

[DISPATCHES]

'Is é mo mhórtuairim go dtuigimid anois ar deireadh conas troid go lúcháireach, bíodh gur crua agus pianmhar an troid í. Bíodh a fhios againn nach bhfuil aon phláinéad taca againn, níl againn ach an t-aon cheann amháin. Agus ísáinnithe, nimhithe, faoi chuing ag an míleatachas, agus ina háit ina ndéantar sárú rialta ar bhunchearta an duine, éilíonn an mháthairthalamh orainn dul i mbun gnímh.'

Berta Cáceres a lámhachadh chun báis i Hondúras,
2 Márta 2016

'I believe that through all of this we have learned to fight with joy, even though it gets very hard and painful. We must know that we don't have a back-up planet, we only have one. Our mother earth, militarised, fenced in, poisoned, a place where basic human rights are being systematically violated, demands that we take action.'

Berta Cáceres, shot dead, Honduras, 2 March 2016

REPORTS FROM THE
FRONT LINE

fi FRONT LINE
DEFENDERS

2020 Front Line Defenders Annual Report

Every year, Front Line Defenders produces **Dispatches**, its annual report detailing the work of the organisation to support the protection and security of human rights defenders at risk around the world.

In 2020, due to COVID-19, Front Line Defenders took the decision to produce a shorter version of its annual report.

2020 – A Challenging Year for Human Rights Defenders

In the first quarter of 2020, human rights defenders (HRDs) aimed to capitalise on the atmosphere of protest from 2019. However, these efforts were halted in March as the global pandemic forced HRDs' attention to the needs of their communities. These new pressures to support their communities through the crisis, in addition to their existing activism, were made worse by restrictive pandemic measures placed by governments across the world, exposure to the virus through their outreach work and increased efforts by states to control the flow of information. In particular, women human rights defenders (WHRDs), LGBTIQ+ defenders and those defending the rights of vulnerable populations found themselves at most risk.

The regular everyday risks faced by HRDs all over the world remained ever-present despite the additional difficulties imposed by the pandemic; according to information collected by Front Line Defenders and provided by partners in the HRD Memorial project, at least **331 HRDs** were killed for carrying out their peaceful human rights work in 2020. In every region of the world, **arrest and detention** continued to be the most common reported violation used by states to undermine or stop the work of HRDs. In addition to pandemic-related legislation introduced supposedly for health reasons, various other restrictive laws were passed which limited the ability of HRDs and civil society to function well and safely.

2020 has seen a marked increase in the number of HRDs recognising the role technology has in their work and expressing a willingness to learn more, with many HRDs significantly engaged with digital organising and advocacy for the first time. While the quick adaption of many HRDs



The screenshot shows the top portion of a news article on the Open Access Government website. The header includes the logo and name 'OPEN ACCESS GOVERNMENT'. Below this is a navigation bar with links for HOME, NEWS, PUBLICATIONS, SPECIAL REPORTS, and STAKEHOLDERS. A secondary navigation bar lists various topics: GOVERNMENT, HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT, AGRICULTURE, ENERGY, RESEARCH, TRANSPORT, EDUCATION, and FINANCE. The article title is 'The consequences of a global pandemic on human rights defenders', dated October 1, 2020. The main image is a white surgical mask with the Brazilian flag printed on it.

© Ronniechua

Nishat spoke to Ed O'Donovan, Head of Protection at **Front Line Defenders**, to dissect pandemic obstacles faced by human rights defenders – especially Indigenous communities in Brazil

to the online space demonstrated their flexibility, virtually all defenders were exposed to new risks through their engagement with online tools. With HRDs migrating to working from home, they often lacked access to digital security infrastructure available in their offices or normal workplaces. Defenders often used personal devices for their work, presenting additional digital threats. The widespread use of surveillance technology by some states meant that governments were able to use defenders' unprecedented reliance on technology to target and monitor them.

The challenges presented by the virus and state responses to it were met with remarkable resilience from human rights defenders around the world, who found themselves taking on a multitude of new roles in addition to their everyday rights defence work. In a year of unending crisis, the impact that HRDs have on their communities was demonstrated as countries struggled to cope with the rapidly spreading pandemic. From educating on virus-prevention measures in states where governments sought to downplay the seriousness of the pandemic to turning to humanitarian work in areas where the state was largely absent or had abdicated its responsibilities, HRDs filled voids and saved lives.

Organisational Developments

In 2020, Front Line Defenders continued to further strengthen the organisation to make sure it is best placed to respond to risks faced by HRDs. Aside of strengthening its internal systems and procedures, FLD expanded its team of committed staff, hiring a new [deputy director](#), a new [head of EU Office](#), as well as several additional colleagues in its field-based protection teams and in its support functions. FLD also hired extra capacity to engage with International Financial Institutions on risks faced by HRDs in the framework of projects funded by IFIs. To strengthen the organisations gender mainstreaming a comprehensive Gender Action Plan was developed. At governance level, Front Line Defenders founder [Mary Lawlor](#) stepped down from the Board upon her appointment as UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders at Risk and agreed to join the organisation's International Advisory Council.

