

2016

Annual report



DEFENDDEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

2016: Annual Report

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DefendDefenders (the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	4
About DefendDefenders	6
The East and Horn of Africa in 2016	8
Advocacy and Research	12
Protection and Security Management	20
Technology Program	24
Capacity Building Program	26
Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network	28
Partners and Financials	30



FOREWORD

Dear friends, colleagues, and fellow human rights defenders,

As our battle for the promotion and protection of human rights increasingly shifts towards the digital world, the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project decided it was time for our online and offline organisational image to get a makeover. In 2016, we adopted DefendDefenders as the organisation's new name and worked on a new brand and website to reflect the progress the organisation has made in the last 12 years.

Throughout 2016, DefendDefenders has taken stock of the changing political, economic, social and cultural dynamics in the sub-region and worked to develop strategies for human rights defenders (HRDs) to continue their work in this rapidly evolving environment. Today, HRDs face a combination of persisting and growing challenges, which include online censorship, administrative and legislative restrictions on civil society and the media, intimidation, threats, arbitrary arrest, and extrajudicial executions.

The dire situation in two countries in particular shaped the year for all of DefendDefenders' departments: the continuing conflict in South Sudan, and the grave and worsening crisis in Burundi. While we provided support to HRDs from a total of 19 countries, 37% of our protection grants went towards Burundian and 16% towards South Sudanese HRDs respectively.

Our continued advocacy on both of these crises yielded some concrete results through the establishment of the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan in March, and of a UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi in September. The **Advocacy Program** attended the 31st, 32nd and 33rd sessions of the UN Human Rights Council, as well as the 58th and 59th sessions of the African Commission on Human and

Peoples' Rights with delegations of HRDs to raise awareness of pressing human rights concerns across the sub-region.

Our **Capacity Building Program** continued to develop new ways of supporting the growing number of HRDs who now find themselves in exile, in need of assistance to navigate complex asylum seeking processes to continue their work on human rights, and to address the trauma of their experiences back home. This work has been informed by our report "Exiled and in Limbo" which provides analysis and recommendations on the situation of exiled HRDs in Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda.

A total number of 357 HRDs and 15 human rights organisations were supported under DefendDefenders' flagship **Protection Program** in 2016. These interventions included direct financial grants for relocations, family support, emergency evacuations, and capacity building. Other interventions included access to medical treatment, solidarity visits and physical accompaniment, legal support, referrals to other partners, security advice, counselling, internships, and fellowships.

As always, our **Technology Program** has been busy pioneering new ways to protect HRDs as they work in an increasingly digital environment. This development has both empowered HRDs with strong communication tools and made them vulnerable to new threats, such as online surveillance and Internet shutdowns. Throughout the year, the Technology Program trained and provided tools to 485 HRDs in digital safety, social media, and documentation.

The **Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network** (PAHRDN) supported over 200 HRDs and four organisations across the continent. It has continued to look for ways to create linkages between different sub-regions and strengthen



Pan-African solidarity, and this year was focused on developing the concept of African Hub Cities. Throughout 2016, PAHRDN consulted with state and non-state actors on the establishment of four African HRD Hub Cities in Kampala (Uganda), Johannesburg/Pretoria (South Africa), Tunis (Tunisia), and Abidjan (Ivory Coast).

DefendDefenders' newly adopted five-year strategic plan focuses on building on our achievements by sharing more widely our lessons learnt, while at the same time innovating and adapting to the challenging environment and shrinking space for human rights activism. We will continue to explore the opportunities presented by the wider global agenda and emerging technological developments to better and more effectively support HRDs.

As the organisation grows and evolves, DefendDefenders is active on many fronts but our goal hasn't changed: to ensure that all HRDs in the sub-region are able to continue their important human rights work in the safest way possible.

On behalf of the entire DefendDefenders team, I would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all our partners who have supported us throughout the year including our board members, and look forward to continuing and strengthening our collaboration in 2017.

Yours in solidarity,



Hassan Shire
Executive Director



ABOUT DEFENDDDEFENDERS

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

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;
- Lack of systematic protocol for international support to human rights defenders under attack; and
- DefendDefenders serves as the Secretariat of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (EHAHRD-Net) representing 78 individual and organisational members.

EHAHRD-Net 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 maximise 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.

DefendDefenders also serves as the Secretariat of the Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network.





THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA IN 2016

The East and Horn of Africa remains one of the most challenging places in the world for human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society to safely conduct their work. Throughout 2016, grave and worsening human rights and humanitarian crises in Burundi, Ethiopia, Sudan, and South Sudan had a dramatic impact on the space for HRDs who continued to be targeted through arbitrary arrests and detentions, physical attacks, torture, enforced disappearances, and killings. At the same time, rising tensions triggered by electoral contests in Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda led to renewed clampdowns on civil society and media expressing criticism or opinions on the electoral processes. Other countries such as Rwanda, Eritrea, and Djibouti remain so restrictive that few if any HRDs are able to work effectively and independently.

Regressive legislation was adopted in many countries across the sub-region, notably laws pertaining to Internet freedom and the right to form associations, curtailing citizens' rights to free expression, association, and peaceful assembly. Additionally, increasingly broad counter-terrorism laws in the East and Horn of Africa are being misused to target the legitimate work of HRDs. Legislation regulating NGOs and the media adopted in recent years has also been used to justify spurious judicial proceedings against independent human rights organisations, HRDs, journalists, and media outlets accused of "threatening national security." Across the sub-region, administrative harassment continues to be used to disrupt the work of HRDs and journalists.

In **Burundi**, President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to seek a third term in office in April 2015 triggered a persistent and deadly crisis that continues to affect the country. The failed *coup d'état* in May 2015 sparked a systematic crackdown by the government and its security forces against real and perceived perpetrators, which swiftly targeted Burundi's once thriving civil society. There are currently no independent HRDs working freely in the country. Following the publication of the UN Independent Investigation on Burundi's (UNIIB) report in September 2016, the Burundian government declared the three experts *persona non grata*, suspended its cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and adopted legislation to withdraw from the International Criminal Court (ICC). A Commission of Inquiry created by the UN Human Rights Council (UN HRC) in September 2016 noted during its first oral update in March 2017 that trends documented throughout 2015 and 2016 would likely persist in 2017. By the end of 2016, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that 342,621 refugees had fled the country into neighbouring states.



Despite increased foreign investment and a healthy 6% growth rate, **Djibouti** remains one of the most closed countries in the sub-region and on the continent, with severe restrictions on the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly, and expression. Authorities routinely harass and arbitrarily detain critics of the regime, including the political opposition, as well as the few independent journalists and HRDs left in the country. Tensions rose around the April 2016 presidential election, with journalists, HRDs, and union workers arbitrarily arrested and threatened on a number of occasions. The presidential elections were marred by allegations of fraud and on 8 April, President Ismail Omar Guelleh was re-elected for a fourth term with 87% of the vote.

