

Dear friends and colleagues,

April saw the rainy season creep over Kampala and the staff of DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders) once again travel all over the world. This month, we celebrated Defenders' Day in Sweden and Tanzania, an occasion to look back and reflect on what has been achieved since the creation of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders' mandate. This mandate is all the more important today, recognising not only the work that human rights defenders do, but also the risks they face and their need for an international mechanism to provide overview and protection.

I was struck by the chair that stood empty at the Civil Rights Defenders celebration in Stockholm, as a symbol of the human rights defenders who had been killed or detained due to their work. Just this month, John Waweru, a Kenyan land rights defender was shot dead in Nairobi. The need for protection of human rights defenders has never been greater.

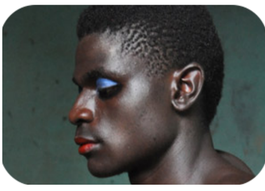
April was also the anniversary of an unfortunate event – the beginning of the anti-third protests in Burundi, which triggered a grave human rights crisis in the Great Lakes country. In just one year, freedoms of expression, assembly, and association have all but disappeared. Since the beginning of the crisis, human rights defenders have been repeatedly threatened, intimidated, and in some cases disappeared and killed. Many have fled the country, and those that remain live in constant fear. The country stands today as a reminder of the consequences we face when early warning signs of a crisis are not addressed.

This month, we stand in solidarity not only with human rights defenders in the East and Horn sub-region but also with Egyptian human rights defenders, and our partners from the Northern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network. Throughout the month, police and security forces in Egypt have arrested large numbers of activists, lawyers, and journalists. The clampdown is related to a day of planned demonstrations on 25 April under the slogan "Egypt is not for sale." Civil society's right to peacefully assemble and express views is fundamental to a healthy society, and all State authorities have a duty to protect it.

With best wishes,

Hassan Shire
Executive Director of DefendDefenders

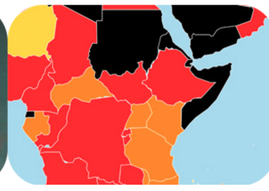
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Defenders' Day



Several Human Rights Defenders' Day celebrations took place across the world to look back on the establishment of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders in 2000. Delegations from DefendDefenders attended a celebration organised by Civil Rights Defenders in Stockholm, with representatives from national coalitions and around 160 human rights defenders from 35 countries. The Civil Rights Defender of the Year Award was awarded to Intigam Aliyev, a prominent human rights lawyer from Azerbaijan.

On 28 April, Mr Hassan Shire travelled to Dar es Salam to attend a celebration organised by the Tanzanian Coalition of Human Rights Defenders. Around 120 HRDs and other stakeholders attended the celebration, and Mr Shire delivered the East and Horn of Africa Defender of the Year Award to Onesmo Olengurumwa, the coordinator of the Tanzanian Coalition for his outstanding work.

News from the sub-region:

Burundi

- On 2 April, the UN Security Council approved a resolution paving the way for the deployment of a UN police force in Burundi;
- On 9 April, DefendDefenders and Burundian civil society commemorated the seventh anniversary of prominent human rights defender Ernest Manirumva's murder;
- On 26 April, one year after the protest against President Nkurunziza's third term began, DefendDefenders looked back at how HRDs experienced key moments of the crisis and the impact it had on Burundian HRDs through a timeline, testimonies, and interviews;

Djibouti

- On 4 April, the BBC reported that Djiboutian authorities detained and expelled its team of reporters and producers, who had travelled there to cover the 2016 presidential elections;
- On 8 April 2016, Djibouti held presidential elections despite allegations of fraud by opposition parties. A preliminary statement by the IGAD election observation mission stated that the elections were "conducted in a transparent, peaceful, and orderly manner and in accordance with the Constitution and the laws governing the Republic of Djibouti";

Ethiopia

- Mobile social media apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Twitter have been blocked for over a month in several regions of Ethiopia, including Oromia;
- On 13 April, the Ministry of Science and Technology submitted a draft Computer Crime Proclamation to the House of Peoples' Representatives;

Kenya

- On 11 April, John Waweru, a defender of economic and social rights, was killed in Nairobi, Kenya. It is believed the attack was related to his work on land and environmental rights;
- On 19 April, Section 29 of the Kenya Information and Communication Act was declared unconstitutional. The law has been used to prosecute online activists who highlight corruption and abuse of office issues, and over 16 persons have been charged under this section this year;

Rwanda

- Congolese human rights defender Epimack Kwokwo, former Executive Secretary of the Ligue pour la défense des droits de la personne dans la région des grands lacs (LDGL), received threatening phone calls and has been subjected to intense harassment by Rwandan authorities throughout the month of April;

Somalia/Somaliland

- Three journalists are facing possible prison sentences in Somaliland. On 23 April, the journalists were told that their trials had been postponed to an unknown date;

South Sudan

- On 12 April, the Minister of Information and Broadcasting Michael Makuei threatened to shut down media houses that did not recognise the presidential order creating 28 states in South Sudan;
- On 26 April, Riek Machar returned to Juba in an important a step towards implementing the August 2015 Peace Agreement and forming a transitional government;

Sudan

- The Sudanese National Intelligence Security Service (NISS) confiscated print runs of *Al-Taghyeer*, *Al-Saiha*, and *Akhir Lahza* without giving reasons;
- On 19 April, security agents fired into a crowd of students peacefully marching to the Office of the Student Unions. One student was killed, and another 27 students were injured. Protests have erupted in many universities around the country, which have been brutally repressed by NISS agents;

Uganda

- On 10 April, unknown assailants broke into the premises of the Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda;
- On 26 April, the Data Protection and Privacy Bill 2015 was tabled before parliament, which should serve to protect Article 27 of the Constitution of Uganda and help protect citizens' data.

DefendDefenders:

- Provided support to 9 defenders;
- A delegation of 8 travelled to Banjul to attend the 58th session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), where they took part in 2 side-events, and delivered oral statements on the situation of human rights and HRDs in the East and Horn of Africa and a joint statement on Sudan.
- Submitted our bi-annual report on the state of human rights in the East and Horn of Africa to the ACHPR;
- On 7 April 2016, Executive Director Mr Hassan Shire, and Director of Programs & Administration, Ms Memory Bandera, took part in a Brown-Bag lunch at the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency's (SIDA) headquarters in Stockholm to brief partners on the human rights situation in the sub-region;
- Mr Hassan Shire met with Dr Martin Ledolter, the Austrian Development Agency's (ADA) Managing Director, on 21 April 2016 during his visit to Uganda to brief him on the current situation in the region and the work DefendDefenders has done in the past year through the Pan African Human Rights Defenders Network;
- The Advocacy team met with the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders - Uganda secretariat to discuss joint advocacy initiatives, including trainings in documentation, Uganda's upcoming Universal Period Review and the ACHPR;
- Staff from the ICT and Security Management teams went on a weeklong road trip through Western Uganda to follow up with HRDs previously trained in digital and physical security management;
- The two teams also collaborated by conducting a training and a training of trainers on physical and digital security management in Kenya;
- The ICT team is preparing a forthcoming Ugandan human rights documentation project and has been working hard on automating and securing our data protection. HRD organisations having difficulty with the same task should get in touch!

From our network

- Congratulations to Ryota Jonen for his new role as the Director in charge of managing the secretariat of the World Movement for Democracy! DefendDefenders looks forward to working closely with him to implement its strategic decvlaration, "A Call for Democratic Renewal."
- Apply now to a workshop that is open to East African lawyers from Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania who are currently handling freedom of expression cases, or have a prospective freedom of expression cases that they wish to bring before domestic or regional courts.