BECAUSE IT IS LIFE WE DEFEND, IT IS WITH LIFE WE RESIST

I AM NOT AFRAID OF DYING. I AM AFRAID OF LOSING THE AMAZON.
I WILL KEEP FIGHTING TO DEFEND THE AMAZON AND ITS PEOPLE

AS A HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER IN BURMA, I PASS MY DAILY LIFE LIKE A HUNGRY SOUL CRYING FOR FREEDOM AND JUSTICE

THE CONTINUING HARASSMENT AND THREATS ON MY LIFE HAVE DEEPLY AFFECTED ME. THESE THREATS HAVE SEPARATED ME FROM MY CHILDREN. THIS PAIN BREAKS MY HEART

I DO THIS WORK WITH MY FULL HEART BECAUSE IT IS WITH OUR HEARTS THAT WE WILL MAKE PROGRESS

HRD, ARGENTINA
Front Line provides practical round-the-clock support to at-risk human rights defenders, and promotes the visibility and recognition of human rights defenders.

Front Line addresses needs identified by defenders themselves, including protection, networking, training and access to international bodies that can take action on their behalf.

Front Line runs a small grants programme to provide the security needs of defenders and mobilises campaigning and lobbying on behalf of defenders at imminent risk. In emergency situations Front Line can facilitate temporary relocation.

Front Line conducts research and publishes reports on human rights defenders, and promotes the visibility and recognition of human rights defenders in specific countries. We also develop multimedia CDs and training packages on behalf of human rights defenders and facilitate networking and weaving between human rights defenders in different parts of the world.

Front Line provides practical round-the-clock support to at-risk human rights defenders at risk, either temporarily or permanently, because of their work. Front Line works to protect the lives of those brave people who fight for human rights in difficult or sometimes impossible situations.

Front Line defines a human rights defender as any person who works non-violently for the human rights of others without the fear of intimidation or arrest. Front Line was founded in Dublin in 2001 with the specific aim of protecting human rights defenders at risk either temporarily or permanently because of their work. Front Line works to protect the lives of those brave people who fight for human rights in difficult or sometimes impossible situations.

Front Line is the winner of the 2007 King Baudouin International Prize for Development.

**WHAT DOES FRONT LINE DO?**

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**FRONT LINE TRUSTEES**

Denis O’Brien (Chairman)

Kieran Mulvey (Director)

Michelle Keery (Director)

Mary Lawlor (Director)

Sarah Kennedy (Chair)

Robert Fisk (Independent Director)

Pierre Sané (Independent Director)


datatext
Friends, when you feel that your contribution isn’t acknowledged and your expertise ignored, remember, you do this work because it is a vision beyond you, yet of you.

I love the name of Mutabar Tadjibaeva’s NGO, “Club of Fiery Hearts”. Mutabar was arrested as she was about to come to the last platform in 2005 and remains in prison. To me that’s what you are, fiery hearts, filled with passion, compassion and care, displaying the kind of unconditional love that the poet Rilke talks about when he said:

“For every two solitudes protect, / from the sun, from the wind and from the rain, / from the darkness that we call love.”

Lawlor said “It is always difficult for me to try to find words to explain properly what you mean to us in Frontline, these people if I walked away. The only thing to do is to take this to the bitter end, so what is actually happening, it will lead to change, to peace. Obviously, I am not going to tell you about this. I’m not going to tell you about this. The only thing I want to tell you is that, the kind of unconditional love that these people feel inside. The only thing I can do is to take this to the bitter end, so what is actually happening, it will lead to change, to peace.”

It is not possible to capture all the sharing and learning, the energy and emotion, the commitment and inspiration generated by the ninety one human rights defenders who came together in Dublin Castle between the 22nd and 24th November 2007 to come together to exchange experience, discuss relevant issues and engage with decision makers from government and international bodies. The meeting brought together on average more than 100 human rights defenders from around the world.

The Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders aims to:

1. Analyse and expose the reality of the repression of human rights defenders and promote their work internationally.
2. Provide an opportunity for participants to share experiences and make practical recommendations in specific areas and influence thinking at the international level.
3. Prioritise the sharing of experience so that human rights defenders can learn from each other and discuss what strategic lessons can be drawn for their prevention and minimisation of risk.
4. Include feedback on major new report on women HRDs to be published by Frontline, with the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) to establish stronger international institutions, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the African Commission on Human Rights and the European Commission on Human Rights and Defenders, the African Commission on Human Rights.