Citizens of **Eritrea** continue to live under one of the most repressive governments in the world. The 1997 Constitution remains unimplemented, democratic elections have been repeatedly postponed, and independent civil society and media in the country have been effectively silenced. No independent national or foreign NGOs are able to function in Eritrea. In June 2016, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea presented its second and final report to the UN HRC, which found that “Crimes of enslavement, imprisonment, enforced disappearances, torture, persecution, rape, murder and other inhumane acts have been committed as part of a campaign to instil fear in, deter opposition from, and ultimately to control the Eritrean civilian population since Eritrean authorities took control of Eritrean territory in 1991.”

Security forces’ excessive use of force in response to mass protests that broke out across several regions of **Ethiopia** in November 2015 claimed the lives of over 800 protesters and led to the detention of more than 26,000 individuals accused of participating in the demonstrations. A six-month nationwide State of Emergency was declared in October 2016, under which sweeping powers were given to a Command Post appointed by the House of People’s Representatives, including the suspension of fundamental rights protected by the Ethiopian Constitution, the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, and other international human rights treaties. Despite repeated calls from the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR), U.S. Congress, the European Parliament, and OHCHR, Ethiopian authorities refuse to give access to an impartial, independent, and international investigation into alleged violations committed during the protests in Oromia and Amhara regions.



In the run up to **Kenya's** August 2017 general elections, tensions between the government and the opposition have risen, particularly when opposition groups organised a series of protests against the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, resulting in a ban of "unlawful" demonstrations. While the country's civil society remains among the most active and diverse in the sub-region, HRDs are limited from engaging on certain issues and topics which are perceived as sensitive or threatening to the government. The use of enforced disappearances and extra judicial killings by Kenyan security forces – including in one case against an HRD, his lawyer, and their driver – continues to be a serious and systemic problem.

Rwanda remains one of the most restrictive environments for HRDs in the sub-region, with little or no independent media and human rights organisations. The leadership of independent human rights organisations has often been replaced with those sympathetic to the government, while journalists critical of the regime routinely self-censor or have been forced to leave the country. The presidential election scheduled for August 2017, in which President Paul Kagame is using a new constitutional amendment to seek a third term in office, could expose HRDs and the media to heightened risks.

Somalia (including Somaliland) continued to show patterns of intermittent instability and HRDs were faced with increased repression under the guise of anti-terrorism measures as the country geared up for its February 2017 electoral process. Civil society actors reported receiving threats from both state and non-state actors, fearing arbitrary arrests, and the government repeatedly failed to investigate attacks against HRDs, including journalists. In July 2016, the Ministry of Internal Security of Somalia banned public meetings organised in hotels in Mogadishu, if no prior notice was given to the Ministry.

The government of **Sudan** continued to orchestrate high levels of repression against civil society throughout 2016, and the ongoing conflict in Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile has internally displaced more than 3.2 million people. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), between 160,000 and 195,000 civilians were displaced in Darfur and Jebel Marra throughout 2016, and in September 2016 Amnesty International published documented evidence of chemical attacks in the Darfur. Following a civil disobedience campaign launched in November 2016 to protest subsidy cuts to fuel and electricity alongside an increase of 20% on government salaries, civil society has been confronted with further shrinking of Sudan's already limited civic space. HRDs have been harassed, arbitrarily arrested, detained, and exposed to torture and other forms of ill-treatment at the hands of security services.

The Agreement on the Resolution of Conflicts in **South Sudan** (ARCSS) effectively collapsed with a return to violent hostilities in Juba in July 2016. Human rights violations have since sharply increased, characterised by coordinated attacks on civilians and destruction of private property by Government forces, predominantly along ethnic lines. Citizens of South Sudan are now exposed to rampant human rights violations, possibly





amounting to crimes against humanity, perpetrated with impunity by the State as well as through retaliatory acts by the opposition and other factions. Since July, many HRDs have fled to neighbouring countries in the sub-region, where some continue to report threats and intimidation by national security agents. In December, the UN-appointed Commission on human rights in South Sudan issued warnings that the country was on the brink of genocide.

Since John Magufuli was sworn in as president of **Tanzania** in November 2015, authorities have orchestrated a renewed clampdown on HRDs, journalists, and members of the LGBTI community across the country, fuelled by both political statements and police acting with impunity. The enactment of restrictive legislation like the Cyber Security Act, the Media Services Act, and the Statistics Act have stifled public criticism of the President's new program. In 2016, NGOs faced threats of deregistration, media houses came under renewed pressure from the government to toe party lines, and HRDs found civic space increasingly shrinking.

Uganda held its fifth presidential and parliamentary elections in February 2016, which were marred with irregularities, the shutdown of social media and mobile money services, and criticised by international observers for falling short of international standards at key stages. The post-electoral period tested Uganda's commitment to respecting fundamental freedoms with reports of increased infringement on the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. Attacks against journalists, which rose alarmingly during the election period, have continued in its aftermath, while civil society and media organisations have experienced break-ins which have yet to be thoroughly and transparently investigated. Legal restrictions remain an impediment for NGOs working on issues related to sexual orientation and gender (SOGI) issues.

ADVOCACY AND RESEARCH

Advocacy at the national, regional, and international level is essential in order to raise awareness of the rights and work of HRDs, and ensure that challenges they face are known to decision makers and other stakeholders within and beyond the sub-region. In order to make the voices of local HRDs heard worldwide, DefendDefenders facilitates the effective engagement with regional and international human rights mechanisms, particularly the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC). In 2016, DefendDefenders attended and supported HRDs to engage at the 31st, 32nd, and 33rd sessions of the UN HRC in Geneva and the 58th and 59th ACHPR sessions in Banjul, and undertook a wide range of other advocacy and research activities to support the work of HRDs in the East and Horn of Africa.

UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Throughout 2016, DefendDefenders worked closely with HRDs to raise awareness of some of the world's gravest human rights crises through its work at the UN HRC, focusing its efforts on calling for and/or supporting the establishment of investigations into serious crimes and human rights violations committed in Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and South Sudan. At the same time, DefendDefenders focused on raising awareness of shrinking civic space during electoral processes in the sub-region, the specific threats faced by the SOGI community, and continued to support advocacy efforts around existing mandates on Sudan and Somalia.

DefendDefenders continued to engage in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, and delivered statements during the adoption of the outcome of [Rwanda's](#) and [Tanzania's](#) UPR reports.

