



EAST AND
HORN OF
AFRICA
HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS
PROJECT
(EHAHRDP)

Annual report 2015

East and Horn of Africa
Human Rights Defenders Project



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I. Foreword

It's been over ten years since I had to flee my country and found a safe haven in Canada. Forced to leave my native Somalia because of my work, I had to fly halfway around the world, far from my colleagues, family, friends and work to find safety. Today, against the backdrop of the European refugee crisis and the multiple crises, conflicts and crackdowns taking place in the sub-region, it is more important than ever that human rights defenders (HRDs) find a safe and hospitable place to get rest and respite and continue their work.

Despite our achievements, 2015 was a stark reminder that HRDs and civil society remain extremely vulnerable in the East and Horn of Africa. In February 2015, DefendDefenders (the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project) published a report warning that Burundi was rapidly approaching a turning point in its history as a democratic country, highlighting Burundian civil society's extremely precarious position.

Sadly, the decision by President Pierre Nkurunziza to seek a third term in office and the subsequent crackdown as Burundi citizens took to the street in protest has been devastating to civil society. Within less than a year, one of the most vibrant communities of HRDs on the African continent was all but destroyed.

HRDs have a vital role to play in nation building and in the development of a healthy democratic society. As the governments in the sub-region increasingly turn towards authoritarianism and repression to preserve and tighten their grip on power, the working environment of HRDs becomes both hostile and dangerous.

Our flagship Protection program remains the pillar of our work, providing life-saving assistance to HRDs most at risk. In 2015, they did exemplary work under extremely difficult conditions. With the gradual but rapid deterioration of the situation in Burundi throughout the year, they have reacted swiftly and professionally to the overwhelming number of cases of HRDs at risk. I am proud to say that we were able to provide 114 protection grants to HRDs and two to civil society organisations. Although we assisted HRDs from twelve different countries, Burundians made up 20 per cent of our protection cases in 2015.

Our Advocacy and Research programme continued to work towards promoting and raising the voices of HRDs at national, regional, and international forums. Delegations comprised of staff and HRDs attended all sessions of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Banjul, to attempt to influence the narrative and ensure the protection and promotion of civic space and the work of HRDs in their country.

We conducted research into the trends and patterns affecting HRDs in the sub-region and, to build on our work on Burundi, launched "*Caught Up in Bitter Contests*", an analysis of the working environment of HRDs ahead of, during and after elections in September 2015.

As access to technology and Internet has grown across the sub-region, so has our ICT department. The rapid development of the digital world has created new possibilities for HRDs to do their work more effectively. However, they can now also have their data as well as their online and offline security compromised by actors half a world away. DefendDefenders is on the cutting edge of equipping HRDs with the new skills and tools they need to protect themselves and our team's expertise is increasingly sought after, both inside and outside the sub-region.

The Capacity Building department organised numerous trainings and follow-up visits, reaching over 600 HRDs directly. By supporting the development of new and existing National Coalitions for Human Rights Defenders and by hosting events such as consultations for a model law on the protection of HRDs, the team continued to build stronger structural protection mechanisms in the East and Horn of Africa.

Meanwhile, DefendDefenders also looked outside its geographical boundaries. The Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network connects HRDs from five sub-regions on the continent, for example through its

annual Pan-African Shield Awards, recognising the contributions of civil society and encouraging HRDs to continue with their invaluable work.

Despite the challenges we face, looking back at what we have achieved over the last decade, I am optimistic. DefendDefenders has grown into a mature organisation that has proven itself capable of providing quick and effective responses if needed. Together with our partners and donors, we will continue this vital work.

No matter the adversity they may experience, HRDs from all walks of life continue to speak out and claim their fundamental rights. Their perseverance is an inspiration to all of us at DefendDefenders and, witnessing this on a daily basis, I am confident they will contribute to build a peaceful future for the East and Horn of Africa.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hassan Shire', written in a cursive style.

Hassan Shire
Executive Director

II. About DefendDefenders

DefendDefenders (the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project) seeks to strengthen the work of human rights defenders (HRDs) throughout the region by reducing their vulnerability to the risk of persecution and by enhancing their capacity to effectively defend human rights.

DefendDefenders focuses its work on Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia (together with Somaliland), South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. DefendDefenders was established in 2005 following extensive field research in the region, which identified the most pressing and unmet needs of HRDs in order to seek to overcome some of the resulting challenges. The key areas identified as needing to be addressed were:

- Insufficient collaboration amongst human rights organisations, especially among neighbouring countries;
- Resource constraints (notably material) which greatly undermine the effectiveness of the work carried out by HRDs;
- Knowledge gaps, in particular regarding international human rights instruments and mechanisms as well as crisis management; and
- Lack of systematic protocol for international support to human rights defenders under attack.

DefendDefenders serves as the Secretariat of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (EHAHRD-Net) representing more than 75 individual and organisational members.

The Network envisions a region in which the human rights of every citizen as stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are respected and upheld. Its mission is to maximize the protection of HRDs working in the sub-region and to enhance the awareness of human rights work through linkages with national, regional and international like-minded entities.

III. Background

Much of DefendDefenders' work in 2015 was centred HRDs working in the context of elections. These politically charged periods often result in restrictions on civic and political space, as political parties attempt to tighten their grip on power. Elections in Sudan, Ethiopia and Burundi all presented substantial challenges to the work of HRDs. While election-related targeting of HRDs occurs during nearly every election in the region, mechanisms for the support and protection of HRDs in these periods has often been insufficient to meet the challenges experienced.

DefendDefenders conducted research and produced a report on HRDs working in the context of elections, which examines the impact of elections on HRDs in Sudan, Ethiopia, Burundi, and Uganda. The technical nature of elections is not addressed in this report, but rather the environment in which HRDs operate and the attacks and abuses to which they are subjected as a result of the heightened tensions surrounding electoral periods.

While the April 2015 election in **Sudan** was not competitive, free or fair, civil society was heavily constrained. Obstructive legislation such as the Organization of Humanitarian and Voluntary Work Act (2006), Press and Publications Act (2009), and the National Security Act (2010), were used in the election to shut down NGOs and to arrest and charge journalists and HRDs. During the election period in Sudan, at least five HRDs were arrested and four NGOs were raided, three of which were shut down.

In **Ethiopia**, the Charities and Societies Act (2009), which was passed in advance of the 2010 elections, was used to heavily impair the capacity of NGOs to engage on human rights or governance issues. As a result, the media became the primary outlet for the discussion of civic and political matters. In order to inhibit the media, Ethiopian authorities utilised the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (2009) to label journalists as terrorists and shut down critical media houses. In the pre-election period, nine journalists were arrested and charged with terrorism and three publishers were sentenced in absentia. In August 2014, six newspapers and magazines were shut down and charged with crimes against the state

leading to a mass exodus of HRDs. The increased harassment of journalists in the pre-election period led over 37 HRDs to flee the country. Since this deliberate election-related targeting of HRDs, independent media in Ethiopia has been largely silenced.

