

## Call for Action: COMMUNITIES ARE HRDS!

#communitiesareHRDs

### **Protection International encourages human rights defenders awards to recognize the collective dimension of human rights work and achievements**

Reality shows that HRDs rarely work as individuals but as part of groups, should the latter be communities, grassroots organizations, or NGOs. Because together means stronger, protection is largely ensured by the collective and relational work carried out by HRDs.

Ahead of the 20th Anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Protection International organized a round table last December to reaffirm that the collective strength of HRDs should be acknowledged and supported as the main lever of protection.

The Declaration on HRDs has brought a lot of attention to HRDs as individuals, less so to the collective movements they are part of. However, considering HRDs only as isolated individuals leads to cutting them off their social fabric that allows them to fight for and maintain their rights.

Likewise, **several awards given to HRDs now exist and they are powerful instruments to raise awareness on critical situations**, particularly in a moment when HRDs have been increasingly criminalized and threatened. Still, they also tend to be given to individuals rather than to the communities and grassroots organisations they work with.

If giving a human face to a cause can be seen as having a bigger impact onto the general public, evidence shows that it can also have counterproductive implications for the community.

First, it risks focusing on the individual's personal story instead of giving visibility to the communities' struggles and to the root causes of these struggles. Secondly, it also risks disrupting the community itself, by *de facto* distancing the individual from the community.

Protection International acknowledges the great value of all awards given to HRDs. For that very reason, we wish to continue supporting them as much as we can. We also wish to contribute to their development by **encouraging the nomination of more and more collective movements**. 20 years after the adoption of the Declaration on HRDs, this would undoubtedly mark a new step forward.

*“By shedding light only on the iconic achievements of individual HRDs, we often make them more vulnerable by weakening their connection with their constituency and exposing them as individuals and increasing pressure.*

*This is why PI advocates for protection actors to go beyond individual heroic figures of individual HRDs and encourage collective human rights awards which strengthen communities, organisations and movements.”*

– Liliana de Marco Coenen, Director of PI.