How did Front Line Defenders Adapt to COVID-19?

Front Line Defenders adapted its work quickly at the onset of the pandemic by:

- Developing new methodologies to deliver security consultations and workshops remotely.
- Providing protection grants to HRDs at risk because of their human rights work in the context of COVID-19.
- Further developing psycho-social and well being support for HRDs.
- Developing relevant resources for HRDs on [working securely from home](#) and on [video conferencing](#).
- Documenting the specific challenges faced by HRDs during COVID-19.

In 2020, Front Line Defenders was able to provide support to more HRDs than in any previous year.

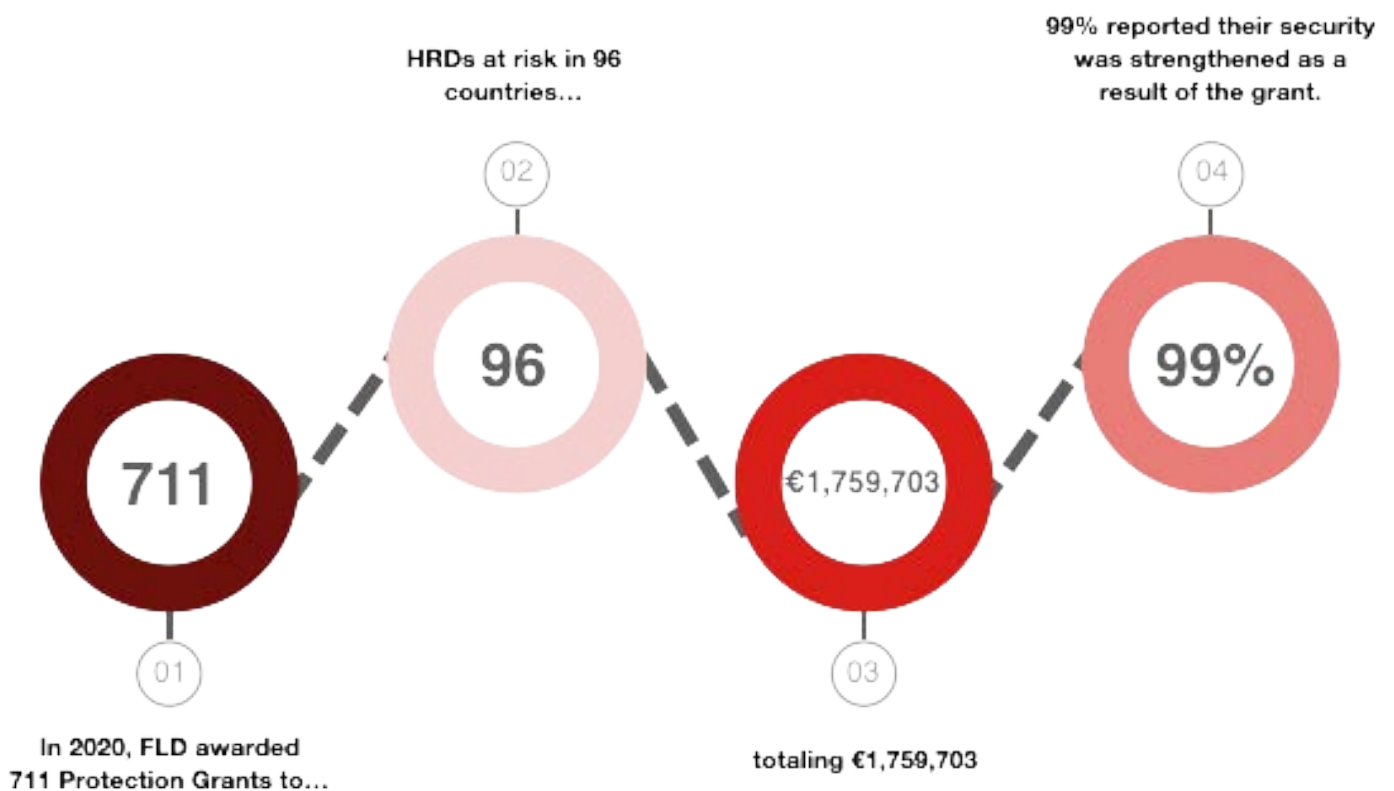
2020 By the Numbers

- 2,604 HRDs and 361 organisations in 126 countries received direct support
- 711 Protection Grants = €1,759,703
- 259 Urgent Appeals on 477 HRDs in 70 countries
- 96 HRDs from 19 countries participated in 12 RAPP workshops
- 113 security consultations and 21 workshops for 599 HRDs in 59 countries
- 346 HRDs and 158 organisations from 76 countries received digital protection consultations
- 16 HRDs and 5 groups from 19 countries supported by the Rest & Respite Programme
- 280 HRD ID Cards issued