The HRDs who came together in Dublin Castle between the 22nd and 24th November 2007 were also on strengthening mechanisms for protection, engaging the international community, holding perpetrators accountable and providing support to those under attack. Examples of these threats and attacks were shared in often harrowing testimony. But the focus was also on strengthening mechanisms for protection, engaging the international community, holding perpetrators accountable and providing support to those under attack.

All the HRDs who came together in Dublin Castle between the 22nd and 24th November 2007 were also on strengthening mechanisms for protection, engaging the international community, holding perpetrators accountable and providing support to those under attack. The HRDs were joined by many representatives from international human rights organisations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Judge Louise Arbour and Mr. Derso Aslam Ahmed, Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, who gave keynote speeches on the first morning, with the EU; Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders by phone from Pakistan; Paulette Guerin, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights; Daniela Salazar Marin, representative of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; and Guillamé Pfeiflé, Associate Human Rights Officer and assistant to Hina Jilani at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Presentations were made about a new report on women HRDs to be published by Frontline, with the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) to establish stronger international institutions, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the African Commission on Human Rights and the European Commission on Human Rights.

FOREWORD

Speaking at the opening of the Fourth Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders, Frontline’s Director Mary Lawlor said “It is always difficult for me to try to find words to explain properly what you mean to us in Frontline, how we care you carry out this work.”

The full text of Mary Lawlor’s speech is available on the Frontline website at http://www.frontline.ie/defenders/report/
The High Commissioner went on to speak about the “respon- sibility to protect,” the work of her Office, and the progress made in constructing the Human Rights Council. She suggested that “the responsibility to protect,” an emerging principle affirmed by governments in 2005, that asserts that in the event of grave human rights abuses, states have an obligation to protect their citizens. She emphasised that the protection of human rights is a central element of Ireland’s foreign policy. Noting that this year Ireland will observe the ten-year anniversary of the Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders, Hina Jilani, herself a human rights defender from Pakistan who was at risk of being detained. In this context she called for the release of all human rights defenders.

The Foreign Minister noted that the protection of human rights is critical to Ireland’s foreign policy. She emphasised that the protection of human rights is a central element of Ireland’s foreign policy. Noting that this year Ireland will observe the ten-year anniversary of the Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders, Hina Jilani, herself a human rights defender from Pakistan who was at risk of being detained. In this context she called for the release of all human rights defenders.

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We have assisted 5800 women. We work with 45 social workers, half of whom have been raped, attacked or killed. Sexual abuse by an official.

We have suffered harassment, my eyes were covered, I was disappeared and my mother threatened my children I could no longer concentrate on my work. I was phoned and told ‘We have your daughter, we are raping her right now’. There are thousands of communications are monitored. Property has been damaged. Symptomatic are criticised in the media...”

“More than 40 women have been murdered in recent years in Guatemala. Our offices were searched, we have been threatened several times. Women abused during the years of war are seeking justice, often years after the event; and those who seek justice are targeted. We were searched we had a night right, we were danced – we no longer come to stop our offices. We need the same, and they feel we are unnecessary. We no longer receive messages in blood. Those who persecute us also use symbols. Legal and economic harassment and intimidation

The property of HRDs is often damaged. Offices are broken into and damaged, equipment destroyed, homes vandalised or disturbed with threatening graffiti, vehicles sabotaged to prevent them from doing their work, and also reinforce the atmosphere of physical violence, and insecurity, in which many are forced to operate.

“Where Am I working our work [with prisoners] become even very difficult. We were harassed by a group of women. They said we were traitors. They destroyed my place of work. My house (at university) was vandalised, my 17-year-old niece, who used to attend school, was arrested on fabricated charges; my brother too. This is the reason we were traitors.”