In **Burundi**, election-related insecurity devastated the country after President Pierre Nkurunziza decided to seek a third term despite constitutional limits. As a result of civil society's active participation in a campaign calling for the President to respect Burundi's constitution and 2000 peace agreements, HRDs were heavily targeted. In 2013, the Law on Public Gatherings and the Press Law were passed, limiting freedom of expression and assembly in advance of the 2015 elections. HRDs in Burundi continued to face harassment, arrest, torture, and physical and digital attacks ahead of, during, and after the July presidential election. The worsening environment in Burundi led to over one hundred HRDs and journalists to flee the country between April and December 2015.

Historically, elections in **Uganda** have been periods of repression, increased intimidation, restrictive legislation and targeting of HRDs. Since it was passed, the Public Order Management Act (2013) has been utilised to selectively block public gatherings related to the elections. In the lead up to the 2016 election, journalists were increasingly targeted for their coverage of the opposition's campaign and critical reporting.

The direct targeting of HRDs and systematic tightening of civic and political space prior to, during, and after elections in the East and Horn of Africa is a critical issue that has been inadequately addressed.

Other countries in the sub-region present their own challenges outside of this context. The UN Human Rights Council renewed the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on **Eritrea**, to further investigate human rights violations in Eritrea, "with a view to ensuring full accountability, including where these violations may amount to crimes against humanity." It is widely believed that at least four of the 11 journalists arrested in 2001 have died in detention.

Somalia continues to be among the most dangerous working environments worldwide for civil society and journalists. In addition to carrying out attacks against the civilian population, the extremist group Al Shabaab routinely targets HRDs and journalists. Meanwhile, Somali authorities continue to place unacceptable restrictions on the right to freedom of speech by shutting down media houses, detaining journalists, and passing restrictive legislation such as the 2016 Media Law.

Although one of the most stable countries in the East and Horn of Africa, space for civil society in **Tanzania** has shrunk dramatically in the last year. HRDs face significant challenges in their work, such as the adoption of the 2015 Cyber Crimes Act, which criminalises information deemed false, misleading, inaccurate or deceptive. The law further allows authorities to seize and search digital devices if they believe these contain information that can be used as evidence to prove a crime has been committed.

In **Kenya**, the indictment of senior government officials by the International Criminal Court has left authorities suspicious of civil society. In October 2015, the NGO Coordination Board threatened to suspend 959 organisations, including well-

established NGOs like the Kenyan Human Rights Commission (KHRC). A series of terrorist attacks and growing unease over the large numbers of refugees living in Kenya have had a serious impact on the work of HRDs. Counterterrorism legislation has been used to freeze the assets of legitimate human rights organisations.

In **Rwanda** and **Djibouti**, heavy legal and extra-legal restrictions on civil society continue to hamper the work of human rights defenders. With few to no independent human rights organisations left in both countries, the run up to presidential elections in February 2016 in Djibouti and 2017 in Rwanda saw human rights defenders struggle with an increase in judicial, administrative and physical harassment.

The August 2015 peace agreement formally brought an end to hostilities in **South Sudan**. However, occasional violence has broken out since, and it remains to be seen if the signatories will implement all mechanisms toward peace and reconciliation. Meanwhile, critical HRDs and particularly journalists are already experiencing increased pressure from authorities. In 2015 alone, seven journalists were killed in South Sudan.



DefendDefenders' staff during a digital security training.

IV. 10 year anniversary

On 26 and 27 October 2015, DefendDefenders celebrated its 10-year anniversary of defending HRDs throughout the East and Horn of Africa. Founded on 4 November 2005, the organisation has grown to include 29 full-time African and international staff members, as well as volunteers and interns, who work together to make the lives of HRDs better and safer on a daily basis.

Over the past decade, DefendDefenders has witnessed first-hand the narrowing space for civil society, and the increasing risks being borne by HRDs across this sub-region and the continent itself. HRDs are routinely subjected to physical attacks, digital surveillance, stigmatisation, prosecution, arbitrary arrest, and worse, perpetrated by both state and non-state actors. In the majority of countries where we work, this pattern is worsening year after year. Many governments in this part of Africa have introduced regressive new laws, limiting permissible activities for civil society organisations and human rights NGOs, and restricted the rights of their citizens to freedom of association, assembly and expression.

To address these challenges, DefendDefenders has trained nearly 1,000 defenders in physical and digital security and worked to elevate the voices of HRDs through advocacy at national, regional and international level. As the principal organisation working to support HRDs in the region we provided protection grants to over 750 people in the last ten years.

The anniversary celebrations were attended by an array of guests ranging from African Union Commissioners and government officials to international partners and civil society. All in all, about 200 people, including HRDs from all 11 countries in the sub-region, participated in the celebrations.

The two days were both a chance to celebrate our accomplishments over the last decade and a way to look towards the future. On 26 October, we met with focal points, HRDs, the board of directors, donors, and other key stakeholders. During these closed sessions, they were invited to give feedback on their experience with DefendDefenders and asked for input on the organisation's 5-year strategic plan.

October 27 was a public celebration: the morning featured speeches by prominent supporters and testimonies by human rights defenders. After the cutting of the cake, the attendees broke up in two separate sessions discussing "the state and future of human rights defenders in Africa" and "the state of women human rights defenders in the sub-region." In the afternoon, people were invited to participate in clinics on digital security, physical security, art therapy, and strategic litigation. The evening was crowned by the Pan African Human Rights Shield Awards.



Participants during the first day of celebrations.



Hassan Shire, Executive Director of DefendDefenders, cuts the cake on day two of the celebrations.

Publications and documentaries

As part of its anniversary, DefendDefenders invested in [documenting](#) its history and that of the HRDs it has helped over the years. A commemorative publication containing reflections on the DefendDefenders story over the past 10 years and containing material reflecting the video stories developed in the film project was created. Supported by pictures and testimonials, the publication revolves around four substantial pieces. Two of these, the personal story of the Executive Director and profiles of DefendDefenders' departments highlight the different aspects of the organisation.

The story of Njoroge Waitera, a Kenyan HRD DefendDefenders assisted during Kenya's post-election violence gives an impression how our organisation can impact the lives of an individual. An interview with Mohammad Badawi, of the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies, illustrates how lasting organisations defending human rights can be built.

DefendDefenders also took on two filmmakers as part of a Creative Film Residency. They produced three videos between 20 and 30 minutes, again focusing on both the organisation and the HRDs.

'Defend Defenders: A History of supporting human rights defenders in Africa' [covers](#) the history of DefendDefenders with a focus on Hassan Shire, stretching from his youth in Mogadishu working for the Dr. Jumale Human Rights Center up to his time in Canada at the Centre for Refugee Studies and founding the project in Uganda.