Burundi

As the respect for and protection of fundamental human rights in Burundi steadily declined throughout 2016, DefendDefenders supported Burundian HRDs to attend sessions of the UN HRC and the Committee Against Torture (CAT) to raise awareness of the situation through oral statements, high-level side events and meetings, and the submission of a joint civil society report to the CAT. On 4 March, DefendDefenders, together with leading activist Pierre Claver Mbonimpa and partners, met with High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein and his senior Africa staff to discuss the ongoing crisis in Burundi.

In September 2016, prolonged and renewed advocacy alongside the publication of a strong report by the United Nations Independent Investigation on Burundi (UNIIB) resulted in the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry to investigate human rights violations and abuses committed in Burundi since April 2015, and to identify alleged perpetrators with a view to ensuring full accountability. Only four such Commissions have been established in the history of the UN HRC, reflecting the gravity of the situation in the country.

"During the [UN HRC]'s Special Session in December 2015, I spoke of the Burundian Government's brutal campaign to suppress dissenting voices. Since then, reports of enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, brutal torture, sexual violence and extrajudicial executions have only increased. Since then, the Government of Burundi has assumed a seat as Member State in this very room, despite the worsening crisis and its flagrant refusal to abide by its obligations as a member of the Council."

– Statement by Pierre Claver Mbonimpa during the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders and the Special Advisor on the prevention of genocide.





On 1 March 2016, DefendDefenders Executive Director Hassan Shire and Advocacy and Research Officer Clementine de Montjoye, alongside other civil society representatives, met with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the sidelines of the High Level Segment of the 31st Session of the UN HRC, to discuss pressing issues including shrinking civic space, increased repression during elections, reprisals, and countries of concern.

South Sudan

Building upon our previous efforts to see the UN HRC react substantively to the devastating war in South Sudan, we continued our advocacy throughout 2016, [demanding](#) the establishment of a Special Mechanism to work with regional efforts towards justice and accountability. On 23 March 2016, a resolution was adopted without a vote establishing a Commission on the situation of human rights in South Sudan, which was an overdue but vital step towards conducting independent investigations into the grave human rights violations taking place in South Sudan, and therefore towards greater justice and accountability in Africa's youngest nation. In December 2016, a Special Session on South Sudan was held during which DefendDefenders delivered an oral statement calling for the Commission on South Sudan's mandate to be strengthened to include more investigative powers and greater resources.

Eritrea

During the 32nd session of the UN HRC, the Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea (COI on Eritrea) [presented](#) its second and final report, highlighting that "there are reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed in Eritrea since 1991." While this report marks a milestone in the struggle of Eritreans to see their plight recognised and justice delivered, DefendDefenders worked with Eritrean civil society groups to ensure that the Commission's report was translated into tangible actions, including full accountability. While the UN HRC failed to adopt a resolution paving a clear path towards accountability for crimes committed in Eritrea, DefendDefenders continued to work with partners to support the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, and to engage with other international and regional mechanisms that may bring about justice for Eritreans.



Ethiopia

Mass protests in Ethiopia continued throughout 2016, triggering often violent repression from authorities and security forces, resulting in over 800 deaths and tens of thousands of arrests. A State of Emergency was declared in October 2016, giving sweeping powers to a Command Post and further human rights violations. DefendDefenders [called](#) upon the UN HRC to raise the grave violations of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in Ethiopia, demanded that the government of Ethiopia release those arbitrarily detained during and after the protests, and allow access to an independent, impartial, and transparent investigation into the deaths resulting from excessive use of force and other violations of human rights in the context of the protests.



17

Oral statements delivered at international and regional human rights mechanisms.

As the security and human rights situation grew increasingly volatile throughout the year, several statements were made by States during the 33rd session of the UN HRC demanding transparent investigations into allegations of excessive use of force by Ethiopian police and security forces. DefendDefenders welcomed the concerns voiced by several delegations, [highlighted](#) the urgency of the situation, and emphasised the need for an independent, impartial, and international investigation into the alleged abuses in its own Item 4 statement.



Elections

Following the publication of its 2015 report "Caught Up in Bitter Contests," which extensively documented the strategies of harassment, intimidation, and attacks used to target human rights defenders in the context of elections in the East and Horn of Africa, DefendDefenders identified HRDs working in electoral contexts as a priority group. Building on previous side-events on the topic, DefendDefenders, together with partners, organised a side-event at the 31st session of the UN Human Rights Council examining election-related restrictions on civic



space and the challenges faced by human rights defenders engaging with electoral processes in Burundi, Uganda, Rwanda, and Djibouti. The goal was to raise shrinking civic space during electoral periods as a key indicator of political instability and a bellwether for further human rights violations.

SOGI rights

In an historic vote, the UN HRC established a mandate for an Independent Expert on SOGI rights to combat and prevent violence, hatred, and discrimination against sexual minorities. The importance of this decision can hardly be overstated, particularly for the East and Horn of Africa where HRDs working on SOGI rights still face frequent threats and harassment.

AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) offers a unique chance for HRDs to directly engage with regional human rights mechanisms and, through the NGO Forum preceding the Commission's public session, share their experiences with African civil society as a whole.

10 Side-events organised during sessions of international and regional human rights mechanisms.

During the ACHPR's 58th Ordinary Session, DefendDefenders focused on addressing the lack of political will by many African States to urgently address human rights violations, impunity, and non-compliance with international law. At the NGO Forum, a panel was convened by DefendDefenders and its partners to discuss the status of freedom of association and peaceful assembly in Africa.

The debate was co-hosted by the ACHPR Study Group on Freedom of Association and Peaceful Assembly, which was mandated to provide an analysis of the legal framework regulating these fundamental freedoms in Africa, and whose report was concluded and launched during the 56th Ordinary Session.



A new resolution gave a mandate to the Study Group to draft guidelines on freedom of association and peaceful assembly in Africa.

African citizens are facing increasingly violent, and sometimes seemingly intractable crises and conflicts, especially in countries like South Sudan and Burundi. The role of the African Union (AU) in addressing widespread human rights violations has never been more critical. DefendDefenders' delegation organised a parallel event to discuss ways the ACHPR and the AU can better respond to human rights crises in Africa.

Extensive contributions from Hon. Commissioners Dersso, Maya, Fadel, and Gansou, as well as two women HRDs from South Sudan and Burundi, tackled the question of AU involvement from all angles, from civil society participation at the AU to perpetrators' engagement with peace processes, concluding that the AU lacks conflict and crisis resolution initiatives and linkages between different AU organs, therefore rendering response mechanisms often ineffective and inefficient.

