to help.

### Self-protection

In the sessions devoted to self-protection, Front Line presented three projects that it has developed to provide HRDs with tools to protect themselves and the security of others.

Andrew Anderson (standing in for Enrique Eguren of Peace Brigades International) sketched in the contents of the Protection Manual that Front Line has developed with Peace Brigades International. He explained that the Manual advises a HRD how to assess and analyse *risk*. It offers the equation:

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{\text{Threats} \times \text{Vulnerability}}{\text{Capacity}}$$

The risk she faces is equal to the threat she faces multiplied by her vulnerability divided by the capacity she has to protect herself. Gender can increase vulnerability; location is also a factor. The handbook goes on to offer a

methodology for assessing *threats* and recommends that an HRD should think carefully about their nature. Is she under surveillance, likely to be arrested, or beaten? Is the threat personal or to all members of her group? It then considers *security* and *prevention*. How can an HRD note changes in her environment and the behaviour of others, share information, and identify *significant* changes and incidents? Can she increase the costs of attacking her, secure the protection of external organisations or local organisations that have influence, make it more difficult to obtain access to her office? Finally, the Handbook discusses the development of a *security strategy*. Devising rules is a first step, but rules should be appropriate to the risk and must be applied by everyone concerned. In addition, it is important to take steps to protect witnesses, families and all those who are more indirectly at risk. The main message of the Manual is not to put security first and last. It is rather: Think clearly and take deliberate decisions.

*“We know the risks that HRDs face – and they themselves have a good understanding of those risks. We also know that they spend little time thinking about those risks; and this is a major part of the challenge when trying to improve protection. HRDs often don’t think enough about their own security.”*

Andrew Anderson, Front Line.

A section of the manual also looks at secure communications and information technology. A toolbox to assist HRDs with these matters was the second project to be presented at the Platform.

“NGO-in-a-Box” brings together a bundle of different software programmes that HRDs can use to protect their communications and reduce the risk that their office machines could be bugged. A pilot version of the toolbox was distributed to NGOs at the Platform. It will be made available to HRDs around the world on request. Front Line will be in a position to guarantee that all the software used is “open source” (meaning that it is free of copyright, and therefore cheaper to use), clean, and can be operated legally.

Front Line will also provide training, using “NGO-in-a-box” as the core tool for its courses. The course was piloted during 2005 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where over 70 NGO staff were trained to use electronic communications securely.

Witness presented a fourth security initiative. Its video project provides HRDs with video equipment and training that enable them to document violations, or film them as they happen, and provide verifying factual evidence to support the images. Such clips can be used for various purposes, to document crimes, to

feed news and wire services, or provide supporting evidence for court cases. Security is included in the training provided, since it is important to consider the safety of both the filmer and the filmed when using these techniques.

The platform went on to look at other ways in which HRDs can protect themselves from risk, or put themselves in a position where they feel more secure.

*“Very often it is personal relations that enable us to protect ourselves”*

HRD, Yemen

A number of participants emphasised the importance of working together, both within countries, where NGOs too often fail to support one another or cooperate as closely as they might, and internationally. Many national HRDs welcome the moral and practical support – and eventually protection – that international NGOs and networks like Front Line can offer.

Some HRDs called for a closer working alliance between organisations that share common goals, to compensate for weakness and build capacity.

*“We indigenous people are few in the world; we must therefore be imaginative in acting to protect our rights and the world... We need to create more engagement; be truly independent; and we should coordinate – as we are doing here [in Dublin].”*

HRD, Colombia

Participants from Arab countries expressed particular interest in finding ways to cooperate more closely with international partners. As one participant said at the end of one session: *“I have listened very carefully all day. A most important thing now is solidarity between us, especially in the Middle East. In Saudi Arabia we are simply not allowed to set up human rights organisations and we are accused of operating illegally and easily closed down. As we have seen, oil-rich countries also give no ground to political pressure. We cannot resign ourselves to this: we need the support of organisations in the region and further abroad.”* Several organisations present suggested that Front Line should consider how it (and other international networks) can help HRDs to communicate with and support one another, complementing the practical assistance that Front Line already provides.