'Baptism by Fire: Kenya's HRDs and the post election violence' [documents](#) the experience of Kenyan HRDs during the 2007-2008 post election violence, the support they received from DefendDefenders, and the founding of the National Coalition for Human Rights Kenya.

Finally, *'Defending Defenders: an inside look'* [profiles](#) the inner workings of DefendDefenders through interviews with staff, supporters, and HRDs.

V. Protection and security management

By speaking out, human rights defenders will always find themselves in the crosshairs of those that are violating people's rights: the very nature of their work leads to risk. DefendDefenders trains HRDs to recognise, assess, and counter these risks.

The protection and security management program has a two-pronged approach, which consists of 1) building the capacity of HRDs through security management trainings that enable them to create safe working environments by putting in place measures to mitigate potential risks; and 2) to offer emergency assistance to HRDs at imminent risk resulting from their human rights work in the sub-region.

Protection cases handled

The protection programme was set up to ensure an effective response to requests for assistance from HRDs at risk. HRDs can contact DefendDefenders through a secure website, by e-mail, or through an emergency phone line that can be reached 24 hours a day. After receiving a request for assistance, a rapid response process is immediately initiated to verify claims, and assess a defender's need. The response mechanisms are varied and always applied on a case-by-case basis, but can include, security advice, protection grants, legal advice, medical support,

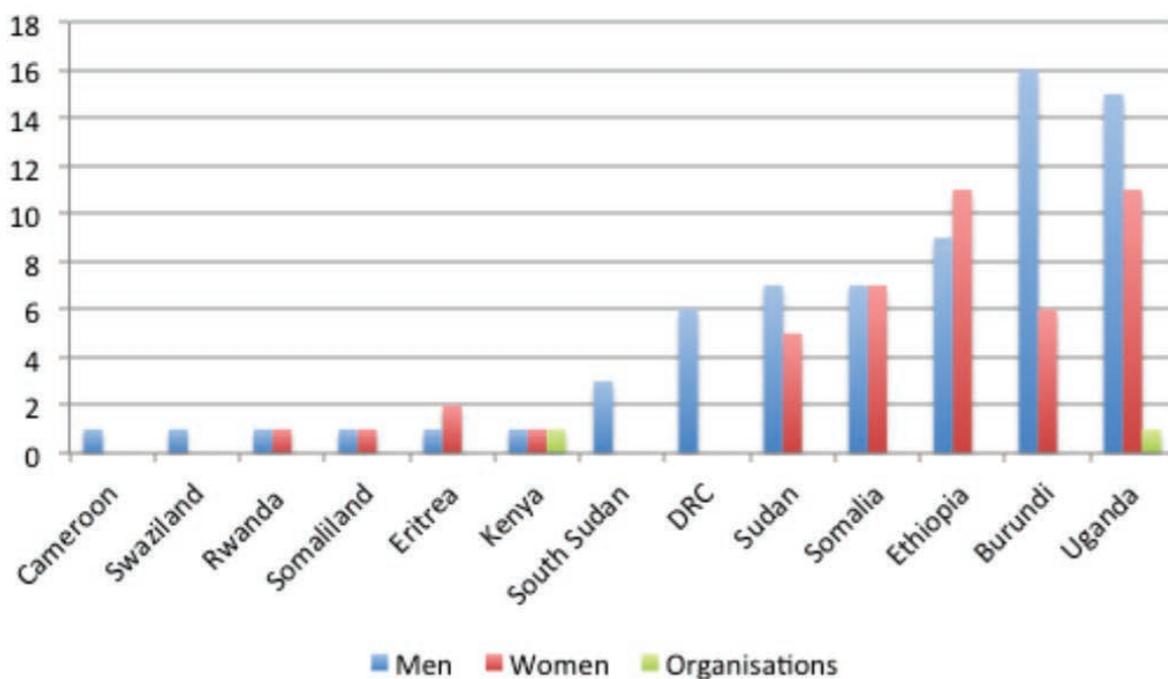
evacuation, and relocation to another country in the sub-region where safety can be guaranteed.

In 2015, the Protection department continued to increase its reach and impact throughout the sub-region with national and international partnerships. In October, DefendDefenders joined as one of twelve members in the ProtectDefenders.EU consortium, a new worldwide mechanism to reach HRDs at risk and facing the most difficult situations.

Meanwhile, the department also rapidly responded to new developments in the East and Horn of Africa. As the crisis in Burundi started to unfold, DefendDefenders experienced a strong increase in grant applications. Between April 2015 and December 2015, we provided 12 technical and 22 financial protection grants against 120 requests from Burundian HRDs. The support provided includes evacuation, relocation, family support, medical, counselling, monitoring visits, support with immigration and asylum processes. An additional 63 HRDs received security advice or risk assessments from DefendDefenders in the same period.

In total, DefendDefenders provided emergency financial assistance to 114 HRDs and two organisations. Forty per cent of these grants were given to women HRDs.

Protection grants provided in 2015 by country and gender





Participants in the annual Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network counterpart meeting.

Security management

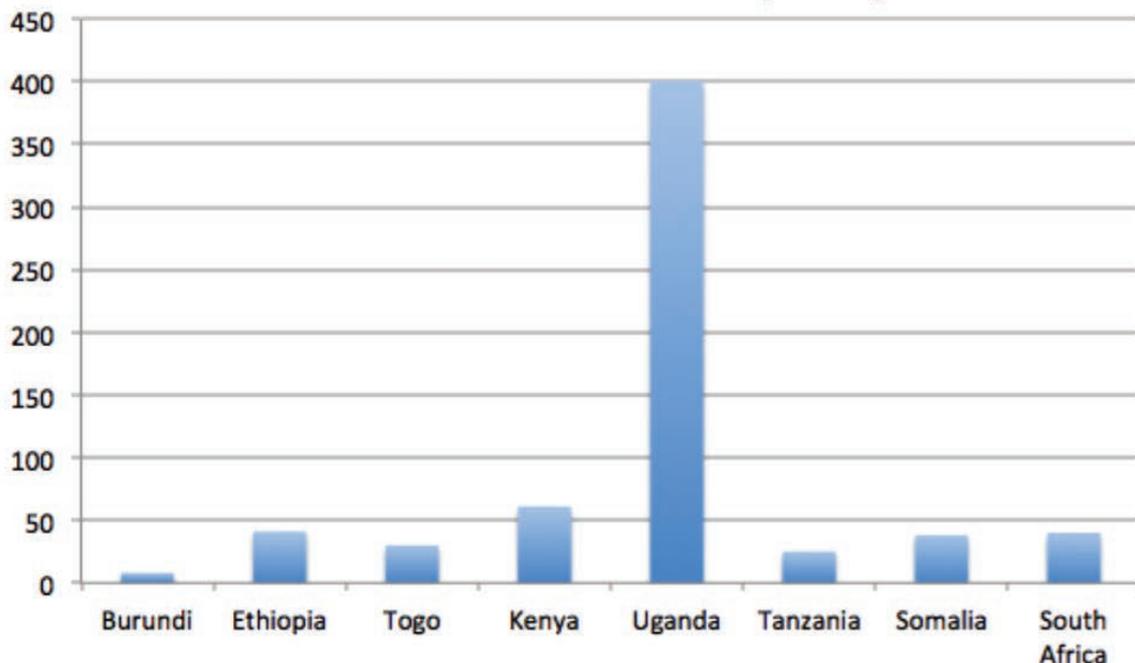
The focus on physical and digital security management support to individuals and organisations engaging in human rights work resulted from the assessments carried out of the security incidents that befall HRDs at risk. Many of the incidents reported by HRDs could have been prevented if they had implemented security protocols. Examples of these incidents include unwanted access to sensitive data due to not having passwords on laptops and phones or arrest and detention after failing to inform the authorities about planned meetings or demonstrations. Our security management trainings equip HRDs to mitigate these risks.

