1. Rethinking HRDs Protection, international roundtable in Brussels
2. Her Life, Her Diary - Side by Side WHRDS, a photographic tribute to Thai defenders
3. Supporting Colombian communities with the defence of their land and heritage
4. Supporting pro-democracy group la Lucha in DRC
5. Defending land rights of Guatemalan indigenous communities

PROTECTION INTERNATIONAL is an international non-profit organisation that provides protection strategies and tools for security management to human rights defenders who are at risk. Since 2004, Protection International has been working with local partners in over thirty countries across the globe.
Rethinking HRDs Protection, international roundtable in Brussels

A step forward for security and protection of human rights defenders

WHERE:
Brussels, Belgium

WHAT:
As part of Protection International’s global campaign around the 20th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Protection International (PI) and the Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR) of the University of York, organised an international roundtable in December 2017, on “Rethinking the protection of human rights defenders”.

“We are the sentinels of human rights protection, for which we must work together hand in hand.”

- Denis Mukwege
HOW:

The event gathered over 80 human rights defenders (HRDs), practitioners, academics and policy makers from all continents, allowing them to challenge together the currently established protection approaches, tools and practices.

Based on a participatory and multi-format approach, it took participants through three different strands, from reviewing the concept of HRDs, through identifying the gaps in the current protection approaches to finally re-think the protection of HRDs and draw ways forward.

Protection actors gathering in Brussels claimed a shift in focus, moving from this narrow and failing security approach towards the broader recognition of the right to defend rights, and of HRDs as primary actors when discussing their own security and protection, but without downplaying states’ obligations to respect and protect the right to defend human rights.

The event was attended by Michel FORST, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Victoria Tauli Corpuz, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples and Dr. Denis Mukwege, Congolese gynecologist and women’s rights activist.

IMPACT:

- Offering a participatory platform for key actors to discuss, exchange and design new ways forward on the defense of human rights and protection of HRDs.

- Getting consensus amongst key actors on a shift in focus and on ways forward in the field of HRD protection and paving the way for all activities around the 20th anniversary of the UN Declaration on HRDs.

“

We should join our efforts into a global coalition of human rights defenders, to raise awareness on who they are and what they do and finally change the narrative driven by smear campaigns against them.

- Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders
Her Life, Her Diary – Side by Side WHRDs, a photographic tribute to Thai defenders

Giving visibility and a voice to women human rights defenders in Thailand

WHERE:

Bangkok, Thailand

WHAT:

On 29 November 2017, in partnership with the Canadian Embassy in Bangkok, Protection International (PI) launched the book “Her Life, Her Diary – Side by Side WHRDs - Diary of Hope and Dreams”, a collection of 20 portraits of Thai women activists taken by Luke Duggleby, British Bangkok-based and global award-winning photographer. The launch event, which was held in the Bangkok Arts and Cultural Centre, was accompanied by a photo exhibition of the portraits and followed by a press conference.

According to information from PI, in the period 2014 – 2017, at least 170 community and rural-based WHRDs have been the target of judicial harassment due to their outspoken roles in the defense of the environmental and land rights, and of equal access to natural resources. “Side by Side WHRDs 2018” recognises the outstanding tenacity and courage of Thai women HRDs, and aims at raising awareness of the many struggles they face in their daily work to promote social justice and human rights.
HOW:

Held on the occasion of the International Women Human Rights Defenders Day, the launch event was an opportunity to meet the 20 women HRDs featured in the book, who shared their experiences with the public. The event gathered more than 200 attendees, including members of NGOs, journalists and representatives of international organisations amongst others.

IMPACT:

• “Side by Side WHRDs 2018” enhanced women HRDs participation in public dialogues and promoted the recognition of their efforts to influence protection policies that guarantee access to justice and effective protection mechanisms.

• Through the project, Thai WHRDs were able to strengthen networks and alliances, and hence to seize the opportunity to work cooperatively in order to share experiences, address challenges and pursue common advocacy objectives.

• After the project was finalised, some of the WHRDs featured in the portraits continued working together and got involved in collective activities for the defence of human rights for their first time. An emblematic example of this is their participation in Thailand’s “We Walk for Friendship” initiative by People Go Network, in January 2018, a solidarity walk that called for the respect of civic and human rights.

• National press such as Thailand Post, Bangkok Post, Prachatai and The Nation, reported about the project, thus raising visibility and awareness about the specific work and personal stories of WHRDs that are less well known in Thailand.

• “Side by Side WHRDs 2018” was part of the international exhibition “Southeast X Southeast” at the Southeast Museum of Photography, Florida, USA.
Supporting Colombian communities with the defence of their land and heritage

The communities Limones, Quiroga, Joanico, San Antonio, Santa Rosa, San José and Concepción, established in the Colombian Pacific coast, reflected on the development of collective protection strategies to defend their land rights.

WHERE:
Guajuí River, Cauca region, Colombia

WHAT:
Protection International supported afro-descendant communities affected by the Colombian armed conflict with the development of capacities to defend their land rights as indigenous people and as ethnic authorities.

