

20 YEARS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

ANNUAL REPORT 2018



PROTECTION
international





VISION

We aspire to a world in which fundamental human rights and freedoms are respected by all, whilst being protected and fulfilled by those responsible.



MISSION

Our contribution to that world is to ensure that everyone who defends human rights can do so without fear of threats or attacks.



APPROACH

We support human rights defenders to protect themselves through a comprehensive, collective and long-term approach, which is applied in all contexts where we work.

Our approach is founded on three pillars:

CAPACITY BUILDING

Empowering defenders to manage their own protection.

PUBLIC POLICIES

Promoting State Authorities fulfill their obligation to protect.

STAKEHOLDERS

Engaging those individuals and institutions with a positive stake in the protection of human rights defenders to do more or better, and those with a negative stake to respect the rights of HRDs.





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MOVING TOGETHER IN SOLIDARITY

A LETTER FROM PROTECTION INTERNATIONAL

In 2018, Protection International celebrated **20 years of the UN Declaration on HRDs** along with states, civil society, and human rights defenders concerned about the security and protection of human rights defenders at risk. The Declaration, adopted by the UN General Assembly on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, affirms the **right of everyone to promote and protect human rights**.

The 20th anniversary of the Declaration comes at a time when we are experiencing an **unprecedented backlash against human rights**. In many places around the world, states have been introducing and enforcing laws and policies that **restrict the 'space' for civil society**. Defenders around the world continue to face a range of threats and attacks aimed at deterring them in their causes – from stigmatization, judicial harassment and criminalization, to surveillance, online attacks, physical violence, killings, and disappearances.

Protection International's **ethos is to work alongside human rights defenders to protect themselves**, connecting them with other defenders and protection actors who support them in their human rights work, and working with them to build an environment in which everyone can enjoy the right to promote and protect human rights. Protection International works with defenders at multiple levels – local, national, regional and international. We **aim to draw lessons from each of the contexts we work in**, and to facilitate learning across places and regions so that defenders can learn strategies and tactics from each other.

Human rights work is not done by individual 'heroes' but by ordinary people who come together around a human rights cause. **Communities, collectives, networks and local movements are an essential part of the global human rights movement**. Recognising the importance of collective protection, we launched the campaign

#CommunitiesareHRDs to highlight the collective aspect of human rights struggles and achievements. **Protection International exists to support and strengthen the security and protection of human rights defenders** around the world. We **seek to do so collaboratively**, through partnerships with civil society groups and organisations, and thoughtfully, **questioning how our practices impact the lives of defenders**.

In 2018, PI became a member of two Brussels-based advocacy networks and the Defenders in Development Campaign. We renewed our commitment to ProtectDefenders.eu and joined the Paris HRD World Summit 2018, with 150 HRDs and protection actors from around the world. We also published a critical review of existing protection mechanisms and greatly invested in research and advocacy for a collective approach to protection.

PI's founding members started with a simple but innovative idea: researching and developing tools and tactics for the protection of HRDs at risk. We are deeply grateful to our partners, collaborators, advisors, donors, board members and staff – past and present – who have contributed so much to our learning and growth.

We are pleased to present in this report some **highlights from our work in 2018**. Staying connected with our mission, in 2019 we plan to invest in deepening our expertise in HRD protection, with a renewed commitment to the right to defend human rights.

Stay tuned—we will share more about this journey as it unfolds.

In solidarity,

Alice Nah
Chairperson, Board

Liliana De Marco Coenen
Executive Director

BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND MANAGEMENT



Alice NAH, *Chair*

Alice Nah is a lecturer at the Centre for Applied Human Rights at the University of York, UK. Alice conducts research on the security and protection of human rights defenders at risk, and on asylum and migration in Asia. She leads an international research project that examines how human rights defenders navigate risks, manage security, and receive protection support in different countries.

Patrick DECOODT, *Treasurer*

Patrick Decoodt has developed a long career in international business within Belgium and overseas, through which he gained expertise in transition management. In the past, he has been an independent consultant for various SMEs, including cultural organisations, social enterprises and not-for-profit organisations.

Gitahi GITHUKU, *Member*

Gitahi Githuku is a human rights defender from Kenya who has worked with various national and regional human rights organisations over years. Since 2014, he works with the American Jewish World Service (AJWS) based in Nairobi, focusing on natural resources and sexual health rights programmes.

Liesbeth MONDEN, *Member (until May 2018)*

Liesbeth is a lawyer at the Brussels Bar Association and holds expertise in immigration law, family law, criminal law and juvenile law. She is also a Board member of Memisa Belgium, a nonprofit organization focused on improving basic health care worldwide.