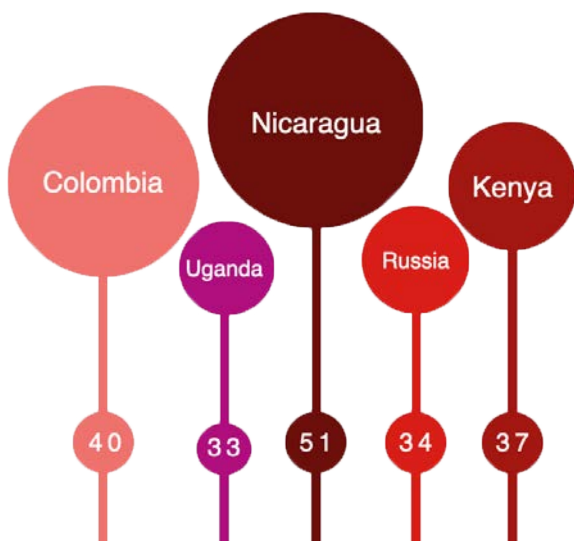
Protection Grants

“The grant helped me to overcome a very critical stage as a defender of LGBTQ rights due to the fierce defamation campaign that I was subjected to and the transition to a safe environment suitable for work. The grant also helped me focus on the group’s activities as its CEO and continue to run these activities.”

- LGBTQ+ rights defender, Egypt, supported through FLD’s Protection Grants programme, 2020



Top 5 Countries by Grants Received

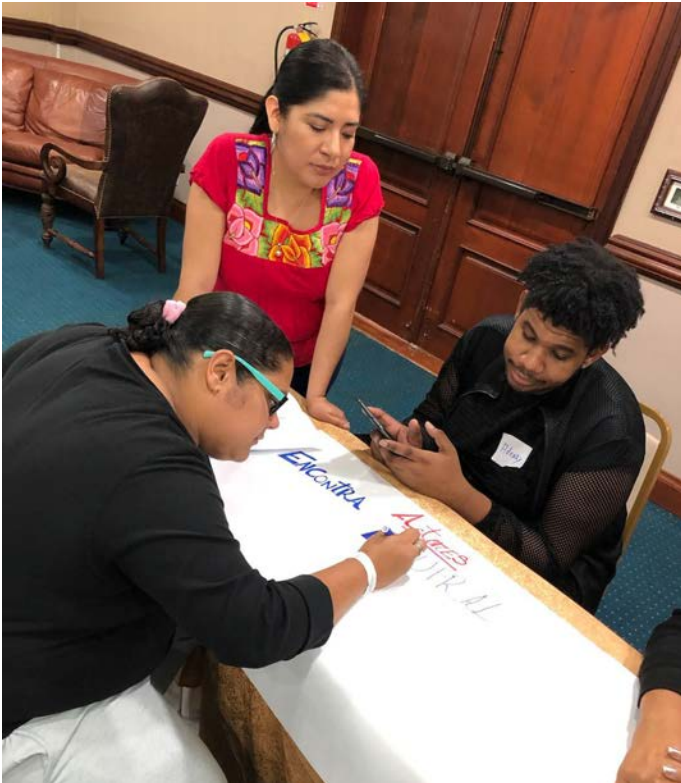


“With the health crisis linked to COVID-19, I was more inclined to work from home. Since the security of my home has been improved, I’m less afraid of someone at home catching me through the walls, so I can concentrate more on working on my files.”

- WHRD from Burkina Faso, whose home was searched. FLD’s grant provided additional home security.

Capacity Building

Risk Analysis & Protection Planning (RAPP): In 2020, 96 HRDs at risk participated in RAPP programme workshops, in order to develop deep understanding of effective risk mitigation measures. An additional 138 HRDs participated in shorter meetings, including webinars.



RAPP Workshop in the Dominican Republic before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

“Thank you very much for all that you and Front Line Defenders have done for me. For Training of Trainers, for consulting about my homework as part of the training (which grew into a grant application and really improved the safety of the safe house), for the fee that I received as a trainer for the first time. Thanks to you and Front Line Defenders, I was able to conduct more than ten training sessions (online and offline), and help several people improve their safety. A few more people, with my help, received support from Front Line Defenders. Now, as a volunteer, I am working on a brochure for LGBT activists about the risks they face and how to improve their safety.”

- Ukrainian LGBTQI+ Defender

Wellbeing Webinar - Europe & Central Asia Region

As a way to help HRDs cope with the stressful times of COVID-19, FLD initiated a series of webinars as a tool for capacity building, grounding, reflecting as well as a coping mechanism during the pandemic. The webinars were led by a group of psychologists and all had specific themes. The sessions covered needs and gaps identified by HRDs, covering: ‘Changing World during Covid-19’; ‘How I am changing during Covid-19’; ‘People around me – how they are changing and how can we respond’, and finally ‘review of the main themes and question’. The four webinars on well-being were attended by 111 WHRDs from Eurasia (from countries including: Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia & Georgia).