Other organisations emphasised the value of campaigning and lobbying to protect one another and advance human rights. An HRD from Chechnya said that

publicity was vital to protection, and that it was also necessary to keep international experts and institutions informed – and press them to act, because too often they fail to intervene energetically. International human rights organisations and experts, as well as governments, she said, *“must be kept responsible not only to us, Human Rights Defenders, but to the people who are suffering”*.

In her closing remarks, Hina Jilani, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Human Rights Defenders, speaking at length about the risks and threats that HRDs face, also underlined the important things that they can do to set high standards in their work, and protect their reputation.

*“HRDs must be non-violent, transparent, careful in their reporting – this is vital if they are to protect their reputation and defend themselves against criticism.”*

Hina Jilani

Finally, the importance of training was recognised – in security techniques, but also in other areas of human rights work, from research and reporting to advocacy and lobbying.

## E. POLITICAL PROTECTION

*“It is clear that the primary responsibility for the protection of human rights lies with governments.”*

Hina Jilani

*“Partnering is a challenge for us: it is a frontier areas and we have much to learn.”*

Conor Lenihan TD, Minister, Government of Ireland.

The Platform provided a valuable opportunity to discuss how governments and international agencies, and particularly countries of the European Union, can protect HRDs. Michael Matthiessen, Javier Solana’s Personal Representative for Human Rights, delivered a keynote speech on the opening day, and the conference devoted a full session to discussion of the European Union Guidelines on protection of HRDs, which were drafted during the Irish Presidency of the EU in 2004, and introduced during the Netherlands presidency in 2005. Human Rights diplomats from both Ireland and the Netherlands participated in this discussion, beside human rights diplomats from France and the United Kingdom.

Eamonn MacAodha, from Ireland's Foreign Ministry, began by outlining the Guidelines and describing how the European Union and its Member Governments are applying them and training diplomats in their use. Human Rights Ambassador Peit de Klerk of the Netherlands then talked about the technical handbook, published by the Dutch presidency in 2005, and the complementary but different roles that diplomats and NGOs play in protecting human rights. Human Rights Ambassador Michel Doucin of France went on to discuss French policies in relation to human rights and how the EU debates and defends human rights principles in different institutions (UN bodies such as the UN Human Rights Commission, regional bodies such as the OSCE and Council of Europe, as well as the Francophonie Commission). Finally, Jonathan Wolstenholme of the British Foreign Office (Britain was holding the EU Presidency when the Platform took place) indicated the EU's priorities with regard to UN human rights reform, which included strengthening the Special Procedures (UN Treaty Bodies and Special Rapporteurs), and British priorities, which include diplomatic advocacy in support of freedom of expression.

In the lively debate that followed, discussion focused on two principal issues: the different roles of diplomats and NGOs, and the limits of diplomatic influence.

*"We appreciate the efforts of the EU. But we note that their diplomacy cannot effectively protect HRDs and that countries with oil and natural resources (like those in the Gulf) seem immune to pressure and are not challenged. The United States seems to be in control; there is a degree of connivance... So do the Guidelines work? Are they really prioritised?"*

HRD, Bahrain

Replying to this challenge, the officials acknowledged the limits of diplomatic influence, especially on governments that are repressive and unwilling to respect human rights; but they argued that the influence they exercise is nevertheless valuable, especially when used well.

*"You bring us examples of complex political problems. They show the limits of our influence; and it is true that we do not seek to be the world's policeman... There are mechanisms we can use – but we are often blocked in using them because national governments or regional institutions obstruct or oppose their use. It is not an easy environment"*

Ambassador Piet de Klerk, Netherlands

Some questioners criticised the EU and Western governments more generally, on the grounds that their human rights advocacy is self-interested and selective.