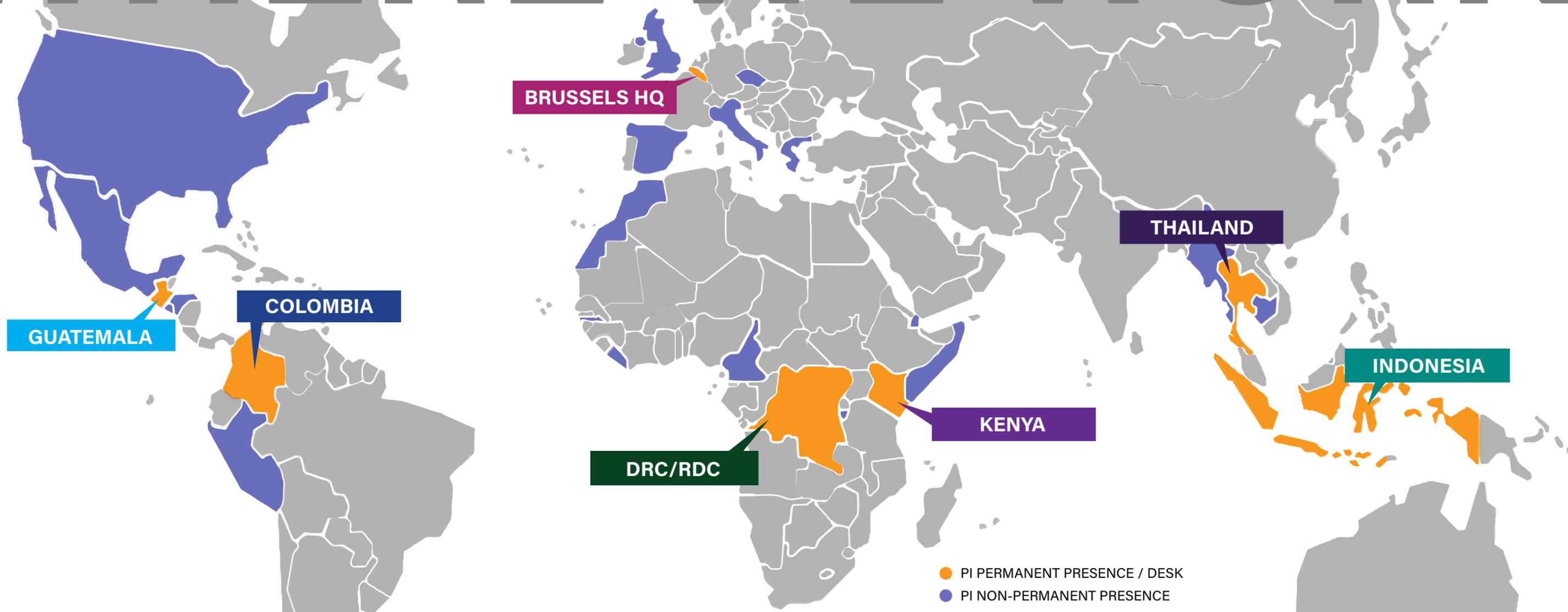
Marusia LÓPEZ, *Member*

Marusia López is a Mexican feminist with nearly two decades of experience in local, national, and international human rights organisations. She currently serves as Senior Associate on issues of holistic protection of women human rights defenders at JASS on the global level.

Liliana DE MARCO COENEN, *Executive Director*

Liliana joined Protection International in 2014 and became its Executive Director in 2016. Together with the global management team, she is responsible for strategic direction and implementation of PI's mandate across different regions. Liliana is passionate about social justice and brings to her leadership vast experience in human rights policy and advocacy. She holds an LL.M in international human rights law from the University of Essex, UK.

WHERE WE WORK



IN 2018, **PROTECTION INTERNATIONAL (PI)** ACCOMPANIED

32
indigenous
and local
communities

IN
24
countries

ASSISTED
54
civil society
organisations
(working primarily on human
rights, land grabbing, and
environmental issues)

SUPPORTED
more than
60
people through
our online
course

AND TRAINED
2 697
community activists
and human rights
defenders directly

ENGAGING WITH PARTNERS AND NETWORKS

CONSULTANCY SERVICES

Protection International's support to partners in countries without a permanent PI presence continued to grow in 2018. Our staff in the Protection Desks and pool of Senior Advisers delivered **consultancy services on preventive security and protection management to 23 partners** and began to work on several services that would continue in 2019.

Despite the Nicaragua's government hostility and crackdown on human rights defenders (HRDs), PI was able to support five organisations in **Nicaragua**, including indigenous, feminist and LGBTQI organisations, in developing their own security and protection protocols.

Protection International supported a number of partner organisations of Bread for the World (BftW) affected by the crisis in the North and South West Provinces of **Cameroon**. PI facilitators provided key support in developing short-term and mid-term protection action plans in the run-up to the presidential elections in October 2018, as well as in the reassessment of security protocols following the elections and the fast deterioration of the security situation in the country.