Security Advisor: In 2020, 599 HRDs in 59 countries received security advice through 113 consultations and 21 workshops facilitated by the FLD Security Advisor. In-person missions to Indonesia, Uganda, Mexico, Senegal, Burkina Faso were completed; the remainder of the support was delivered online.

“Our office moved to a new location and is in lockdown like the rest of the country. As the situation is getting tougher, we are practising more of what you taught us in terms of physical security. And for that we thank you again. Your 2-3 days has had positive long lasting impact to our organisation.”

- Vietnamese HRD

Capacity Building (cont'd)

Digital Protection: FLD Digital Protection Coordinators provide targeted response and support for HRDs experiencing or at risk of attacks on digital platforms, including hacking, doxxing and other efforts to interfere with their work as HRDs. In 2020, they provided digital security support to 346 HRDs and 158 organisations in 76 countries. In 2020, FLD worked with many local digital protection experts to provide targeted support to HRDs in specific countries requiring additional support – and also as a way to mitigate impossibility to travel internationally.

FLD supported a trans Afro-Brazilian musician and WHRD. Through her music she addresses social and political issues, and visibilizes the struggle of two of the country's marginalized groups. She became the focus of intense wrath and threats on social media when she released a song addressing racism in the country, and calling out politicians for feeding into it. Brazil has one of the highest rates of murder for trans people for many years (at least 124 trans people were killed in 2019), and the 'digital terrorism' she faced on social media was promoted by popular figures from Brazil's right-wing sphere. FLD Digital Protection Experts provided support to her on social media security, doxxing and more generally on digital security risks and the actors behind the threats. She refuses to be silenced, and returns to social media to continue her critical messages to advance the rights of her communities.

“Front Line is one of the organisations that does not focus on only a group of people, but has gone beyond this by helping everyone without distinction. The Amazigh community are forgotten, but [FLD's regional Digital Protection Coordinator] helped them with all the care and love.”

- Indigenous rights activist, Libya, supported by FLD's Digital Protection Programme

Visibility for Protection (VfP): In 2020, 107 HRDs participated in two Visibility for Protection Workshops and a series of consultations. Workshops and consultations supported HRDs from the Balkans (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo and Albania) as well as Southern Africa (Malawi, Zimbabwe and Eswatini). HRDs reported improved capacity to analyse risks related to visibility such as defamation, stigmatisation, hate speech and online violence, to make protection plans to address these risks, and to influence what society thinks about them.

Visibility for Protection Workshop in Mexico for women human rights defenders working on enforced disappearances before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

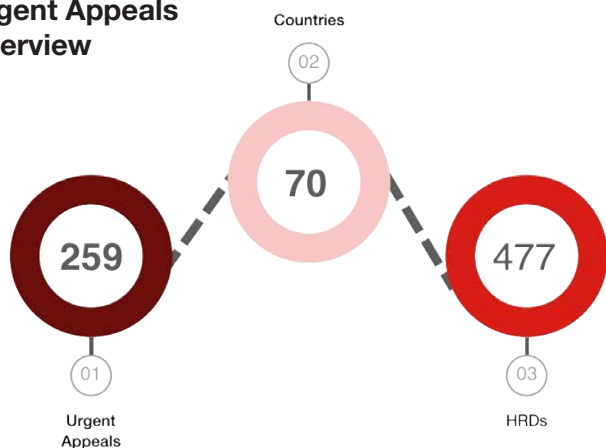


International Advocacy - Urgent Appeals

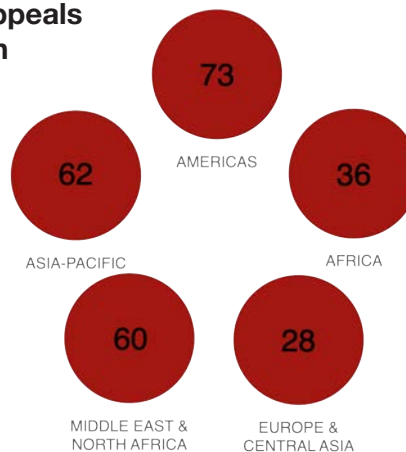
Urgent Appeals/Cases

Front Line Defenders advocates on behalf of individual human rights defenders at risk to international bodies, regional institutions, governments and other actors to push them to take action towards their protection.