In 2015, DefendDefenders conducted security management trainings in Kenya, Somalia, South

Sudan, and Uganda. Over 100 HRDs benefitted directly from these workshops, having not only acquired these vital skills themselves, but also the knowledge to transfer them to other HRDs.

DefendDefenders also continues to follow-up with organisations and individuals that have been previously trained to assess the implementation of the measures covered in the workshops, and evaluate the effectiveness of the program. In 2015, the security management team followed up with over 40 organisations across the sub-region. Although some organisations continue to experience issues, most of the organisations have set in place basic security protocols, while individuals have adopted security measures to mitigate risk. Altogether, DefendDefenders trained over 600 HRDs across Africa.

Number of HRDs trained in 2015 by country



VI. Advocacy and research

DefendDefenders' Advocacy Programme works to promote the work of human rights defenders across the East and Horn of Africa and raise awareness of the challenges they face in speaking out on human rights violations.

Our Advocacy team facilitates the effective engagement of HRDs with regional and international human rights mechanisms – the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). In 2015, we attended and supported HRDs to engage at all three sessions of the UNHRC in Geneva, and the two ACHPR sessions in Banjul. Throughout the year, we also undertook a wide range of other advocacy and research activities.

Since the beginning of the Burundi crisis, set off by President Nkurunziza's bid for a third term, DefendDefenders has taken a lead role in highlighting the dramatic worsening of the situation of human rights defenders in the country, and has conducted constant and multi-faceted advocacy on the issue. All public advocacy has been published in both English and French on the website. As the crisis has gotten increased attention, we have been working closely with partners on joint initiatives to support the work of HRDs both inside the country and in exile.

UN Human Rights Council

During the **28th session** in March 2015, DefendDefenders focused on the deteriorating situation in South Sudan as a result of the civil war, hosted two side-events with our partners, and released several statements.

During the opening session of the high level segment, DefendDefenders' Executive Director delivered a statement on the restrictive operating space for HRDs and the continued reprisals by state actors towards them. Edmund Yakani, a South Sudanese HRD was not able to attend this session due to threats to his life. This resulted in the UN HRC's President personally responding to a case of reprisals for the first time, and calling upon the Government of South Sudan to respond to the allegations.

In June 2015, during the **29th session** the council adopted resolution 29/13 on establishing a mission by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to monitor, report and make recommendations on the alleged human rights violations in South Sudan. This was the strongest resolution adopted by the Council since the outbreak of the civil war in 2013.

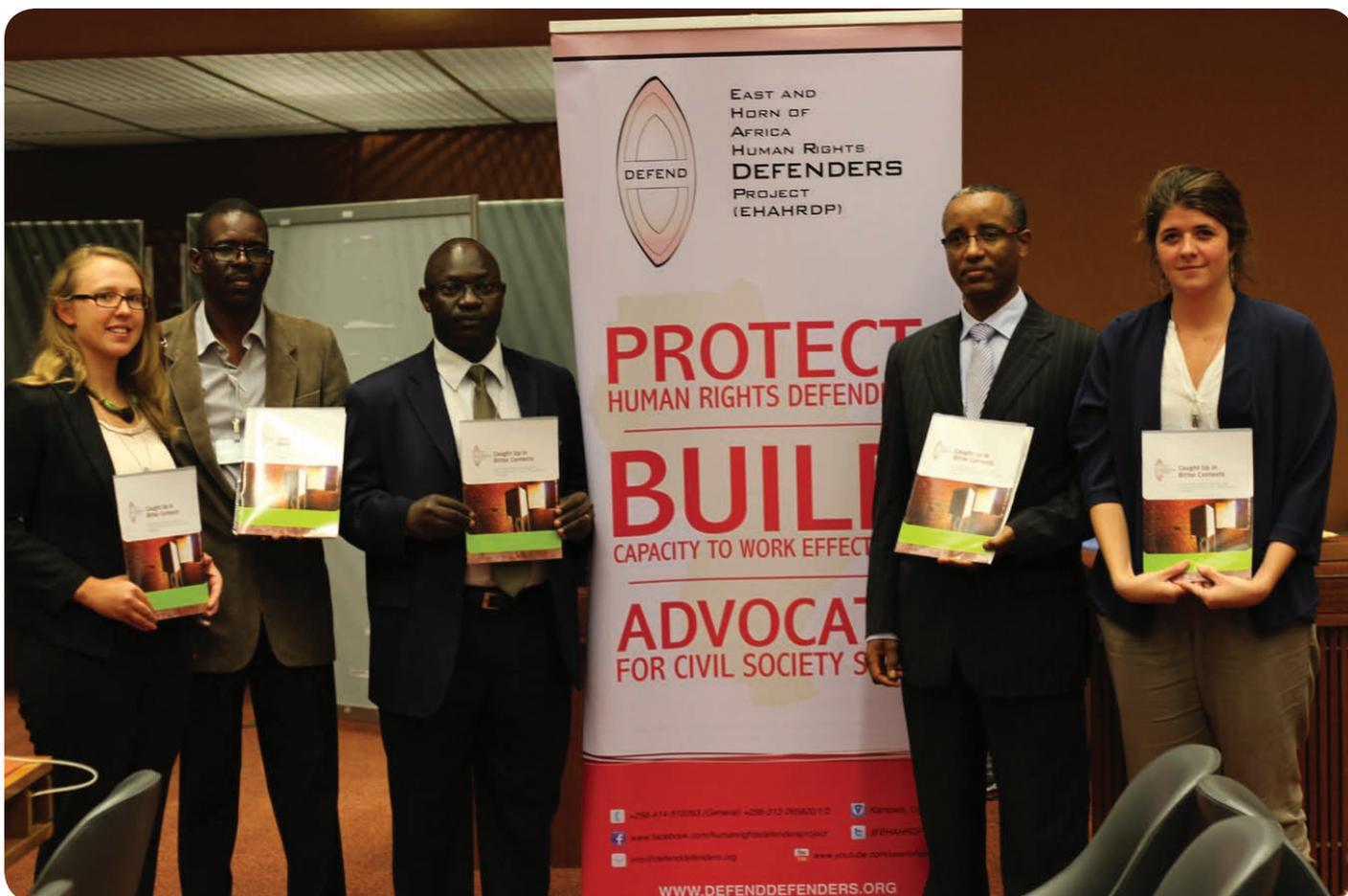
DefendDefenders closely monitors the situation in Eritrea and also took this opportunity to strongly advocate for the extension of the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) to investigate alleged crimes against humanity in Eritrea and report to the Council on its findings in June 2016. At this session, the COI released its report finding gross, systematic and widespread violations being committed against the Eritrean people in complete impunity.