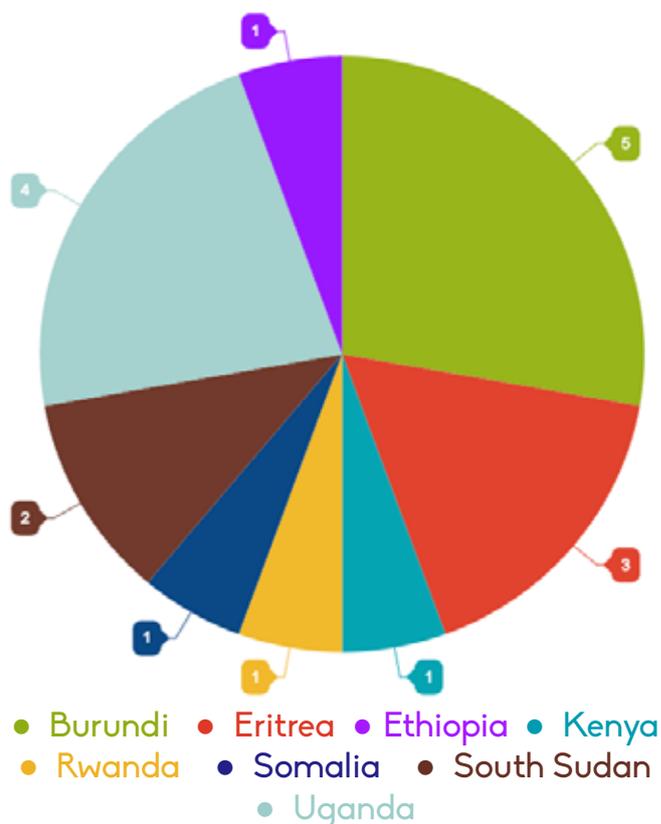
Ahead of the 59th Ordinary Session, DefendDefenders [submitted](#) its bi-annual report to the ACHPR, calling for action on the worsening crises in Burundi and Ethiopia, and welcomed the two strong resolutions adopted to that effect.

Meanwhile, the dire human rights situation in Eritrea remains unaddressed. Despite the damning findings of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea, the ACHPR has not passed any resolution on human rights in Eritrea since its 38th Ordinary Session in November 2005. During the session, DefendDefenders organised a side event on the situation in the country and led advocacy efforts in support of the COI on Eritrea's call for the AU and the ACHPR to work towards establishing regional accountability mechanisms and refer Eritrea to the African Union Executive Council for failure to comply with its decisions and recommendations.

Finally, DefendDefenders worked to [raise](#) awareness of the right to freedom of the Internet as governments across the continent increasingly turn to limiting Internet access in attempts to

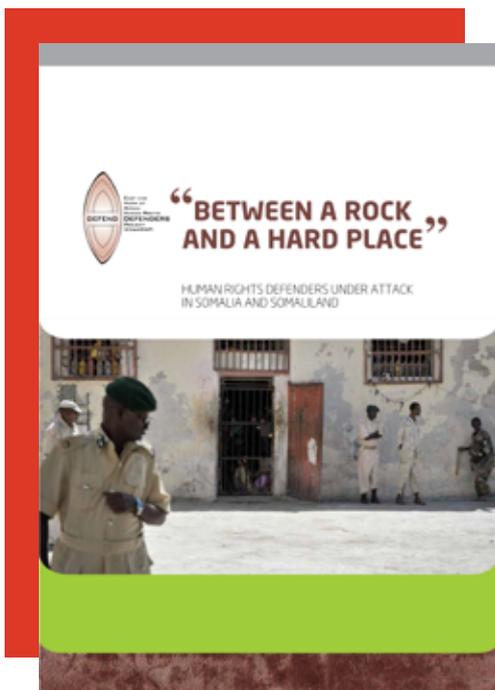
stifle the free flow of information within and across their borders. Along with PAHRDN, DefendDefenders organised a side event on Internet freedom in Africa to highlight challenges related to human rights activism online, and discuss the growing role played by blogging and social media to shine light on human rights violations. We welcomed the ACHPR's decision to adopt a resolution on freedom of information and expression on the Internet in Africa, which recognises the role of the Internet in advancing human rights, urges States to guarantee, respect, and protect Internet freedom, and encourages the revision of the Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Assembly to consider Internet rights.

HRDs supported to attend international and regional human rights mechanisms by nationality



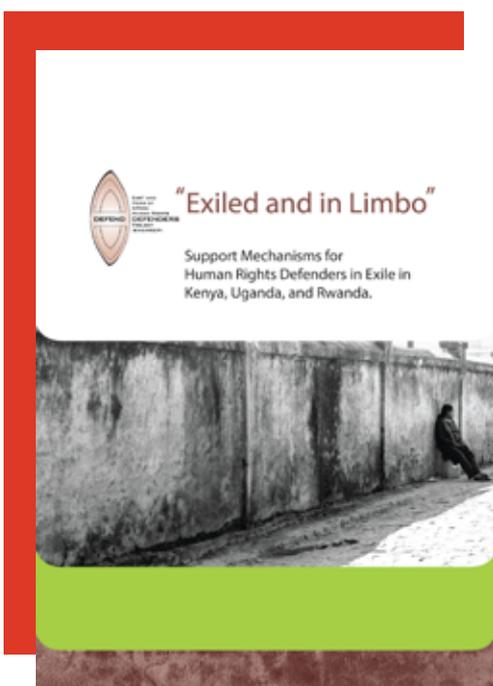
RESEARCH

DefendDefenders continues to conduct original research as well as joint research with key partners. In 2016, the Advocacy department [contributed](#) to three joint submissions to the 26th session of the UPR working group ahead of Uganda's November 2016 review, and one report ahead of South Sudan's second UPR cycle. DefendDefenders also [submitted](#) two bi-annual reports to the ACHPR detailing events affecting the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly in the East and Horn of Africa. Additionally, two reports – one thematic and one country-specific – documenting trends and patterns affecting HRDs in the sub-region were launched throughout the year.



Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Human Rights Defenders under Attack in Somalia and Somaliland

The report, [launched](#) in February, provides insight into the situation of Somali and Somaliland HRDs four years after Somalia's first formal parliament in 20 years set out a reform agenda to address human rights abuses. The report found that HRDs face an onslaught on their right to life, security, and freedom from arbitrary detention as violations against them are committed by both State and non-State actors. The launch of the report was accompanied by a [video](#) of HRDs discussing the challenges and attacks they faced while working in Somalia.



Exiled and in Limbo: Support Mechanisms for Human Rights Defenders in Exile in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda

Exiled and in Limbo [explores](#) the unique challenges faced by HRDs forced to flee their country of origin. The report focuses on the situation in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda, where DefendDefenders has identified at least 350 exiled HRDs from all over in East and Horn of Africa. It also offers an overview of the various resources and protection mechanisms available to HRDs in each country. The launch of the report was accompanied by a [video](#) of HRDs discussing the difficulties of continuing to work from exile.