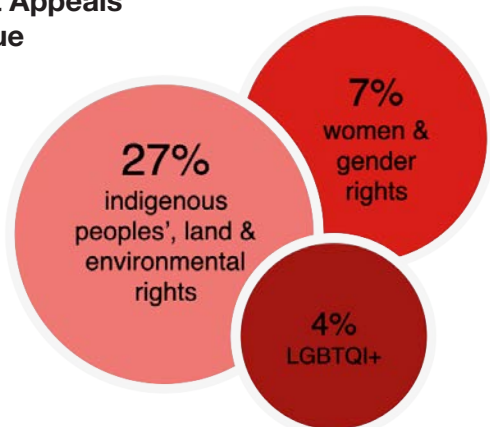
Urgent Appeals Overview



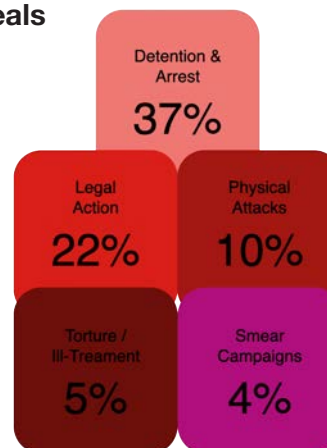
Urgent Appeals By Region



Urgent Appeals By Issue



Urgent Appeals By Violation



“Within days of my unlawful arrest by the Gambian police on June 30th FLD issued a public statement on July 3rd demanding the Gambia Government to drop all charges against me and also ensure the safety of HRDs. I was then contacted by FLD to find out about my situation and to let me know that FLD is prepared to provide me support. FLD then put me in contact with the EU locally and facilitated a meeting with the ambassador. This meeting was extremely helpful as I came to know the determined efforts to secure my freedom and what opportunities are available if my situation should deteriorate. I had fruitful discussion with the ambassador. I was indeed emboldened and felt lot safer with this intervention. I was highly encouraged to realize the array of resources available to ensure my freedom and safety.”



Madi Jobarteh, a HRD working on democracy and human rights in The Gambia. In June 2020, Madi was charged with “false information and broadcasting”. Had he been found guilty, he would have faced between six months to five years’ imprisonment or a fine. FLD issued an [Urgent Appeal](#) on his behalf and facilitated a meeting for him with the EU Delegation in Banjul. On 14 July 2020 the charges against the Madi Jobarteh were dropped.

International Advocacy - National, Regional & International Protection

United Nations

Front Line Defenders continued to work closely with the office of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders (UNSR) on cases of HRDs at risk. In 2020, FLD provided input to the UNSR report on the Killings of HRDs. During this period, Front Line Defenders also researched and presented [five country evaluations](#) under the Universal Periodic Review mechanism on challenges facing HRDs in Mauritania, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Spain.

European Union

In an increasingly complicated environment for human rights advocacy (particularly in light of Covid-19) Front Line Defenders succeeded in keeping the issue of HRDs high on the EU's agenda. In 2020, the EU office conducted advocacy on 183 new cases of HRDs at risk in 46 countries, and EU actors took action on 80% of those cases. FLD's EU office found new ways to adapt and continue its work. While physical meetings with EU actors were not possible in 2020, the virtual nature of meetings provided the opportunity to connect HRDs with EU policy makers. For example, in October/November 2020, FLD facilitated meetings between Indian HRDs and EU diplomats, parliamentarians and policy makers. As result, two of the three HRDs were consulted as part of the EU delegation's consultations ahead of the EU-India human rights dialogue scheduled for January 2021. In parallel, FLD spearheaded a joint CSO document of recommendations to the EEAS and EU delegation in India ahead of the EU-India human rights dialogue.

EU Toolkit on WHRDs

FLD published an **EU Toolkit on WHRDs** providing practical steps for the EU to better meet the needs of WHRDs, from a gendered, intersectional perspective. Since its launch, FLD has been actively promoting the Toolkit at the EU level. In December 2020, the Head of FLD's EU office presented the Toolkit to MEPs at a public exchange on WHRDs in the European Parliament's Women Rights Committee (FEMM). This exchange included the participation of WHRD Nana Mwafrika Mbarikiwa and UN Special Rapporteur Mary Lawlor. In its Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World, the European Parliament called for the EU to “adopt as an annex to the EU Guidelines on HRDs, a toolkit that would provide practical steps for the EU to better meet the needs of WHRDs worldwide”. The final EU's Guidance Note on the implementation of the EU's Human Rights Defenders Guidelines reflected FLD's recommendations, including proposals on practical support to WHRDs, land and environment defenders, indigenous defenders, LGBTI defenders, journalists and lawyers.