Together with our partners, we organised parallel events, the most prominent being the event on the misuse of anti-terrorism legislation to criminalise the legitimate work of HRDs. The panellists included HRDs from Kenya and Ethiopia that have been prosecuted or targeted under these laws.

Our advocacy team attended the **30th session** in September 2015 with a large delegation of HRDs from Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Somalia. During this session, we continued our efforts on South Sudan alongside our partners during a panel discussion with two prominent South Sudanese HRDs.

DefendDefenders also successfully launched its new report, *"Caught Up in Bitter Contests: Human Rights Defenders Working in the Context of Elections in Sudan, Ethiopia, Burundi and Uganda"* on 30 September. The event included a panel discussion with HRDs from Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda who focused on the restriction of civil society space prior to, during, and after elections.

After joining multiple calls for the UNHRC to take action on the worsening human rights crisis in Burundi, DefendDefenders was pleased to see the Council pass a resolution on Burundi that strongly condemns the widespread human rights violations taking place in country, and called upon Burundian



DefendDefenders launches "Caught Up in Bitter Contests" on the margins of the UN Human Rights Council.

authorities to ensure accountability and prevent further violations.

However, with the situation continuing to deteriorate, the Council convened a special session on Burundi in December 2015. DefendDefenders provided the first NGO speaking slot to Burundian civil society leader Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, who read a statement focusing on attacks against HRDs and asking for the establishment of an independent expert mission to investigate human rights violations.

African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

In April 2015, during the **56th Ordinary Session** of the ACHPR, our focus remained on the devastating civil war in South Sudan. We used this session to call for the African Commission to take decisive action and demand the release of the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan's report. The report was subsequently released in October 2015.

On the margins of this session DefendDefenders, together with its partners, organised two parallel events. The first focused on Somalia and Sudan and discussed the worsening human rights situation, and

compared the rise of militant ideologies, terrorism, and fundamentalist laws in both countries.

Uganda's periodic report on its human rights obligations was reviewed at this session. DefendDefenders took the opportunity to support three HRDs from Uganda to engage in advocacy around the report. During a second side-event, state delegates including members of Uganda's Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights Affairs, and other African and international human rights organisations came together to discuss situation in Uganda.

Finally, in light of the visible trend of shrinking space for civil society and the persistent targeting of HRDs and their work, the ACHPR created the Study Group on Freedom of Association and Assembly during its 46th Ordinary Session.

As part of the Study Group DefendDefenders contributed to the report, which was concluded and launched during the 56th Ordinary Session.

During the **57th session** of the ACHPR in November 2015, we held very successful side events on Somalia, Sudan and Uganda that attracted not only CSOs but Commissioners of the ACHPR and members of state delegations. Of particular relevance was the dialogue between Ugandan government delegates and the HRDs, which took place for the first time in the history of the ACHPR. The side-events enabled an important and constructive dialogue between all stakeholders involved.

Trainings and workshops

The Advocacy team also organised three trainings on Strategic Advocacy, Litigation, and Social Media. The objectives of the trainings were to provide a practical introduction to some of the key advocacy forums available to HRDs with a focus on the ACHPR and the UN HCR, to introduce advocacy concepts, identify the core skills required for advocacy, and learn how to develop an advocacy strategy. The social media training aimed to equip participants with knowledge on how to utilise popular social media platforms to spread advocacy messages

Country missions

Djibouti

From 15 to 17 December 2015, a DefendDefenders representative attended a conference organised by the African Union on the role of women in combatting violent extremism. Alongside representatives from the African Union Mission in Somalia and the governments of Somalia and Puntland, DefendDefenders presented the challenges counter-terrorism could pose to fundamental rights, and warned against the use of counter-terrorism as a smokescreen for restrictions on rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression.

Somalia

On 27 January 2015, Hon. Commissioner Reine Alapini-Gansou, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa for the ACHPR joined Hassan Shire in chairing an interactive dialogue with HRDs from across Somalia. More than 80 Somali HRDs working on the promotion and protection of human rights in South Central Somalia, Puntland, and Somaliland attended this meeting to discuss human rights protection, share personal experiences and testimonies on the situation of

HRDs, and engage in a conversation with the Special Rapporteur and Ministers from the Somali Federal Government.

Research

Throughout the year the Advocacy and Research team conducted research into country-specific and thematic trends and patterns affecting human rights defenders.

In February 2015, our [report](#) “2015: Burundi at a Turning Point” was launched, documenting an alarming pattern of harassment, intimidation, threats, and legislative reforms, all targeting Burundian human rights defenders. Through our partnership with the Open Society Institute for Rights and Governance (OSIRG) program, DefendDefenders was able to carry out extensive research missions to Burundi to assess the situation of HRDs throughout 2015.

In April, we visited Bujumbura to research the impact of Burundi’s elections on HRDs. We conducted interviews with 26 HRDs from 17 organisations as well as representatives from the United Nations and diplomatic missions.

From 18 May to 4 June 2015, we conducted research in Nairobi, Kenya on the situation of HRDs and journalists from Ethiopia. During this mission we interviewed 19 Ethiopian journalists, the majority of which arrived within the past year, as well as four Sudanese HRDs. Additionally, DefendDefenders worked with Amnesty International, Article 19, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and the Xavier Project to verify information.

In June 2015 DefendDefenders also conducted its first ever mission to Sudan for the [report](#) “Caught Up in Bitter Contests: Human Rights Defenders Working in the Context of Elections in Sudan, Ethiopia, Burundi and Uganda.” The report was launched at the UN Human Rights Council in September 2015.

The information gathered for the report was critical in highlighting the impact of elections on human rights defenders across the sub-region and building recommendations to better support and promote HRDs during such volatile periods. In addition to the report, the information gathered during the research missions was used in the organisation’s advocacy efforts.