As part of their ongoing support to the **Goldman Environmental Foundation**, PI's teams were thrilled to support its 2016 prize winner, Máxima Acuña, and her family in carrying out an assessment of the threats and risks she faces

as a woman human rights defender (WHRD). PI also assisted them in defining steps and security measures to strengthen Mrs. Acuña's and her family's capacities to address such risks and improve her protection.

PI equally supported four civil society organisations in **Myanmar**, which work in different conflict situations related to land tenure and extraction of natural resources, as well as violent conflict between the military and several ethnic armed groups.

In June 2018, PI participated in the **annual training on safety and security for HRDs provided by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)**. The participants came from the United States, Canada and countries in Western Europe, where the spaces for civil society have progressively deteriorated in recent years. Their training covered issues related to their security when carrying out human rights monitoring in increasingly hostile or higher risk environments.

Finally, Protection International's senior advisers also supported the staff of People In Need (PIN) and the Centre for Human Rights based in **Czech Republic** to develop security plans and protocols tailored to specific country contexts and emergency situations.

MEMBERSHIPS

For PI, the process of supporting human rights defenders would be incomplete without seizing the power of networks and fostering inter-sectoral movements through alliance building.

For this reason, PI is an active member of different networks both at country level, where our Protection Desks are based, and at the international level, mostly in Brussels.



PI is part of [ProtectDefenders.eu](#) – the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanisms.



In 2018, PI officially became member of the geographically focused advocacy networks [European Network for Central Africa \(EurAc\)](#), for the African Great Lakes area, and [EU-LAT](#), for Central and Latin America.



[The Human Rights and Democracy Network \(HRDN\)](#), an informal grouping operating at the EU-level in the broader areas of human rights, democracy and conflict prevention.



As part of its work on Business and Human Rights, PI is also a member of the [Defenders in Development campaign](#). Led by the [Coalition for Human Rights in Development](#), the campaign seeks to challenge the current development paradigm by engaging in capacity building and collective action to ensure that communities and marginalized groups have a say in development projects.



CELEBRATING 20 YEARS WITH HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

In the year that marked the **20th Anniversary of the [UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#)**, Protection International decided to take a step forward in the protection of human rights defenders and call for the much-needed recognition of the collective dimension of human rights work.

Twenty years after the adoption of the Declaration, the world continued to experience an unprecedented backlash against human rights, resulting in an increasingly hostile environment surrounding defenders. In a context of smear campaigns against HRDs that legitimised attacks against them and foster impunity, PI contributed to a **greater recognition of the collective aspect of their work and achievements.**

COMMUNITIES ARE HRDs!

Under the slogan and hashtag **#CommunitiesareHRDs**, PI called on all actors, especially decision-makers, to better understand and support a collective approach to human rights work.

At the heart of the campaign was a three-fold objective: **empowering defenders and particularly WHRDs** as active subjects so that communities are informed and mobilise to change the prevailing narrative, advocating for the **inclusion of a collective protection approach in national and international public policies**, and mobilising NGOs, donors and decision-makers to **endorse the discourse on the collective approach**. The overall goal: changing the individualistic narrative on HRDs and raising awareness on the UN Declaration.



COMMUNITIES
ARE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

“Communities” refers to collective groups in a broad sense, i.e. groups fighting together for the right to defend human rights. Social groups living together, coalitions gathering around specific issues of concerns or civil society organisations and movements are some examples.



FOR GREATER RECOGNITION OF COLLECTIVE WORK

2018 was a year of celebration for a number of communities doing human rights work across the globe. In January, the [SOLIDAR Silver Rose Awards](#) awarded Colombian **Trade Union Sintramaigra** with their Organising International Solidarity Award, in recognition of their work supporting women domestic workers who battle against discrimination, lack of labour rights and violence at the workplace. Later in May, **la Lucha** social movement in Democratic Republic of Congo and the **Peaceful Resistance of the Microregion of Ixquisis**, Guatemala received the [Front Line Defenders regional awards for Africa and the Americas](#) respectively. In June, four North-American grassroots organisations were bestowed the [Robert F Kennedy Human Rights Award](#): **March for Our Lives, United We Dream, Color of Change** and **The International Indigenous Youth Council**.

Additionally, in 2018, [the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize](#) gave nominations to numerous NGOs, including South African NGO **AfriForum** as well as those **NGOs dedicated to saving migrants crossing the mediterranean sea**.

Although only highlights, these examples show how awards are powerful instruments in raising awareness on critical HRD situations, particularly in contexts where HRDs are increasingly criminalised and threatened. However, most of the Human Rights Awards worldwide still retain the individualistic perspective, rather than one that is collective and recognises the communities which make up many grassroots human rights organisations.

