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Press Release  
Embargoed until 23 July 2020

**Front Line Defenders Launches Monthly Digital Magazine  
Cypher – Comics as Eyewitness**



[Dublin, Ireland] Front Line Defenders launches a new monthly digital magazine, **Cypher**, with the first edition on 23 July 2020. This project advances the organization's storytelling and narrative framing work in collaboration with and in support of human rights defenders (HRDs). Working with artists from around the world, including the award-winning visual storyteller, Beldan Sezen, as creative director, the 'zine will be a monthly publication featuring 3 or 4 stories of HRDs, their work and the challenges they face.

Each month, Front Line Defenders will collaborate with comics artists from around the world, pairing them with HRDs to develop stories that portray their work and the challenges, risks and threats they face. The first edition features stories from:

**Kenya** (artist: [Nomes Dee](#)) – a profile of [Ruth Mumbi](#)'s efforts to defend the rights of evicted families in the Kairobangi neighborhood of Nairobi as the COVID-19 pandemic spread;

**Pakistan** (artist: anonymous for security reasons) – the story of the abduction enforced disappearance of Pakistani HRD [Idris Khattak](#), as told from the perspective of his daughter;

**Lebanon** (artist: [Pascale Ghazaly](#)) – with COVID-19 hitting, ongoing street protests against political and economic corruption and the collapse of the economy, Ethiopian domestic workers found themselves kicked out and abandoned, as even the embassy refused to help; a collective of domestic workers organized critical support;

**Brazil** (artist: [Lyvia Emanuely](#)) – *transvesti* HRD Rosa Luz is a social media and YouTube influencer and rap/hip hop musician; when she used her art to criticize political leaders, she faced intense backlash in the media and from politicians, including death threats, only returning to her public role after a hiatus to ensure her security.

The magazine will be hosted at [www.frontlinedefenders.org/cypher](http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/cypher) and on Instagram (@cypher\_comics).

As part of its visibility work, Front Line Defenders works to develop new means of presenting the work and lives of HRDs and deliver those stories to new audiences, beyond the human rights community that already works to support HRDs. Comics offer unique, creative and

different ways of engaging audiences than videos, reports or infographics, and can be disseminated across digital platforms that can reach audiences that otherwise might not pay attention to more traditional forms of reporting. And by working with artists to put their talents in the service of human rights, Front Line Defenders is enabling partnerships between the artists and the HRDs that can extend beyond the magazine and bring those stories to new communities to which the artists have access.

Front Line Defenders comes to this project following a four-year process of developing, producing and disseminating the [critically-acclaimed](#) nonfiction graphic novel, [\*\*\*La Lucha: The Story of Lucha Castro and Human Rights in Mexico\*\*\*](#). That book, published in English, Spanish and Italian, presented the work and lives of women human rights defenders in northern Mexico. Following the publication in Spanish, Front Line Defenders worked with educators and human rights defenders in Chihuahua state in Mexico to develop a curriculum to use the book in schools in the state. Since 2017, the book has been used by thousands of secondary school students and initial work is underway to develop the project to the national level. This book, and its reception, demonstrated to Front Line Defenders – and to HRDs – how this form of powerful storytelling can be effective and impactful, including reaching audiences (i.e. students) that HRDs rarely have the ability to engage.

Front Line Defenders is excited to bring the stories of HRDs to new audiences in ***Cypher*** and it is a true credit to the immensely talented artists who are working with us to bring them forward. And it is to the HRDs and their faith in this work and trust in Front Line Defenders that we owe the biggest debt, as we try to use this platform for their voices, perspectives and experiences.

For more information:

Adam Shapiro  
Head of Visibility & Communications / ***Cypher*** co-producer  
adam@frontlinedefenders.org  
+1-202-294-8813

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The dictionary definition of cypher is ‘a secret or disguised way of writing’. In many ways, this is the essence of comics storytelling – the image, rather than the word, is a disguise for many words, that can convey meaning and emotion, and can re/frame an entire narrative.

Rap and hip hop culture has taken the word and ascribed a new meaning: ‘an informal gathering of rappers, beatboxers and/or breakdancers in a circle, in order to jam musically together.’ This, too, we find relevant to this project, in that we are bringing together artists and HRDs in freestyle collaboration of activism and art with the aim of informing, elevating and inspiring.

For us, this captures the spirit of why we are working in comics and guides how we facilitate the process of creative production.