COMMUNICATIONS

In 2016, DefendDefenders created the full-time position of Communications Officer within the Advocacy and Research Department, allowing the organisation to take a more proactive approach in its communications. The added capacity helped DefendDefenders institute a monthly newsletter, further professionalise its communication channels, and focus more on its social media profile.

Arrest of Alfred Taban

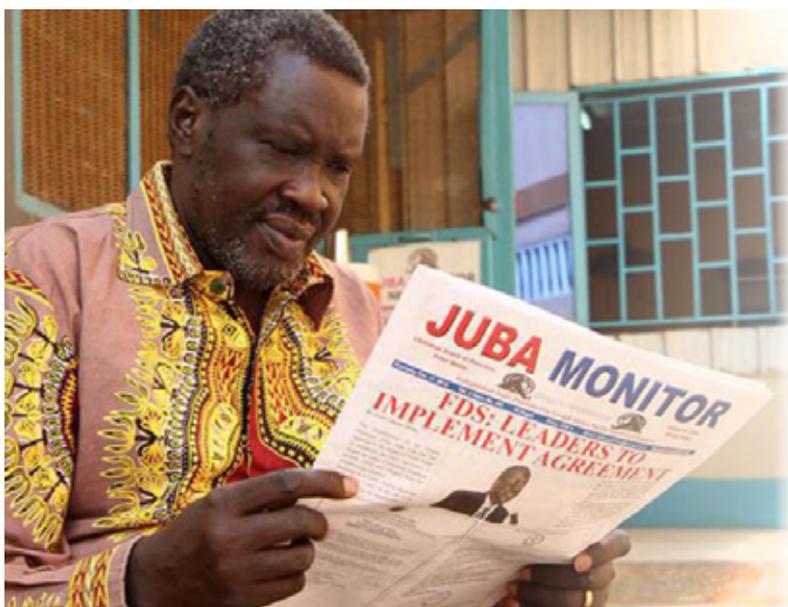
Alfred Taban, editor-in-chief of the Juba Monitor, was arrested on 16 July after publishing an article calling on Salva Kiir and Riek Marchar to step down following the violence in Juba earlier that month. DefendDefenders' immediate [call](#) for his release was covered by a large number of international and local media outlets, including the [New York Times](#), [Reuters](#), and [The Intercept](#). The Advocacy team then launched a social media campaign, coordinating with partners to exert pressure on all relevant actors, contributing to Taban's release on 1 August.

**Defenders Speaking Out:
“The regime in Eritrea
is a crime in itself.”**



UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea

On 8 June, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea presented its second and final report to the UN HRC. To support its call for strong action following the presentation of the Commission's findings, DefendDefenders launched a video featuring HRDs in exile who continue to oppose the regime. The HRDs narrate the violations committed against them, their experiences fleeing the country, and discuss the need for strong international action to bring perpetrators to account. The [video](#) was viewed over 4,000 times in the weeks following the publication of the COI on Eritrea's report.



“The South Sudanese people were expecting full security throughout the country after the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU).

Instead fighting was brought to their capital city.”

**#FreeAlfredTaban
#SouthSudan**

Human Rights Defenders Day 2016

During the celebrations of Human Rights Defenders Day 2016, DefendDefenders partnered with PAHRDN to produce a video highlighting the work of rural HRDs, a group that remains particularly vulnerable and often lacks access to effective protection mechanisms. Countering the increasingly negative narratives surrounding human rights work, the [video](#) focuses on the positive contributions HRDs can make by empowering individuals and communities within the existing legal frameworks.

“I saw so many marginalized people. So I decided my calling was to stand for justice.”



Namutebi Mangadalena Mbihya works as a human rights volunteer in Western Uganda. She reaches out to women in remote areas, teaching them how to stand up for their rights.



PAN-AFRICAN
Human Rights Defenders Network



PROTECTION AND SECURITY MANAGEMENT

In 2016, DefendDefenders continued to feel the impact of the crisis in Burundi, and 126 requests for emergency protection were received. Burundian HRDs in exile also reported the presence of *Imbonerakure*, the youth league associated with the ruling party, and government agents as potential threats to their security and safety in exile.

In July 2016, escalating tensions in Juba led to a clash between government and opposition forces, leading former First Vice President Riek Machar to flee the country and shattering the fragile peace agreement. Since then, fighting has worsened and the year ended with many of the HRDs DefendDefenders has been engaging with seeking asylum in the neighbouring countries. Those that continue to work in the country do so under extremely difficult circumstances.

The situation in Ethiopia remains particularly difficult for journalists, who have been forced to leave the country in large numbers since the 2005 election, and many of those who remained have faced prosecutions under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation. Throughout the year DefendDefenders continued to receive requests from exiled HRDs struggling to meet the cost of living abroad and ensure their own safety.

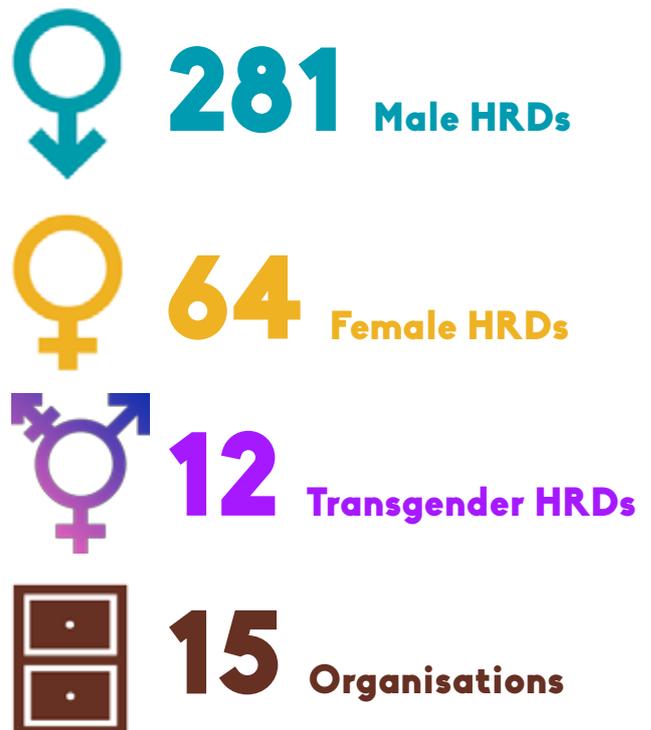
357 Human rights defenders directly supported under the Protection Program.

HRDs working on SOGI issues continue to be targeted in Uganda and Tanzania. Efforts to engage with authorities have led to some positive steps in Uganda, whereas the situation in Tanzania continues to deteriorate, with many HRDs forced into hiding or exile.