Finally, DefendDefenders staff undertook three extensive research trips between June and September 2015. The missions were carried out in Mogadishu, Garowe (Puntland) and Hargeisa (Somaliland). DefendDefenders met with human rights defenders focusing on a range of different human rights issues, including lawyers and journalists. DefendDefenders also met with INGOs and diplomatic missions. In total over sixty interviews were conducted.

In its research, DefendDefenders found that Somali human rights defenders, including media workers, have faced an onslaught on their rights to life, security of person, and freedom from arbitrary detention. The federal government and regional administrations have subjected HRDs to harassment and arrests and attempts by media houses to publish reports that are critical of the government have been met with crackdowns. Furthermore, non-state actors such as Al Shabaab have threatened HRDs and carried out a number of killings targeting them for denouncing the widespread and brutal human rights abuses taking place across the country. A number of human rights defenders have also been subjected to hostility from members of the community for allegedly ‘pushing a western agenda’ and ‘questioning cultural and religious values.’

Based on this research, DefendDefenders published *“Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Human Rights Defenders Under Attack in Somalia and Somaliland.”*

The [report](#) was launched in February 2016, was widely read among the donor and diplomatic communities, and has served as the basis for the organisation’s advocacy on Somalia since.

Overall impact

DefendDefenders continues to expose more HRDs to the regional and international mechanisms that are available to them. As a result of this engagement, the HRDs we supported throughout 2015 are now able to draw more attention to the issues affecting their work, and to advocate with greater skill and expertise. Our research allows us to stay on top of developing trends within the sub-region, and further our understanding of the legal, physical and administrative threats human rights defenders face when conducting their vital work.

Our work contributed to the adoption of a number of key resolutions by international mechanisms as well as the extension of the landmark Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea. Overall, there has been increased visibility of DefendDefenders at the regional and international level. Because of this more HRDs are able to reach out to us seeking protection and support to enable them continue their vital work.



Dr. Livingstone Sewanyana, Chairperson of DefendDefenders’ Board of Directors (4th from the left), with members of the Advocacy team and HRDs at the UN Human Rights Council.

VII. Capacity building

DefendDefenders builds the capacity of HRDs in the sub-region to better protect themselves in cases of immediate threats to their life and work. Our Capacity Building & Programmes department organises trainings, workshops, and action-based learning and mentoring schemes for HRDs. The department is also at the heart of a network of Coalitions where HRDs can come together, claim their rights, and support one another at the national level.

In 2015, the department organised several trainings and workshops that helped HRDs to develop security plans for their organisations, and equipped them to better access national, regional, and international mechanisms to enhance their protection. Over 600 HRDs benefitted directly from the workshops that were organised together with DefendDefenders' other departments, or in cooperation with partners such as Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalitions (THRDC), National Coalition for Human Rights Defenders – Kenya (NCHRD-K) and the National Coalition for Human Rights Defenders – Uganda (NCHRD-U).

KIOS partners' regional conference

The Finnish KIOS Foundation, together with DefendDefenders, organised a conference that brought together KIOS partners, including journalists, minority rights activists, and women HRDs, from across the East and Horn of Africa.

In total, the conference was attended by 31 organisations from six African countries in which KIOS supports human rights projects. The opening day of the three-day event was attended by eminent persons from the human rights sector in the host country Uganda, which included Hon. Jovia Kamateka (Chairperson, Human Rights Committee of Parliament), Hon. Medi Kagwa (Chairperson, Uganda Human Rights Commission), Dr. Livingstone Sewanyana (Executive Director, Foundation for Human Rights Initiative) and Mr. Richard Mugeru (Honorary Counsel of Finland).

The conference covered a wide range of issues such as the situation of HRDs in the region, protection and security mechanisms for HRDs, digital security measures, and the use of social media and other innovative tools for leveraging the benefits of information technology in boosting the work of HRDs.

Regional consultations on the situation of HRDs and the model law on the recognition and protection of HRDs

In partnership with the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), DefendDefenders brought together 26 HRDs from Botswana, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Swaziland, and Uganda, for a regional consultation on a modal national law regarding the



Participants during the KIOS regional conference.

recognition and protection of HRDs.

Topics covered in the model law consultation included feedback from participants regarding threats and restrictions they have experienced as HRDs, a sharing of good practice examples, and a working group on necessary reforms in the protection of HRDs.

Prior to this consultation on 20 May, the participants also met with Michel Forst, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of HRDs, as part of his regional consultations on challenges faced by HRDs.

Claiming spaces

On 16 December 2015, DefendDefenders marked the successful end of the four-day annual Claiming Spaces: Tactical Tools for Human Rights Defenders workshop, which was held in Mogadishu this year. The event brought together over 50 HRDs from different regions, government officials, and representatives from civil society and media. The purpose of this workshop was to celebrate the international human rights day with activities aiming at building capacity of HRDs, creating networks and sharing experiences and information on good practices. This was the fifth edition held since its inception in Uganda in 2011.

At the margins of the workshop, DefendDefenders delegation also visited the family of late journalist Hindiya Mohamed to show their solidarity and extend their condolences. Ms. Mohamed died from injuries she sustained on 3 December 2015 after a car bomb planted in her car exploded.

Strategic Advocacy and Litigation Workshop

From 24 to 28 August, DefendDefenders and the Redress Trust (REDRESS) organised a regional training on strategic advocacy and litigation in Kampala, Uganda. The workshop, aimed to equip HRDs with basic tools and skills in strategic planning for advocacy and litigation campaigns, covered a number of topics including security planning, methods to develop effective advocacy and communication strategies, and procedures for litigation at regional and international mechanisms.

National Coalitions

National Coalitions for HRDs continue to play a vital role in implementing activities and DefendDefenders continues to engage in setting up and extending support in managing these coalitions.

In August 2015, DefendDefenders established the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders–Somalia (NCHRD-S) during a three-day conference that brought together participants from Somalia, Somaliland, Puntland, and Garowe. Also in attendance were the coordinators of the THRDC and NCHRD-K to share their experiences of the process of setting up their respective coalitions, the guiding principles, the challenges they experienced along the way, and their achievements up to date. THRDC also hosted two coordinators from the NCHRD-S. The mentorship visit was planned by DefendDefenders to facilitate experience sharing and to acquire insights in how the THRDC has build a strong coalition on the ground.

Staff retreat and board meeting

DefendDefenders convened a staff retreat designed to enable staff members to reflect on the achievements, challenges, and lessons learned during the year, and to plan for 2016. Over the course of two days, extensive discussions were held on how to ensure that issues and challenges affecting HRDs are best addressed across all of DefendDefenders' departments and activities.

In 2015, board members had the opportunity to deliberate twice in April and October. DefendDefenders took advantage of the ten year anniversary celebrations when all the board members were in Kampala to convene a board meeting. The most significant contributions of the board were review and approval of the personnel policy, financial management policy, anti-corruption policy, and the internal audit charter.