HOW:
Together with its local partners Pensamiento y Acción Social (PAS) and Coordinación de Consejos Comunitarios y Organizaciones de Base del Pueblo Negro de la Costa Pacífica del Cauca (COCOCAUCA),
Protection International set up an itinerant school that carried out capacity building workshops in eight afro-descendant communities.

The workshops gathered men, women and young members from each community, but were particularly addressed to the ethnic authorities called conviteros, who compose the Guajuí River Community Council. These community-based human rights defenders (HRDs) exchanged together on the challenges they face and on the importance to defend their territory as a collective entity, from the cultural perspective of the Afro-Colombian people.

IMPACT:

• 160 human rights defenders, men and women, received direct support from Protection International and PAS.

• Members from the eight communities where able to reflect and to identify the main challenges they confront on a daily basis, thus building a solid base to work collectively to regain control over their territory.

• Members of the Guajuí River Community Council and other community members were able to set up an action plan including specific commitments that stemmed from the four main challenges identified during the exchanges: lack of recognition as ethnic authorities and as rights holders over their land; uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources; presence of armed actors; and continuous loss of meeting spaces.
Supporting pro-democracy group la Lucha in DRC

In the context of the upcoming elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Protection International worked with the pro-democracy group la Lucha to strengthen their capacities in physical and digital protection security.

WHERE:
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

WHAT:
As the general elections approach in DRC, the country is experiencing a very difficult socio-political context. Several pro-democracy activists are killed in peaceful demonstrations; others are unlawfully arrested and sentenced to prison. One of the most targeted social movements is la Lucha.

HOW:
Protection International (PI) trained and accompanied la Lucha members in different cities of the country in order to prevent security slippages, help human rights defenders set up security protocols and equip them with environmental analysis techniques.

The objectives of the capacity building workshops were to:

- Equip la Lucha HRDs with threat, risk analysis and security plan implementation techniques;
- Raise awareness among la Lucha HRDs about the risk and the need to put safety protocols in place;
- Improve la Lucha HRDs data protection skills through digital security training, and physical protection skills through physical security training.

**IMPACT:**

- The techniques of context, threat and risk analysis are known and mastered by la Lucha HRDs;
- Security aspects are taken into account very seriously in the planning of activities by la Lucha HRDs,
- Internet communication between la Lucha HRDs is secured by e-mail encryption;
- Data protection software is installed and la Lucha members master its use.
Defending land rights of Guatemalan indigenous communities

Building protection networks and strengthening collective protection practices in order to defend land and environmental rights.

WHERE:
Micreoregion of Ixquisis, department of Huehuetenango, Guatemala

WHAT:
Protection International (PI) accompanied Guatemalan Peaceful Resistance of the microregion of Ixquisis in its ongoing struggle to halt the construction of a hydroelectric dam project, which brought tremendous environmental as well as socio economic damage for the indigenous people in the territory. Created in 2009,
the Resistance is composed by 12 communities that face contamination of their rivers, disappearance of their fish resources, and a drop down of their yields as a consequence of the dam project.

**HOW:**

Protection International supported the communities in denouncing crimes and other cases of criminalisation they were subject to following demonstrations all along 2017, and in particular during the emergency situation after Sebastián Alonzo, local resident, was shot dead early that year. The Protection Desk Guatemala supported the Resistance in reporting the case and assisted the members with a full risk-assessment process, including capacity building workshops aiming at strengthen collective protection practices.

Moreover, PI engaged in raising visibility of a situation of relentless criminalisation, threats and harassment that the Peaceful Resistance continues facing to date. Through advocacy actions, PI brought the case to national and international actors, such as members of the Guatemalan Government, the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights and the diplomatic community.

**IMPACT:**

- The Peaceful Resistance of the microregion of Ixquisis received the Front Line Defenders 2018 Award for Human Rights Defenders in Risk in the Americas.

- 458 human rights defenders, men and women, were directly involved in the workshops and were able to strengthen their capacities in terms of protection, awareness raising and advocacy targeted to key political actors.

- As a result of PI’s advocacy actions, the construction of the hydroelectric dam project was suspended after the murder of Sebastián Alonzo. Unfortunately, operations resumed a few months after his death.
Have a look at Protection International’s latest publications:

Es Tiempo YA – Políticas públicas eficaces para el derecho a defender los derechos humanos (also available in English)

Criminalisation Series #3 – La criminalisation des mouvements sociaux. Le cas du mouvement la Lucha en République démocratique du Congo

Collective protection of human rights defenders of the right to land and territory. Conceptual developments and methodological changes – Joint publications with PAS (also available in Spanish)

2017 FOCUS REPORT – Public policies for the protection of Human Rights Defenders: Global trends and implementation challenges (also available in Spanish and French)

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Protection International is an international non-profit organisation that supports human rights defenders worldwide in developing their security and protection management strategies.

“We aspire to a world in which fundamental human rights and fundamental freedoms are universally recognised and respected by all, and where everyone has the right to defend these rights and freedoms without fear of threats or attack.”