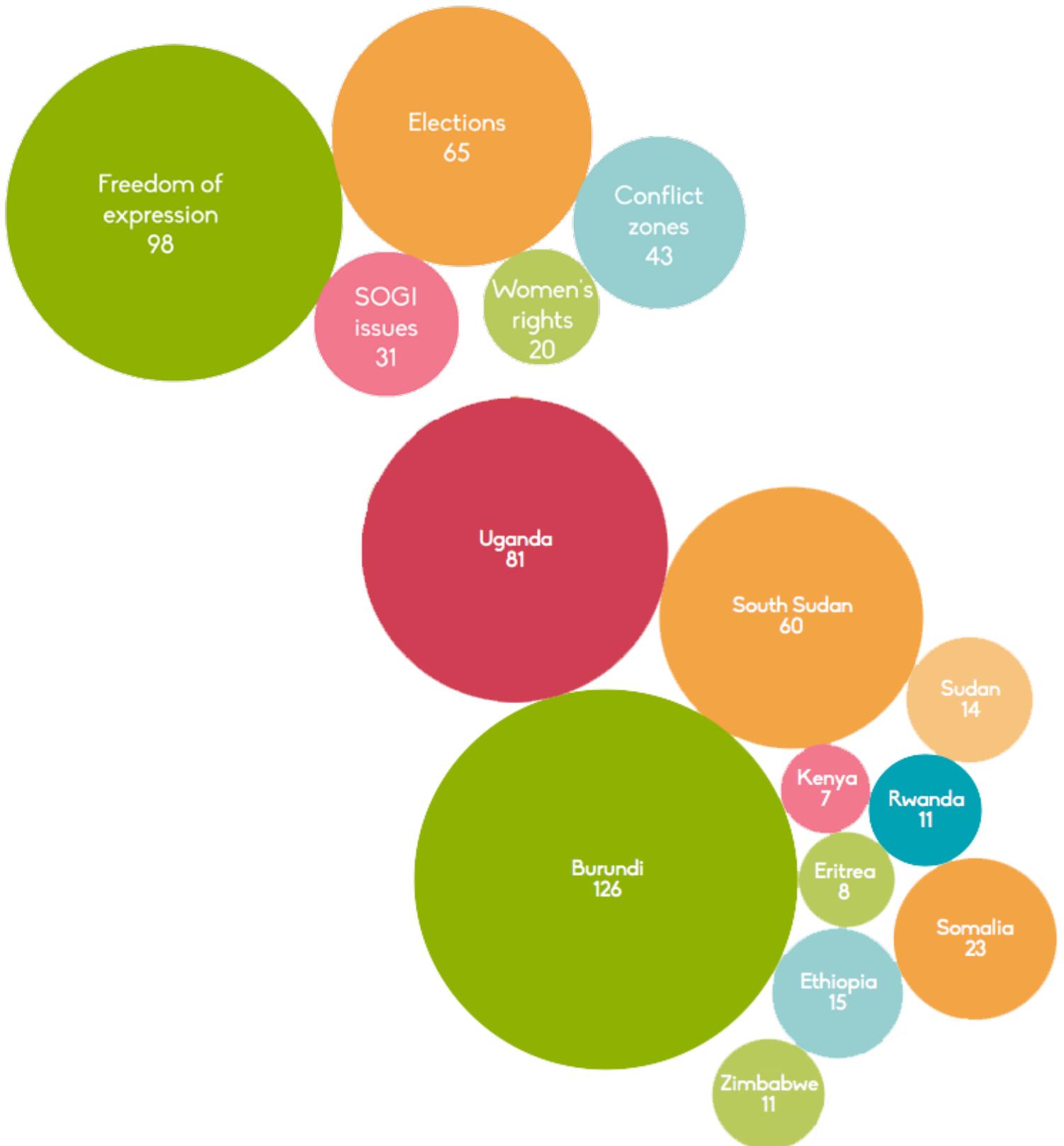
Emergency protection

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In 2016 DefendDefenders directly supported



Top protection requests by thematic area and country



Life for HRDs in exile tends to last longer than expected and remains very difficult, as the general challenges facing refugees are compounded by specific needs associated with their often sensitive human rights work. In our June 2016 report "Exiled and in Limbo", DefendDefenders highlighted the various challenges HRDs experience in exile, which include fears for their security, isolation, and hostile refugee policies. In Kenya, movement restrictions, delayed processing of refugee documents since the suspension of the Department of Refugee Affairs, and alleged police harassment all contribute to an increasingly hostile environment for HRDs. In Tanzania, the refugee policy doesn't allow for urban refugees, which means HRDs must go to camps where they find it difficult to continue their work and often feel unsafe. In Uganda, the refugee policy prohibits engaging in political activism which, according to the Ugandan authorities, could include human rights work or journalism. This presents significant administrative challenges to those who wish to register organisations or continue their human rights work in exile.

The issue of migration and security is one that DefendDefenders has become increasingly engaged with as large numbers of HRDs flee their countries in the sub-region. Several countries have amended their immigration policies to restrict registration or rights of refugees in the context of the growing refugee crisis, which has not spared the sub-region. This has resulted in access and long term stay becoming evermore challenging, in addition to harsh refugee policies. DefendDefenders has worked throughout the year to build stronger connections with government and non-governmental agencies managing refugees in Uganda to ensure that HRDs in exile are protected and supported.



By speaking out, HRDs will always find themselves in the crosshairs of those that are violating people's rights: the very nature of their work leads to risk. However, some in the East and Horn of Africa are particularly vulnerable. Although committed to protecting all those who stand up for human rights, DefendDefenders has a special focus on HRDs working on these thematic areas.



SECURITY MANAGEMENT

The Security Management Program continues its engagement with individuals and organisations to address security challenges for the most at-risk HRDs, building their capacity to prevent and react to potential threats and risk, and providing technical support for those working on thematic issues.

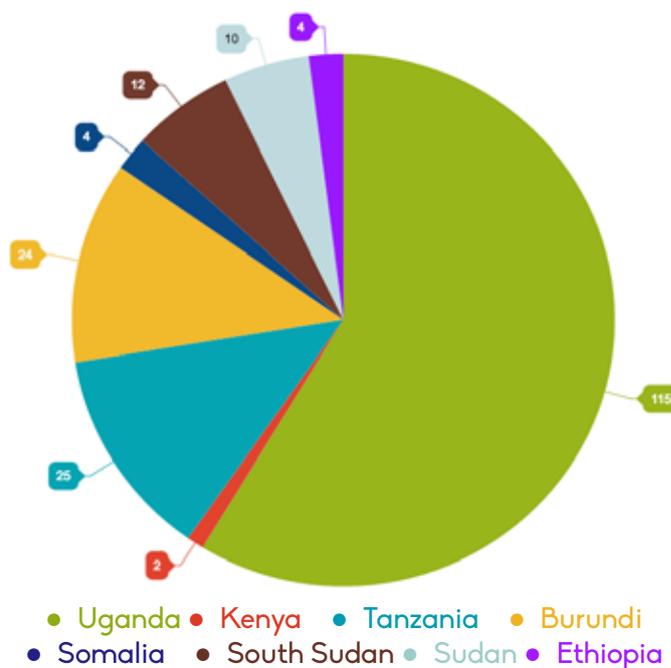
196 Human rights defenders trained in security management.