VIII. ICT department

The ICT Program aims to provide technical support and services both internally to DefendDefenders and externally to HRDs in the sub-region. It does so by providing expert technological services and training to HRDs to improve their safety, effectiveness, and impact; promoting innovation in human rights practice; and providing tight internal ICT administration to DefendDefenders.

In 2015 we conducted 41 digital security and technological education engagements with over 600 human rights defenders in eight countries: Uganda, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia, Somaliland (plus defenders from Ethiopia and Burundi flown out of their countries). By the end of the year we were also hosting and supporting 12 human rights websites on our webserver.

Digital security training and direct assistance

The ICT department conducts capacity building trainings with HRDs with the goal of up-skilling civil society to improve the effectiveness of their work in the digital age and to mitigate against digitally-based risks to their work and safety.

The team conducts trainings ranging from a ½ day up to 5 days depending on the needs and the topics to be covered. Other engagements include organisational audits and follow-up visits to participants of previous trainings. Training topics include digital security, social media, and electronic documentation systems. Several of these trainings this year have been advance-level Training-of-Trainers (ToT) which has contributed significantly to building a network of digital security practitioners in our region.

In addition to conducting training workshops, the ICT department also provides direct assistance to HRDs, which includes installation of security software, resolving technical problems such as virus infestations, 1-on-1 reviews or trainings on security tools, office visits to provide support, and Skype interviews to provide feedback on practices or projects.

The high degree of outreach, our geographic and thematic spread, and number of HRDs in our

network are clear indicators of success. The inclusion in our team of a Francophone intern bolstered our ability to provide French-language education and support to HRDs. New budgeting for follow-up visits also improved the impact of trainings by having additional points of contacts and educating moments with HRDs and their organisations.

We frequently receive feedback from HRDs who later reflect on the usefulness of the training received. We also frequently receive requests for additional training in ICT topics. It is evident that there is a need we are filling through our training activities.

Throughout the year we did experience several challenges pertaining to our training and follow-up process and the developments of materials. We often face groups with highly mixed technical skill levels. It becomes difficult to lead trainings effectively when some participants have easily completed the project while others are struggling with basics. In some later year trainings we tried to mitigate this by framing the participant selection process as a competitive application using a Google Docs Form, rather than as a registration form.



DefendDefenders staff during a digital security training.

Evaluation of impact remains difficult. Post-training surveys give us some numerical and narrative feedback reflecting on the training and they are often highly positive, but anecdotally when we revisit HRDs we find they have not begun using the tools trained on or have forgotten how to use them. While forgetfulness is to be expected, we would at least hope they would have the confidence to attempt to re-install a tool or look for help online. However, we found that follow-ups are hugely useful in reconnecting with participants and providing further guidance in implementing the tools taught in our trainings.

Webhosting for organisations

In 2015 we stepped-up web-hosting support to HRDs and their organisations. We noticed that many organisations have difficulty maintaining a web presence for several reasons including the following:

1. They work with local service providers who don't appreciate the mandate of information sharing, archival and communication for their work;
2. Most web services require credit card payment and domain registrations and webhosting contracts often expire;
3. Websites are hosted in their own country, becoming vulnerable to local political pressures and surveillance; and
4. Service providers overcharge when suitable and easy-to-use free or cheap alternatives exist.

In order to facilitate online activities for these organisations, the IT team provides assistance with the design and hosting of their platforms. We currently host 12 websites on our VPS: africandefenders.org, defenddefenders.org, sos-exclusion.org, ci-ddh.org, ahrethio.org, focode.org, ehrco.org, fonadh.org, rimgerddes.org, lichrd.org, rescuealternatives.org, westafricandefenders.org.

Internal infrastructure and information systems

Internal ICT management comprises the regular work of providing ICT support to the organisation. Since 2014 we have taken significant measures to centralise administration and run the office like an enterprise rather than a home network (as had previously been the case).

DefendDefenders is also in the process of implementing a new internal information system.

CiviCRM, the free and open source web application is being adapted to use for contact management, activity tracking, recording events and participant information, and monitoring and evaluation.

Other engagement

The expertise of our IT team is increasingly sought after and in 2015 we were invited to participate in a number of forums and events. The ICT manager participated in two co-development workshops run by iLab to develop an app to be used by Ugandan journalists to support self-driven learning through an educational digital security app provisionally called the Open Mentoring Platform.

He also participated in a write-sprint to create new and updated documentation for Security in a Box, where he wrote a guide for Windows 10 operating system basic security. His 2014 contribution in a write-sprint for Level-Up, a free curriculum resource for digital security trainers is now [available](#) online at Secure Software Updating.

DefendDefenders was invited to participate in a Twitter discussion on #digitalsafety in Uganda (see the Storify summary of the discussion [here](#)) and members of a team participated on a judges panel for a tool localisation competition. The competition involved three teams of students and young tech developers working on localisation proposals for tools funded by the Open Technology Fund (Redphone, Textsecure, Cryptocat, Martus, and Mailvelope). The teams submitted reviews of these tools and localisation proposals for making them work in Uganda, which were reviewed by the judges. At a pitching event on 2 June 2015, the judges panel heard presentations from each team and asked questions about localisation plans and analysis of each tool. Judges then convened and conferred awards to the three teams.

We are working in a dynamic field with many actors and our collaborations strengthen the field and raise our profile while bringing in new opportunities for collaboration.

IX. Special programs

Based on the needs in the sub-region and organisational capacity, DefendDefenders dedicates staff members to specific countries or issues.

Somalia Human Rights Defenders Protection Program

Launched in 2012 as a three year project, the Somalia Human Rights Defenders Protection program supported HRDs in Somalia with a strong focus on protection work, security management, monitoring, reporting and documentation, improving engagement from the federal government and international partners on the issues of human rights.

In the third and final year of the project, DefendDefenders organised the first African Mechanism visit to Somalia as well as a one-day conference in January 2015. The meeting brought together HRDs to discuss human rights protection, and share testimonies on the situation of HRDs in Somalia (including Somaliland and Puntland).

Hon. Commissioner Reine Alapini-Gansou, the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in the ACHPR joined DefendDefenders' Executive Director Hassan Shire in chairing an interactive dialogue with HRDs from across Somalia. This high level mission to Mogadishu marked the first visit to Somalia of a Special Mechanism of the ACHPR in the country's history.

Prior to the conference, DefendDefenders met with several key stakeholders in Somalia. On 27 February, the delegation was received by President Hassan Sheikh Mahamoud. The President was briefed by Commissioner Gansou on her observations from her visit to Somalia, and discussed the Somali government's efforts to improving the human rights situation.

In March, August, and October 2015 DefendDefenders carried out further national advocacy meetings. The Special Programs officers met with the Ministry of Human Rights in March to share specific concerns relating to HRDs. During the same trip, she also met with the UN's Somalia office and other NGOs to explain the work of

DefendDefenders, the support offered to HRDs and encourage stakeholders to take stronger action in support of HRDs.