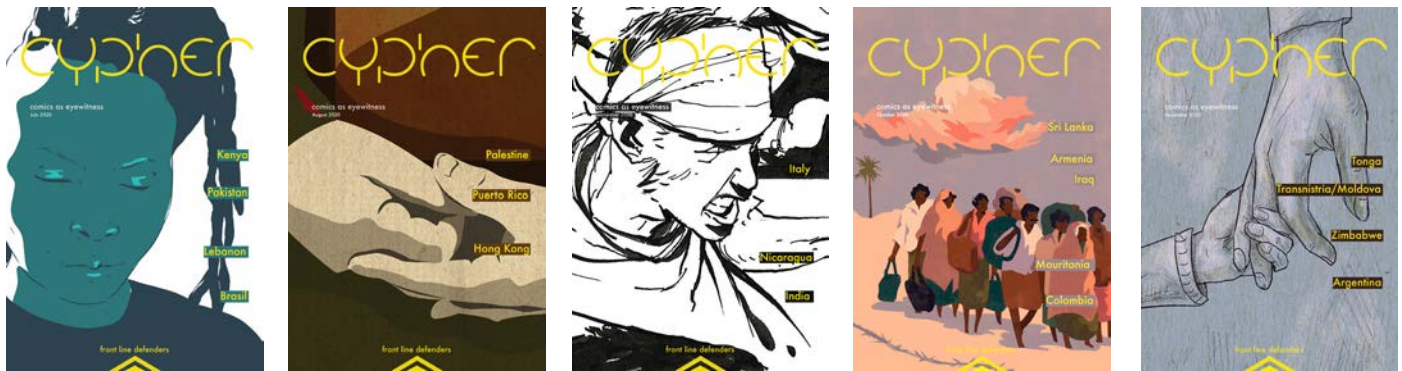
Business & Human Rights

Human Rights Defenders continue to face particularly high levels of risks when working on issues related to mega projects. To better support HRDs in those contexts, Front Line Defenders has been strengthening its institutional capacity on business and human rights and its engagement with International Financial Institutions. In particular, FLD deepened its understanding of the gaps regarding HRD participation in shaping the development of human rights due diligence laws, and worked closely with the “Defenders in Development Campaign” to highlight the reprisals faced by journalists reporting on state COVID responses funded by development banks.

Visibility

Cypher 'Zine

Front Line Defenders launched *Cypher* - digital comics 'zine - in July with three stories, receiving great positive attention for the initiative. Each edition features different artists – usually from the country or region of the HRD – working with HRDs to develop and depict the stories. In 2020, 5 editions were published.



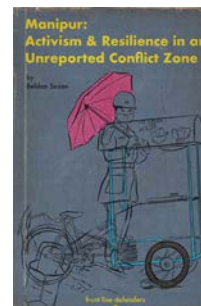
'Rights on the Line' Podcast

Within the first weeks of the impact of the pandemic on the organization's work, the Front Line Defenders Podcast, *Rights on the Line*, was relaunched on 7 April, with a total of 12 episodes produced in 2020; 10 in English and 2 in Spanish. One episode focused on Indian HRDs dealing with the impact of COVID-19 was released jointly with Caravan, a leading independent Indian news magazine and website, while another focused on the continued imprisonment of Iranian HRDs was produced and released in cooperation with the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights.



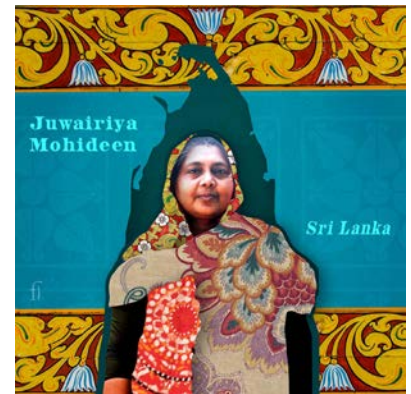
Research Reports

Front Line Defenders published a range of reports on defending rights during the pandemic: **LGBTIQ+ and Sex Worker Rights Defenders at Risk during Covid-19**; **Defending Rights during a Pandemic: Impact of COVID-19 on the Safety and Work of HRDs**; **Defending Rights in Times of COVID-19, Challenges for Mexico and Central America** (joint report); as well as a joint report **Crushing Student Protests: Bangladesh's Repression of the Quota Reform & Road Safety Movements**.



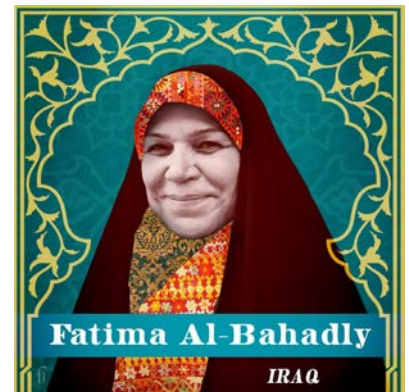
2020 Front Line Defenders Award Winners

Juwairiya Mohideen is a Muslim woman human rights defender based in Puttalam in the North West of Sri Lanka. She and her family were forcibly displaced by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in October 1990. 30 years later, she continues to live in a refugee settlement in Puttalam. In 2010 she established the Muslim Women's Development Trust (MWDT). MWDT provides daily practical support, comfort, advice and legal assistance to women and girls facing abuse, violence and discrimination. Juwairiya is at the front line of calls for reform in Muslim personal laws which deny Muslim women and girls the basic rights enjoyed by their non-Muslim sisters in Sri Lanka.



The Indigenous Guard of Cauca - Kiwe Thegnas (Defenders of Life and Territory), is a community of women, men, boys and girls who defend their territories in a peaceful, unarmed way. The majority of the Indigenous Guards belong to the Nasa indigenous group; communities have been subjected to multiple forms of violence resulting from the presence of armed actors, drug traffickers and multinational exploitation. Among its activities, the Guard organises collective protection of its communities, gives humanitarian protection for victims of armed conflict, and organises relief actions for communities that have been massively displaced from their lands.