In 2016, DefendDefenders conducted security management trainings for HRDs throughout the sub-region, including for exiled HRDs in Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, and Tanzania. A total of 220 HRDs have been equipped with knowledge and skills needed to assess potential risks and draw up security plans. In addition, 10 HRDs received training to be trainers on both physical and digital security, which built their capacities to fully conduct trainings and workshops in their own countries.

35 Security plans developed.

Follow-ups to security trainings were conducted to ensure knowledge was transferred and that action plans developed during the training were properly implemented. The team conducted

Number of HRDs trained by nationality



five follow-up activities for 87 HRDs from 49 organisations. A total of 35 security plans were developed in 2016.

DefendDefenders has developed its training to take a more holistic approach to safety and security, better catering to the psychosocial and emotional needs of HRDs. Most of the trainings conducted in 2016 had a stress management session through artistic therapy. Engaging participants in expressive arts such as music, dance, drama, poetry, and drawing has proven relaxing and relieving, as well as very insightful to the HRDs in question.



TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

DefendDefenders' Technology Program continued and improved upon its existing offering of digital security education, support, and web communications, while creating new programs in documentation, data, and research. In 2016, 485 HRDs were trained in digital security, social media, and documentation. DefendDefenders developed its organisational security program with assessments of eight organisations, and assisted eight organisations with implementation of electronic documentation systems. All the while, we continued our internal mission to improve the strategic and safe usage of technology within the DefendDefenders secretariat.

DIGITAL SECURITY EDUCATION AND SUPPORT

Our Digital Security Education and Support program has become more sophisticated while focusing more on medium and long-term relationships with at risk organisations to provide substantial support and advice at key moments and improve concrete digital security observance. By conducting initial in-depth assessments, DefendDefenders has been able to better target interventions and also provide organisations with concrete recommendations upon which to act. DefendDefenders will be able to further improve this security assessment and support methodology as we were selected as partners to the Internews [SAFETAG](#) civil society security auditing framework program and will participate in a SAFETAG Stewards Assembly in early 2017. Throughout 2016, the Technology Program offered a wide range of support to various human rights organisations, including web-hosting, database, and website development.

SERVICES AND COLLABORATIONS

In 2016 we completed consultancy work for Deutsche-Welle Akademie, CIPESA, FrontLine Defenders, among others, joined program collaborations with InterNews and Small Media,

and contributed to work with Tor Project, Tactical Technology Collective, Localisation Lab, International Refugee Rights Initiative, and GreenHost. These collaborations significantly expand DefendDefenders' horizons, expertise, and lets us to contribute to larger projects led by other organisations. For instance, through work with Localisation Lab we contributed to the translation of two open-source security apps into Luganda and Shona, and provided security training to translators in order to improve their understanding of security principles and community usage.

485

Human rights defenders trained in digital security, social media, and documentation.

Other collaborations led us to work in areas of research and monitoring of the situation of digital security and Internet freedom in the region. We entered into a research project with Small Media and CIPESA to deploy researchers in four countries running both [OONI](#) and [ICLab](#) measurements, as well as conducting interviews with civil society to assess exposure to digital threats. This research culminated in the [publication](#) *Safeguarding Civil Society: Assessing Internet Freedom and the Digital Resilience of Civil Society in East Africa*.





Doc-IT: Electronic Documentation for Human Rights Advocacy

A milestone for the Technology program was the launch of the [Doc-IT: Electronic Documentation for Human Rights Advocacy](#) project, which involved interdepartmental collaboration with the Advocacy and Protection departments. Following a competitive selection process, we established a cohort of seven Ugandan human rights organisations to receive training and support to implement successful electronic documentation projects in their organisations designed to improve their data gathering and analysis in their advocacy work.



CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM

DefendDefenders' Capacity Building Program aims to ensure that HRDs develop the necessary skills to effectively defend human rights while remaining safe. A key component of the Capacity Building Program is to assist HRDs in developing effective security management techniques to ensure their own safety. In addition, to enable successful collaboration with its partners, the Program identifies the training needs of HRDs by conducting a capacity building needs assessment and invites like-minded partners through the National Coalitions to complement our work.

The Capacity Building Program has not only helped HRDs develop necessary skills for their human rights work, but has also enabled them to develop highly effective security management techniques to ensure their own safety, and understand national, regional, and international mechanisms for their protection and how to access them. In addition, the Program has developed a "Training of Trainers" program to enhance staff's ability to meet the training needs of HRDs.

In 2016, DefendDefenders trained 540 HRDs drawn from different networks of partner organisations at the national and community level, to ensure that HRDs are aware of the risks they face in the course of their work, and helped them develop appropriate strategies to mitigate them. In addition, National Coalitions for HRDs have been trained on how to engage with at-risk HRDs when referred to them. These trainings aimed to create a better relationship between HRDs facing risk and service providers by equipping the latter with an in-depth, informed understanding of HRDs' working environment, their needs in situations of risk, and best practices in how to address them.

Throughout 2016, DefendDefenders continued to provide support and opportunities to the different National Coalitions. DefendDefenders focused on the newly formed National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders Uganda (NCHRD-U) and the Somali National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders (NCHRD-S) by training them in setting up local protection mechanisms to handle emergency responses, putting in place advocacy strategies to raise the profile of HRDs under threat, and building their skills conscious of their different work settings. At the same time, DefendDefenders also remained engaged with other National Coalitions in the sub-region in the planning of trainings, advocacy missions, and protection.

841

human rights defenders trained directly by DefendDefenders in 2016.





On 9 December, HRDs from across Uganda came together to celebrate the International Human Rights Defenders Day, in recognition of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted 18 years ago. Civil society took stock of the many achievements and challenges it has faced this past year, and since the declaration was adopted. At the same time, participants took the opportunity to reflect on the growing need for effective protection mechanisms to support HRDs at risk.



PAN-AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK

The Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network (PAHRDN) was established as a coordinating body to help reinforce and build on sub-regional efforts to overcome gaps in protection mechanisms across the African continent. Made up of five sub-regional networks, it works toward facilitating advocacy for HRDs on the continent and ensuring that HRDs under imminent risk of violence or with acute protection needs have access to an emergency response mechanism that will prevent the actualisation of threats. In 2016, PAHRDN:



Directly supported 29 HRDs at risk.