*“In the majority of our societies, people come in and try to change our cultures and our languages; and they are followed by companies that take our wealth. What do you feel are your responsibilities for the human rights situation that prevails in our societies?”*

HRD, Argentina

More specifically, HRDs criticised the slowness of the EU’s response to human rights arrests and crises, and the burdensome bureaucracy of its grant-making system. The OSCE as well as the EIDHR were criticised on these grounds. The diplomats were told that EU countries made it difficult or impossible for human rights defenders or political refugees to obtain transit visas, even in emergencies; and that the EU could do more to enable HRDs to travel when permission to do so is refused by their own governments.

*“Can you protect us better while we are still alive?”*

HRD, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Participants also asked the EU to publicise its human rights work more effectively, because the publics in their countries are not aware of the protection the EU can offer. They criticised EU governments for sometimes formulating policies on countries without consulting the national HRDs and human rights NGOs that work there.

The diplomats said they recognised a number of the complaints, and in some cases the EU was taking steps to solve the problems concerned. They acknowledged that lack of communication between ministries can slow down or obstruct effective action on visas; and noted that the EU’s aid system was so heavily regulated partly because it had been tarnished by recent corruption scandals. They affirmed, nevertheless, that the EU and their own governments were committed to the Guidelines and to human rights protection.

*“It is very important that you are able to carry out your work without reprisal and that any crimes against you are addressed...Give us your advice.”*

Jonathon Wolstenholme, Foreign Office, UK

## F. FINANCIAL SECURITY

Finally, the Third Dublin Platform gave attention to the issue of funding and grant-making, which not only contribute directly to the security of many human rights activists, but are a dimension of international support for HRDs and human rights work in general.

Three speakers provided different perspectives on how grant-makers go about their work. Jo Andrews of the Sigrid Rausing Trust underlined that donors can respond to only a small proportion of the requests they receive, so it is important to communicate very clearly why a grant is needed, and to find out before applying whether the application will fall within the grantmaker's criteria. She noted that many funding organisations cannot make "political" or small grants, and that it is often helpful to work in alliance with larger organisations, or secondary funders, that have a more flexible mandate or the capacity to manage small projects. Noel Purcell O'Byrne, of Development Co-operation Ireland, agreed with Jo Andrews that applicants need to communicate very clearly the value of their project, and added that evidence of co-operation with other groups, and willingness to measure performance and impact will impress many donors. She also recognised that many human rights organisations face problems of registration and legal recognition, and agreed that the solution is to work through other organisations that have been accorded legal status. Caitriona Fottrell, finally, described the work of the Ireland Funds. Her advice was: Make sure you do what donors ask; remember that raising funds from a donor takes time - perhaps years; and put resources into fundraising - it cannot be done on the cheap.

*"Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I will remember. Involve me and I will understand."*

Caitriona Fottrell, The Ireland Funds.

In his closing speech to the Conference, Conor Lenihan, Minister with responsibility for development and human rights in the Irish Government, spoke at length about the evolution of funding policy in Europe and Ireland. He stressed that, as aid budgets rose, the public demand for accountability and transparency will rise too. *"The public want to know that aid works and will ask harder and harder questions... The public requires a global level of compliance with standards of government."* He emphasised that the Irish Government, like

many other large institutional donors, expects to make larger grants over longer periods; but this will bring obligations to recipients, who will be expected to achieve higher standards of reporting and performance; there will be a stronger focus on partnership.

In a wide-ranging speech that touched on many of the themes of the conference – UN reform, the EU Guidelines, the role of civil society, and key human rights challenges – the Minister reaffirmed the Irish Government’s and the EU’s support for human rights and Human Rights Defenders. This is not an area for grandstanding, he said, but for practical applied work.

*“ Because you break the silence, you become a target yourselves. Nobody should be placed in positions of danger or exclusion for protecting the rights of others...”*

*“ We support your freedom of conscience, your freedom of expression and your freedom to move around.”*

Coror Lenihan TD, Minister for Overseas  
Development and Human Rights, Ireland.

*“ I know that when I go home I will be on the run again.”*

HRD, Zimbabwe

*“ For me to be here in Dublin is wonderful, because I see that I am not on my own to fight for human rights.”*

HRD, Russia