Fatima Al-Bahadly is an Iraqi woman human rights defender from the city of Basra. She is the founder of Al-Firdaws Society, an organization focused on protecting women and girls affected by war and strengthening their role in peacebuilding. Al-Firdaws provides literacy, education and skills workshops and works to an end violence against women in areas where women are most marginalised. Fatima works with youth against the militarisation of society and works to end the recruitment of children and youth by militant groups. Through the years, Fatima has received death threats and has faced severe social pressure from her tribe.



Mekfoula Mint Brahim is a woman human rights defender fighting against religious extremism and discriminatory practices in Mauritania, in particular against women and members of the Haratine and sub-Saharan African communities. She is the President of Pour une Mauritanie Verte et Démocratique, a human rights organisation founded in 2009, leading women's empowerment projects in rural areas. She is also a member of Alliance pour la Refondation de l'Etat Mauritanien (AREM), an organisation promoting good governance and fighting against impunity.

Lara Aharonian is a woman human rights defender working to advance women's rights in Armenia. She is co-founder of the Women's Resource Center Armenia, a feminist organization based in Yerevan that works to empower women and girls to become active citizens by combatting gender stereotypes and providing psychological and legal support to survivors of gender-based violence in Armenia. Lara has extensive experience advocating for women's rights, gender equality and the inclusion of trans, lesbian and bisexual women, in addition to raising awareness on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.



Rest & Respite

Recognition that HRDs as individuals are, from time to time, in need of rest, rejuvenation and support is at the heart of the Front Line Defenders Rest & Respite programme.

The resilience of HRDs and the need for adaptability in responding to their needs shone through in the R&R programme in 2020 with plans being reassessed and amended to fit within pandemic guidelines and restrictions. For some programmes this meant an amended timeline, postponed travel programmes or a switch to in-country relocation.

16 individuals and five groups from 19 countries were supported through the R&R programme. HRDs experiencing stress and burnout were able to avail of opportunities both to take a break from their working environments and to take steps to build their capacities for managing stress in the future. HRDs on the R&R programme used the opportunity for personal growth, time for themselves, to rediscover their passions and to assess how best to continue with their human rights work while maintaining a focus on well-being and self-care.



Malungelo Xakasa, a WHRD, was supported to take a short break away with her sons. Malungelo's mother **Fikile Ntshangase** had been killed in October due to her role as chairperson of the Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation which was established by the people of Somkhele and Fuleni to challenge the further expansion of a large coal mine in KwaZulu-Natal. The mining operation would result in the loss of their ancestral land and cause harm to their health and the environment. Malungelo described this photo as capturing a very special time for the family when they were having fun together. She spoke of how the R&R was so important for her relationship with her sons. It had offered them a space to reconnect - she said "we could talk to each other which we hadn't done properly for a long time".

HRD ID Cards

In February 2020, Front Line Defenders Digital Protection Coordinator, MENA Region persuaded the Facebook team to accept the FLD Card to verify the identity of trans WHRD **Malak El Kashif**, a trans-woman from Egypt, in order to retrieve her account. Malak does not have any government-issued documents to match her gender identity.

In November, **Instagram** also accepted the FLD-issued ID Card, allowing her to re-open [her Instagram account](#) after it was closed.



HRD Memorial

The regular everyday risks faced by HRDs all over the world remained ever-present as highlighted in FLD's 2020 Global Analysis report; at least 331 HRDs were killed for carrying out their peaceful human rights work in 2020. Through the HRD Memorial Project, together with partners, FLD continued to document the killings and demand accountability.

On 9 December, the HRD Memorial was unveiled in Iveagh Gardens in Dublin. The Memorial was jointly initiated by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Front Line Defenders to provide a physical space in the heart of Dublin to recognise the important work of HRDs around the world, and pay tribute to the many brave and inspirational HRDs who have been silenced.



The Irish government is proud of its partnership with Front Line Defenders in supporting and promoting the work of human rights defenders. This memorial will represent a place where Irish people, and those who visit our shores, can come and pay tribute to human rights defenders worldwide who have lost their lives in the peaceful pursuit of human rights and equality for all.