Conducted “Training of Trainers” workshops in 6 countries.



Provided 4 security management trainings for 120 HRDs.



Trained 20 staff members of the sub-regional networks in strategic leadership, comprehensive advocacy tools, monitoring and evaluation, fundraising and resource mobilisation, as well as organisational and financial management.



Supported 20 HRDs for advocacy missions to the UN HRC and ACHPR.



Conducted an advocacy workshop for 18 HRDs.



Supported the fulfilment of ACHPR Resolution 273 , extending the scope of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa.



Launched the #OurRightsOurSpace campaign to advocate for stronger legal protection for HRDs.

HUB CITY INITIATIVE

During the process of developing its strategic plan, DefendDefenders identified the creation of Shelter Cities to provide longer-term opportunities for HRDs, as well as the creation and strengthening of national coalitions for HRDs as priorities for the next years.

Temporary relocation to a foreign country as an alternative for protection of HRDs is an intervention of last resort. However, in certain cases where HRDs face profound risks to their physical security, life, or liberty, relocation is the only appropriate intervention. Both international and regional human rights NGOs have established formal and ad-hoc systems to relocate HRDs at risk. Many international governments and regional bodies have established protocols to assist with the temporary relocation of HRDs at risk, including to 'Shelter Cities.' More often, HRDs leave their country when the situation is dire and they are at risk. In recent years, we have experienced a massive exodus of HRDs from countries like South Sudan, Burundi, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Somalia due to the security situation or conflict.

In response, some European countries initiated shelter cities to give relief to HRDs; the EU Shelter City Initiative was launched in 2009. At present, shelter city initiatives exist, in varying forms, in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. However, outside of the European Union, only a handful of comparable initiatives exist.

Throughout 2016, PAHRDN has consulted with State actors and civil society organisations for the establishment of African HRD Hub Cities, and is currently in the process of facilitating the establishment of four virtual Hub Cities, initially in Kampala (Uganda), Johannesburg and Pretoria (South Africa), Tunis (Tunisia), and Abidjan (Ivory Coast).

CIVIL SOCIETY INNOVATION FOR CHANGE

The Civil Society Innovation Initiative (CSII) seeks to strengthen a vibrant, pluralistic, and rights-based civil society in six different regions of the world. After holding discussions and consultations at different levels, it established the Africa hub with the intention to foster a network of demand-driven and cutting-edge civil society to encourage cooperation, innovation, research, learning, and peer-to-peer exchanges. Throughout 2016, PAHRDN contributed to the development of the African Hub, aiming to protect, respect, strengthen, expand, and recover civil society space through:

- Developing an interactive and easy to use online resource center;
- Providing legal analysis and research support to counter the ever-growing number of repressive laws and practices in Africa;
- Providing an advocacy and solidarity platform to countries or individuals affected by such laws and the closing of civic space; and
- Facilitating connections, linkages and coordination mechanisms providing access to information, generating networks and promoting interactions with resource organisations across Africa and beyond through the provision of legal aid for human rights activists with technical resources and possibly a responsive safe haven.



PARTNERSHIPS AND FINANCIALS

Over the years, DefendDefenders has developed working relationships with relevant duty bearer stakeholders in the countries of the East and Horn of Africa as the primary actors responsible for the protection of HRDs. The quality and nature of these relationships evidently varies from one country to another according to the context. The governments in each of the countries where DefendDefenders operates have a role to play by providing space for the work of HRDs, protecting and promoting human rights, and respecting and complying with regional and international obligations. Influencing these actors is therefore key for us.

DefendDefenders, as a secretariat of a network of 78 human rights organisations in the East and Horn of Africa sub-region, and a premier organisation in the region that offers protection, capacity building and carries out advocacy on behalf of HRDs, plays a vital role in HRD protection. As a network based on the ground, DefendDefenders serves as the first point of call for HRDs at risk, which enables it to identify and implement appropriate protection actions effectively. The organisation also serves as a channel of information thereby ensuring that up-to-date information is made available in a timely manner to key stakeholders within and beyond the sub-region.

At the national level, DefendDefenders engages in various ways with the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders-Uganda, Uganda Human Rights Network, Foundation for Human Rights Initiative, Chapter Four Uganda, Human Rights Network for Journalists, Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum, Refugee Law Project, Human Rights Centre Uganda, Avocats Sans Frontières, Uganda Law Society, the NGO Forum, UNHCR, OHCHR, and Uganda Human Rights Commission, among others. DefendDefenders has established relationships of trust and furthered coordination with these organisations.

At the regional level we work closely with national coalitions of HRDs and focal point organisations in our countries of operation. We are also part of a loose network, the African Journalists in Distress, working specifically with journalists across the continent.

International and regional actors are also important, particularly given the potential influence these can exert on national authorities: the UN HRC and its key mechanisms (notably the UN Special Rapporteurs), the ACHPR and its key mechanisms, and the diplomatic community are crucial actors in the protection of HRDs. DefendDefenders is among 12 organisations that are part of ProtectDefenders.eu, a European Union protection mechanism which was established to protect the most at-risk HRDs worldwide. The organisations implementing the ProtectDefenders.eu mechanism are Front Line Defenders, Reporters without Borders, World Organisation Against Torture, International Federation for Human Rights, the International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, Urgent Action Fund, Protection International, Peace Brigades International, the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders, Forum Asia, and DefendDefenders. This partnership enables us to work and share experiences with the premier organisations working on the protection of HRDs worldwide.

In addition, DefendDefenders works closely with other strategic partners in the field and in our advocacy initiatives such as the Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, Committee to Project Journalists, Article 19 and the International Service for Human Rights. DefendDefenders seeks to continually build alliances and create linkages with other sectors of society notably to include more marginalised groups by creating spaces to promote active citizenship.



FINANCIALS

DefendDefenders is appreciative of the partners that support our work financially. We currently have active partnerships with the following:

- American Jewish World Services
- Austrian Development Agency
- Bread for the World
- Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda
- European Union Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
 - ProtectDefenders.eu support
 - South Sudan partner
- Fund for Global Human Rights
- KIOS - The Finnish NGO Foundation for Human Rights
- National Endowment for Democracy
- Netherlands Foreign Ministry
- Open Society Initiative for East Africa
- Swedish International Development Agency (Sida)
- Soleterre Strategie di Pace ONLUS

DefendDefenders' expenditure by percentage



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 risks of persecution and by enhancing their capacity to effectively defend human rights.

DefendDefenders is the secretariat of EHAHRD-Net, a network of 78 human rights organisations in the eleven countries of the East and Horn of Africa sub-region: Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia (together with Somaliland), South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

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