

FOCUS STORIES

2019



PROTECTION
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PROTECTION INTERNATIONAL is an international non-profit organisation that runs comprehensive protection programmes for both men and women human rights defenders (W/HRD) at risk. Since 2004, Protection International (PI) has been working with local partners in over thirty countries across the globe.



1 First-Ever Women Human Rights Defenders International Day Observed in Indonesia

The situation of women human rights defenders and gender-based violence put in the spotlight

Where was it?

Jakarta, Indonesia

What happened?

On the 28th and 29th of November 2019, celebrations took place in numerous locations in Jakarta to mark International Women Human Rights Defenders Day as well as to raise awareness about the difficult situations that women face when acting to promote or protect human rights.

Among other activities, the two-day commemoration included a press conference, a debate on WHRDs' protection, a theatrical performance and a photo exhibition. Activities were jointly organised by the Komnas Perempuan, Indonesia's National Commission on Violence against Women, Protection International and others members of the Civil Society Coalition for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders.

How did we get there?

These celebrations represented an opportunity to bring together a broad spectrum of civil society organisations, such as feminist and LGBTIQ+ groups, as well as impoverished women from urban communities, and put them in contact with national authorities such as the Komnas Perempuan, Indonesia's Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, and the Ministry of Environment and Forestry.



Protection International created synergies by coordinating initiatives of various organisations to amplify the voices of WHRDs in the community. For example, they were invited to participate in a Komnas Perempuan press conference, granting them warranted media attention. Protection International organized various reflection, learning and exchange sessions which connected the communities with several Indonesian NGOs.

Why does it matter?

In Indonesia, celebrations of the International Day for Women Human Rights Defenders had never taken place before, because there was little awareness among the general public, including WHRDs themselves. This reflects the lack of attention and knowledge about the situation of WHRDs, who are not granted special security and protection measures.

Therefore, commemorating this international day was an opportunity to draw the Indonesian public's attention to WHRDs and challenges related to gender-based violence and stereotypes. Women took this opportunity to protest and bring their cases to the government, as well as to learn from other civil society organisations.





2 New Regional Hub for Africa Officially Launched in Kenya

Placing our decision-making close to Africa's human rights defenders

Where was it?

Nairobi, Kenya

What happened?

On the 3rd December 2019, Protection International officially launched a new initiative: its new Regional Protection Hub for Africa. To mark the momentous occasion, celebrations were held at the Belgian Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya with a photo exhibition presenting African W/HRDs by Anette Bronelius.

How did we get there?

In 2019, Protection International issued a new 5-year global strategy as a way to respond to the increasing powerful revisionist agendas against international human rights standards and to the violent repression directed at dissident voices worldwide.

Our new approach to protection shifts the focus from individual defenders at risk to their collectives and to the Right to Defend Human Rights.

Under its 2019-23 Global Strategy, Protection International will change its governance structure and gradually transform itself into a network of Hubs, placing its decision-making where it matters the most: close to defenders.

Why does it matter?

As the first Regional Hub, PI Africa will work out of Nairobi with Africa's grassroots communities, journalists and activists who are exposed to great risks for speaking truth to power by establishing networks with key stakeholders in order to promote their protection.

Through its own locally-based management and governance structures, PI Africa will independently establish links with existing initiatives and promote new ones, working in a flexible manner across African countries.

Comprised of a regional director, protection officers and a fully operational protection desk in the Kivus (DR Congo), the PI Africa team will better ensure timely interventions that are driven by the context and needs pertaining to the existential threats W/HRDs face every day.



3

Provincial Edict to Protect W/HRDs and Journalists Adopted in North Kivu, DR Congo

Four years of efforts by civil society pay off with a new legal tool for W/HRDs

Where was it?

Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo)

What happened?

On the 11th November 2019, the provincial assembly of North Kivu finally adopted a new edict protecting W/HRDs, which was then promulgated by the provincial governor on the 30th November 2019. This is the result of a joint effort by local civil society initiated by the local protection mechanism Synergy Ukingo Wetu (SUWE) with the support of Protection International.

How did we get there?

Protection International has accompanied and technically supported the advocacy work throughout this legal and political process for the whole province of North Kivu.

Numerous activities have been conducted by members of civil society, including workshops on public policies for the protection of W/HRDs, advocacy meetings with provincial deputies, as well as sessions of exchange between experts and administrative members of North Kivu's provincial assembly.

In 2019, Protection International organised three workshops and meetings in Goma for 24 W/HRDs and members of the provincial assembly to raise awareness about the importance of public policies in the defence of human rights. These sessions, informed by findings gathered by Protection International on public policies concerning W/HRDs across the world, were essential in convincing the assembly to vote in favour of the new edict.

Protection International also provided a legal template and examples of public policies from other jurisdictions to convince both W/HRDs and deputies that change is possible in the DR Congo.

Last but not least, Protection International elaborated an argumentation paper in favour of a special protection mechanism for women human rights defenders, which was eventually included within the text of the voted and promulgated edict.

Why does it matter?

The Democratic Republic of the Congo does not yet have effective national or local legal frameworks that can adequately protect human rights defenders. Perpetrators go unpunished and there is no mechanism to compensate for the harm endured by W/HRDs.

In the last two Universal Periodic Reviews (in 2014 and 2019), several recommendations were made to the DR Congo in favour of the creation and establishment of a national legal framework for the protection of W/HRDs, but so far nothing concrete has been achieved.

With the adoption of this provincial edict, a fundamental step was taken towards the effective recognition of the fundamental right to defend human rights in the DR Congo. The entry into force and effective implementation of this new legal instrument by the Congolese authorities are the next crucial steps that will further enhance recognition and support for the work of W/HRDs.

4 Guatemalan W/HRDs Harness the Power of Communication

Empowering W/HRDs to become community communicators and shape the narrative on the right to defend human rights in Guatemala

Where was it?

San Pedro Carchá, Guatemala

What happened?

Local W/HRD communicators in communities across San Pedro Carchá, Alta Verapaz, harnessed the power of communication to defend their rights. This project aimed to create communication focal points in each community, where the collective work of W/HRDs is shared locally and nationally, shaping the narrative that the right to defend human rights must be protected.



How did we get there?

Through a partnership between PI and the Guatemalan Federation of Radio Schools (FGER), a W/HRD from each community took part in four workshops and two seminars at the FGER.

The trainings covered the basic definitions of communication, carrying out interviews, filming and editing from mobile phones, conducting voice-over, digital project management and community journalism. The W/HRDs also put their training to the test by working with 12 local radio stations across the Mayan Network Radio.

Why does it matter?

This activity is part of PI's objective to develop a wide network of W/HRD communicators across Mesoamerica, strengthening the collective protection capacity of W/HRDs in Guatemala and beyond. In San Pedro Carchá, six community members took on roles as local communicators, earning new qualifications and applying their training to raise awareness on the collective rights work of the community.

Have a look at Protection International's latest publications:

- [Baseline Study on Protection Needs of Women Human Rights Defenders in North and South Kivu](#)
(also available in [French](#))
- [Manuel pratique de protection pour les Défenseur·e·s des Droits Humains en République Démocratique du Congo](#)
(available in French)
- [Collective Protection of Human Rights Defenders. A collective approach to the right to defend human rights](#)
(also available in [French](#) and [Spanish](#))

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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."



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