In August 2015, DefendDefenders' Executive Director Hassan Shire was invited to participate in a Constitution Tech Exchange organised by the United States Institute of Peace and the PeaceTech Lab, with the aim of re-examining ways to utilise social media, mobile technology, and other technologies to promote constitutional dialogue in Somalia.

In the same month, Mr Shire travelled to Hargeisa for a four day workshop bringing together nearly thirty HRDs to set up a National Coalition for Human Rights Defenders, following a capacity building needs assessment that was initiated in 2014.

The Special Programs Officer travelled to Puntland in August to identify key partners and document cases in the region, during DefendDefenders' first visit to the semi-autonomous state. In October, DefendDefenders attended a meeting in Kampala where Somali government officials, the United Nations, and members of civil society were present to discuss a draft antiterrorism bill before parliament.

Throughout the year, the Special Programs Officer also conducted research on the situation of HRDs and journalists in Somalia and Somaliland. The findings were published in February 2016, when DefendDefenders launched the [report](#) "*Between a Rock and a Hard Place.*"

Building the capacity of human rights defenders in South Sudan

Under Special Programs, DefendDefenders worked to increase the capacity of South Sudanese HRDs to provide protection at the national level. In September, DefendDefenders organised a steering committee meeting to explore the possibility of re-launching a National Coalition. Human rights organisations and HRDs are currently connected through the South Sudanese Human Rights Defenders Network (SSHRDN).

In November, DefendDefenders organised two workshops to further train HRDs who part of this national network in Juba. Between 11 and 13 November, DefendDefenders conducted a security management training equipping participants with knowledge and skills on protecting their computers and phones from viruses and other malware. The training also covered other areas of digital security including hacking, password management, backup strategies and safe use of mobile phones.

A week later, from 17 to 19 November, DefendDefenders trained the SSHRDN steering committee. The purpose of this workshop was to equip members of the network with skills on risk assessment, support frameworks, development of security action plans, and sharing of good practices and experiences.



From left to right: Hassan Shire (Executive Director of DefendDefenders), Michel Forst (UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders), Kamau Ngugi (Executive Director of the National Coalition for Human Rights Defenders – Kenya) and Onesmo Olengurumwa (National Coordinator of the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition).

X. Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network

The Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network (PAHRDN) is a collaborative network between five organisations located throughout the African continent working together to support and protect HRDs. PAHRDN is constituted by the following 5 sub-regional networks: Cairo Institute for Human Rights for Northern Africa in Egypt, East and Horn of Africa HRDs Network in Uganda, West Africa HRDs Network in Togo, Southern African HRDs Network (hosted by International Commission of Jurists) in South Africa, and Central African HRDs Network in Cameroon.

Protection

In 2015, PAHRDN provided emergency support to 32 HRDs across the continent. This included medical assistance, trial observation, relocation, safe houses, and various security needs.

UN Human Rights Council

PAHRDN participated in the 27th, 28th, and 29th Sessions of the UNHRC in Geneva where important resolutions on the protection of civil society space, and sexual orientation and gender identity were passed. Together with DefendDefenders and other partners, PAHRDN also co-sponsored side events on:

1. The Misuse of Anti-Terrorism Laws in Africa;
2. Breaking the Cycle of Impunity in South Sudan;
3. Human Rights and Elections in Africa;
4. Human Rights in Ethiopia: Government Repression and Failed Commitments; and
5. Perspectives from Civil Society on the Human Rights Crisis in South Sudan.

African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights & NGO forum

At the 56th session of the ACHPR, PAHRDN supported 10 HRDs to attend the launch of the ACHPR's reports on freedom of association and assembly and the situation of women HRDs. PAHRDN also supported the Security Management Officer from North Africa to attend the session as an opportunity to understand the work of the Commission and building capacities on advocacy and networking. The #WeDefend campaign and our report on 'the State of Human Rights Defenders in

2015' were officially launched at the margins of the Commission.

During its 46th Ordinary Session, the ACHPR created the Study Group on Freedom of Association Assembly in light of the visible trend of shrinking space for civil society and the persistent targeting of HRDs and their work. As part of the Study Group, PAHRDN contributed to the report, which was presented during the 56th Ordinary Session. PAHRDN also contributed to the development of guidelines on freedom of association and peaceful assembly, after the ACHPR adopted a resolution that created a mandate for the Study Group to do so.

Trainings and follow-ups

Training of trainers and a number of capacity building activities were facilitated or carried out by PAHRDN independently or in collaboration with our sub-regional networks and other partners such as CIPESA, Protection International, the NCHRD-K, THRDC and the NCHRD-U. In addition, mentorship visits were conducted for the Southern African HRDs Network, Central African HRDs Network and North African HRDs Network.

Over 180 HRDs across the continent benefited from risk assessment, digital security and physical security management trainings that were delivered in West, Central, and North Africa by each of those regions' protection officers and security management officers.

PAHRDN also created a pool of trainers in security management and digital security from within the network officers that can support HRD's through capacity building and by strengthening their protection through the transfer of skill and knowledge on security management and capacity building process, while enhancing the protection responses for HRDs at risk.

Counterpart meeting

The 3rd annual counterpart meeting of the network was held from 22 to 24 October in Kampala, Uganda. It was attended by representatives from the five sub-regional networks and members of the

Steering Committee to reflect on the challenges, propose solutions, and share lessons learned and best practices looking ahead to 2016.

The Human Rights Defenders Shield Award

As part of DefendDefenders ten year anniversary, PAHRDN organised a ceremony to recognise the tremendous work of HRDs across the continent as agents of change. The awardees were selected by a jury made up of United Nations and African Union Special Mechanism and the Chair of PAHRDN after being nominated by their peers.

The 2015 winners were:

- **Central Africa:** Alice Nkom (Cameroon), Minority rights advocate
- **West Africa:** Burkina Faso Civil Society
- **North Africa:** the Morocco Association for Human Rights
- **East Africa:** Pierre Claver Mbonimpa (Burundi), President of the *Association Burundaise pour la Protection des Droits Humains et des Personnes Détenues* (APRODH)
- **Southern Africa:** Thulani Maseko and Bheki Makhubu (Swaziland), human rights lawyers



Top: Alice Nkom during her acceptance speech. **Bottom:** The daughter of Pierre-Claver Mbonimpa, who himself was undergoing medical treatment in Belgium after surviving an assassination attempt, accepting the Shield Award on his behalf.

DefendDefenders (the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project) seeks to strengthen the work of human rights defenders throughout the sub-region by reducing their vulnerability to the risk of persecution and by enhancing their capacity to effectively defend human rights.

DefendDefenders is the secretariat of EHAHRD-Net, a network of over 75 human rights organisations in the eleven countries of the sub-region: Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia (together with Somaliland), South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.



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