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They emphasised first of all that LGBT rights defenders are standing up for fundamental rights and values that all therefore particularly vulnerable to prosecution and police harassment. In common with women HRDs, the fact that they campaign for legal rights and focus on sexual identity and sexual rights puts them in extra danger. LGBTI defenders are also targeted by a wide range of actors: they face state harassment, but also hostility from private actors – not least their families and community – and are vulnerable to attack by media. They face even more isolation than their heterosexual counterparts.

"In my country, the strongest human rights leaders are also named to high posts. We encouraged one [colleague] to accept – but, once in post, she was not able to act.

"We work with young people in Ghana, where old people claim all the right to opinion – especially on old people’s sexuality. It is still a crime in Ghana."

"The issue of donors was also discussed in this session, with participant expressing frustration about the fact that financial support provided for individual projects often fails to take into consideration the time and input required on behalf of defenders to do the actual work.

"HRDs described an array of legal and other obstacles that impede them from carrying out their work. Others have been subject to persistent investigation, accused of accepting grants and funds from abroad without authority, or falsely accused of fraud or corruption. A number were taken to court to intimidate them, even though no sensible case could be made, and some were sent to prison or asked to leave.

"It is very difficult to talk about the rights of gays and lesbians. But if people write about our work and denounce us, we should remember that this means we are being effective, that the authorities are roused to action.

"We are always being accused of playing politics, of being manipulated, of acting like a political opposition. Moreover, there are no communications. The Internet does not work – we cannot add in our website.

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"They were fired from my government employment because of my work on HIV/AIDS. Many rural farmers were infected out and given every opportunity to leave the country. After I organised it was held for four weeks and tortured (damaging both my legs). Later..."

"Mary HRDs were impeded in their use of communications or their ability to travel. Telephone and internet access were regularly denied and monitored or monitored by plain-clothes police. Last year, when I talked about gay and lesbian rights, the media came after us, harassed us, forced us to close our office for a month to calm the situation. My travel was monitored by plain-clothes police.

"I was imprisoned without charge after writing a letter to the BBC seeking them to impose conditions on it. I was called an enemy of the Republic. I was told I would be banned from speaking to foreign embassies.

"In some cases, such legal and economic harassment has prevented HRDs from carrying out their work. They lose their jobs, have their careers derailed, are cut off from their families and communities, and are forced to live in isolation.

"The NGO from which I was supposed to be embezzling this money, however, did not exist.

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The document discusses the challenges faced by Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in various countries, highlighting the stress and isolation they experience due to social and professional isolation, slander, loss of recognition, and increased risk of violence. HRDs often feel isolated and are faced with severe consequences for their work, such as being accused of being a traitor to their country, corruption, and immorality. Many HRDs have been forced to go abroad or face direct threats and sanctions in their absence. The text also mentions the difficulties HRDs have in communicating their experiences, the challenges of operating in contexts of violence, and the necessity to tread carefully in their work.

The document concludes with a question about the future of HRDs and the possibility of being arrested again if they return home. It emphasizes the importance of considering how to influence public attitudes and the need for HRDs to engage in self-care and community support. The text highlights the critical role of HRDs in advocating for human rights and the need for international support and recognition for their work.

Social isolation of this kind is psychologically exhausting. “I sometimes wonder if I am still worth fighting for, because people are always telling me that I am doing so much for nothing.” The text stresses the importance of recognizing the contributions of HRDs and the need for ongoing support and understanding in their work.
Of course, they include various violent episodes and the threats of violence are also real.

The 2007 Platform therefore devoted a session to naming and discussing the problem of stress.

The session was introduced by Jane Barry, who wrote the report ‘What’s the Point of Revolution? It’s Cash Change’ for Urgent Action Fund. She emphasised the importance of human rights defenders’ resilience, its moral and human dignity, political and social need, and the importance of human rights defenders’ own rights understanding.

The session was very well received by participants, who welcomed an opportunity to think about these very personal issues. There was an active discussion, and the participants asked Front Line to develop further work in this area.

‘There are too many scars. One or two well. The other in your heart. You feel alone. But God will take us all. God will help you.’

‘We are not alone. We need to take care of ourselves. Because if we do not work if we do not help ourselves.’

HRD, Uzbekistan

‘What happens is that we do not give ourselves time to reflect on our own safety. But all of us are bringing our personal problems over to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. We need to take care of ourselves. We need to ensure our own safety? We need to be mentally and physically well. We need to share our problems with others.’