- Simon Coveney TD, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ireland

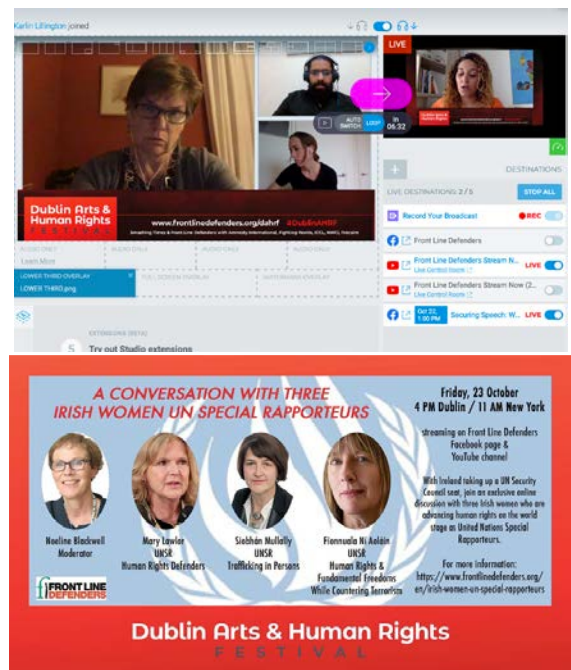


Dublin Arts & Human Rights Festival

The 2020 Dublin Arts & Human Rights Festival hosted 33 events over 10 days, and was seen by an international audience of over 10,000 people.

The Festival was presented by Front Line Defenders & Smashing Times International Centre for the Arts and Equality, in partnership with Amnesty International, Fighting Words, Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL), the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) and Trocaire.

Front Line Defenders program included four panel discussions including: **Securing Speech: WHRDs and Defamation in the Digital Space**; **Irish Women UN Special Rapporteurs**; **Eyes on Extractives: Protecting Land, Protecting Life**; and **Targeting Transnational Activism for Palestinian Rights**. The DAHRF also included a Climate Queens Podcast, Up-cycling workshops with Aisling Duffy and two film screenings: *BROKEN - A Palestinian Journey Through International Law* and *3 Stolen Cameras (Western Sahara)*.

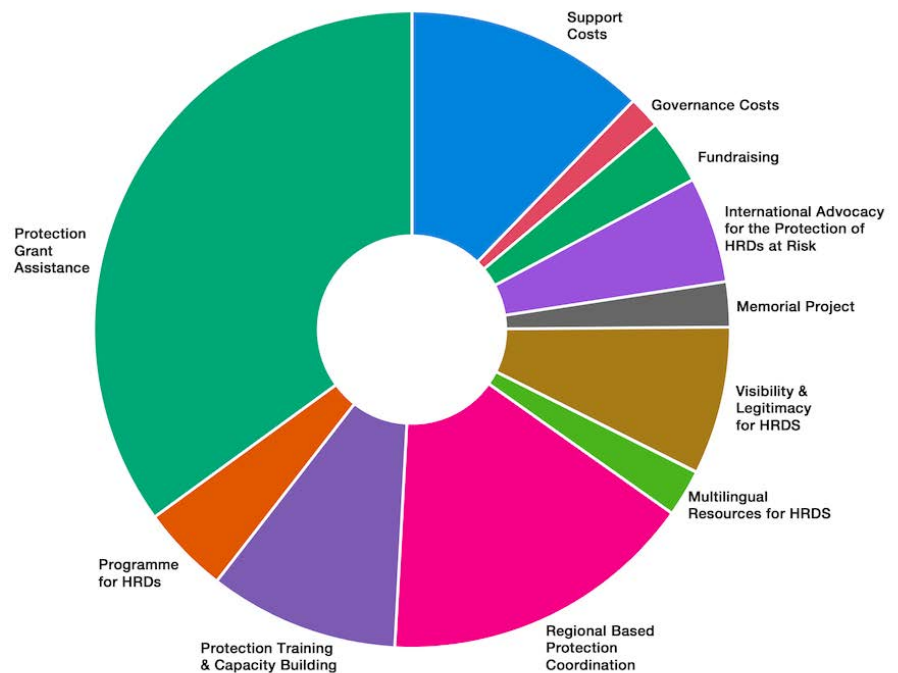


2020 Income & Expenditures

Front Line Defenders is grateful for the support of the following donors:

€200,000+

European Commission
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 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark
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€50,000 - €199,000

Belgian Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs
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€ 2,000 - € 49,000

American Jewish World Service
 Bread for the World
 Environmental Defenders Collaborative
 The Fair Wind Foundation
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 Mize Family Foundation
 Nicolas Puech Foundation
 Overbrook Foundation
 Oxfam
 Swedish Postcode Lottery
 Tikva Grassroots Empowerment Fund
 Twitter

WHERE FRONT LINE DEFENDERS SPENDS ITS RESOURCES

	Total Funds €	Percentage
Protection Grant Assistance	2,049,250	35%
Programs for HRDs	262,303	4%
Protection Training & Capacity Building	564,413	10%
Regional Based Protection Coordination for HRDs	940,876	16%
Multilingual Resources for HRDs	139,460	2%
Visibility & Legitimacy for HRDs	439,076	8%
Dublin Human Rights Festival	1,405	<1%
Memorial Project	134,361	2%
International Advocacy for the Protection of HRDs at Risk	315,146	5%
Fundraising	194,847	3%
Governance Costs	95,099	2%
Support Costs	716,695	12%
Total Expenditure	5,852,931	

Front Line Defenders Audited Accounts are available at www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/financial-information

Front Line Defenders also thanks its many public donors whose contributions are crucial to the organisation's work.

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