HRD, Middle East

‘Much of what we share is negative experience. We have been together for a long time. We need to share positive experiences, too. What is clear is that each one of us should remember our successes. We need to continue to celebrate our successes.’

HRD, Egypt

‘I think that we have been excluded and discriminated against in our society, and that we have fought back against the exclusion, and succeeded. One of my colleagues was raped and we were still very happy, even if she was being dismissed. We need protection – the most urgent problem for us was to live safe. We need help – we do not need the only one. We are not alone. After the meeting I see that others are suffering, and also suffering more than us, and this is a source of great strength to us.’

HRD, Guatemala
The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) is one of two bodies in the Inter-American system for the promotion and protection of human rights. The Commission has its headquarters in Washington, D.C. The other body is the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which is located in San José, Costa Rica.

The IACHR is an autonomous organ of the Organization of American States (OAS). Its mandate is found in the OAS Charter and the American Convention on Human Rights. The IACHR represents all of the member States of the OAS. Its mandate is to promote human rights and to consider complaints from individuals, organizations, and governments. It issues reports on human rights developments in the Hemisphere.

The IACHR also conducts investigations and fact-finding missions in countries with serious human rights problems. It maintains a special rapporteur on human rights defenders. The Special Rapporteur is an independent United Nations expert mandated by the Human Rights Council to report on the situation of human rights defenders in the world.

International solidarity

The government of the United States has supported the work of the IACHR through financial contributions and by providing a platform for discussion and exchange. The IACHR is an important instrument for promoting human rights in the Americas.

Jean Bosuyt, of the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), reported on the development decision-making process, which affects developmental aid. Jean Bosuyt noted that many development agencies have mainstreamed human rights in their policies, but these policies are often disjointed. In many cases, the agencies are not aware of or do not take into account the human rights implications of their actions.

Jean Bosuyt stressed that development agencies have responsibilities in human rights policies, but they need to be more aware of the human rights implications of their actions. He said that development agencies need to work more closely with human rights organizations to ensure that their actions are consistent with human rights principles.

Jean Bosuyt also noted that development agencies face many challenges in implementing human rights policies. He said that development agencies need to work more closely with human rights organizations to ensure that their actions are consistent with human rights principles.

Jean Bosuyt called for more cooperation between development agencies and human rights organizations to ensure that human rights are integrated into development policies. He said that development agencies need to work more closely with human rights organizations to ensure that their actions are consistent with human rights principles.

International pressure is vital - but not at election time

HRD, Brazil

"It is not HRDs who should supply answers to the Inter-American Commission or the UN. They should be supporting us."

The trouble is that human rights do not have teeth; the Inter-American Commission and the UN do not have the power to enforce their resolutions. In many cases, the agencies are not aware of or do not take into account the human rights implications of their actions.

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A high point of the Platform occurred when Hina Jilani joined the conference by telephone from Pakistan. She addressed the meeting, noting that the UN Secretary General’s Special Representative on the situation of human rights defenders, but a high point of the Platform occurred when Hina Jilani joined the conference by telephone from Pakistan. She addressed the meeting, noting that the UN Secretary General’s Special Representative on the situation of human rights defenders, but also that the new appointment is a strong one.

The new appointment is a strong one.

Secondly, 2008 will mark the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – a great opportunity to reaffirm and amplify the principles of respect and human relationship and the single most important expression of the values of human rights defenders. Here too lies a great strength and encouragement for us” – echoing a sentiment that thousands of human rights defenders have expressed about their work during her term as UN Special Representative, which ends in 2008.

We say to one another ‘We are still alive and we will continue’. Human rights defenders have shared the experiences of others, and others have shared mine.”

We say to one another ‘We are still alive and we will continue’.

**POSTSCRIPT**

In the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, the right to peace has been challenged and must be defended.

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Front Line would like to acknowledge the generous assistance of the various funders who made the Platform possible.

The Next Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders will take place in Autumn 2009.

Front Line would welcome any input for the agenda.

The reports from the working groups that took place in this year’s Fourth Dublin Platform will be made available on the Front Line web site.

www.frontlinedefenders.org