"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

As a contribution to the development of these awards, PI **took action to encourage the nomination of more collective movements and communities**. As part of the campaign, PI personally addressed renowned award-giving entities such as the Aurora Prize and the Robert F. Kennedy Centre for Justice and Human Rights, congratulating them for recognising the collective dimension of human rights work.

RAISING AWARENESS ON HRD PROTECTION

By reaching over forty thousand people through our online platforms, "Communities are HRDs!" stressed the message that human rights work is not done by "heroes" but by ordinary people gathered around a human rights cause.

Two such causes became central to PI's campaign: **"We Are Like You"** and **"For Those Who Died Trying"**. In October 2018, the [Human Rights Defenders World Summit](#) took place in celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the UN Declaration on HRDs. On this occasion, Protection International presented the **two projects** as photo exhibitions¹.

Whereas "We Are Like You" told the story of five Colombian peasant communities reconstructing

their collective memory in the aftermath of the Peace Agreement, "For Those Who Died Trying" exposed the criminalisation and violence suffered by HRDs in Thailand. Two different projects, from two different continents, but both advocating for peace and justice, and illustrating the collective stake present in any human rights work.

Furthermore, in 2018 PI joined the initiative ["Defend Rights"](#), led by the [Norwegian Human Rights Fund](#) and online platform [Memria](#). The initiative aims to shift the narrative around HRDs by collecting audio testimonies from those on the front line of defending human rights.

RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY FOR A COLLECTIVE APPROACH

As part of the "Communities are HRDs!" campaign, two publications shed light on the need for public policies that include the collective approach and reflect the collective dimension of human rights defenders' work: ["The Time is Now for effective public policies to protect the right to defend human rights"](#) and ["Collective protection of Human Rights Defenders: a collective approach to the Right to Defend Human Rights"](#)².

The first publication looks at the urgent need for public policies which adopt a preventive approach and take into account structural elements in the protection of HRDs. The second publication identifies a number of problems which stem from the prevailing individualisation of HRDs and provides ideas of key measures and actions that should be taken when developing collective protection strategies with communities or groups of defenders.

In September 2018, PI organised two events which brought the debate on collective protection closer to policy-makers. Together with the [European Network for Central Africa \(EurAc\)](#) and with the support of MEP Marie Arena, PI organised the public conference ["The criminalisation of social movement la Lucha in DR Congo"](#). Earlier that same month, PI organised an informal gathering ["UN complaint procedures for human rights defenders: opportunities and limits"](#). The discussion aimed to create a space for exchange and contribute to the improvement of HRD-related protection mechanisms at the international and national levels. As a keynote speaker, PI invited **Ms. Jannica Spannagel**, research associate at the [Global Public Policy Institute](#), to present her key research findings on the process and impact of these complaint procedures before the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders.

(1) For more information about the exhibitions, please see pages 32 and 40 of this report.

(2) For further information about these publications, please see pages 20 and 24 of this report.

2018

PUBLICATIONS AT A GLANCE

PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS THROUGH PUBLIC POLICIES: THE TIME IS NOW

Human rights defenders play a fundamental role in the advancement of democracy, equality and justice. However, they continue to be stigmatised, harassed, criminalised and murdered in the Americas and across the rest of the world. International human rights standards, namely the United Nations Declaration on HRDs, urge States **to implement measures for the effective protection of defenders and to build an enabling environment where the right to defend human rights can be exercised without fear of threats and attacks.** But in practice, few governments take action.

In view of this increasingly hostile situation for HRDs, Protection International and the [Centre for Justice and International Law \(CEJIL\)](#) brought together their expertise in [The Time is NOW for effective public policies for the right to defend human rights](#). The publication analyses how, despite the growing number of international standards on HRD protection, the protection models implemented by States focus mostly on reactive responses to individual cases of HRDs at risk, ignoring the necessary preventive actions and structural changes that are required in order to ensure a safe and enabling environment for all HRDs.

Drawing from their experiences in the field, PI and CEJIL reflect on the need to adopt comprehensive public policies to tackle the structural problem of threats and attacks on HRDs, and give proposals for making these policies more effective by ensuring the participation of HRDs in the elaboration of the policy, and by taking into account the specific individual and collective needs of HRDs groups.

“There is an immediate necessity to review from top to bottom the so-called protection mechanisms, which should be turned into public policies and then be assessed in terms of strengths but also gaps and limitations”

Enrique EGUREN,
Senior Advisor at PI and author of
The Time is NOW



Throughout 2018, PI and CEJIL presented *The Time is NOW* in nine different countries, including Colombia, Honduras, Guatemala, Switzerland, Peru, Mexico, the USA and Germany. In these events, human rights defenders, civil society organisations, public officials and decision-makers had the opportunity to collectively discuss and understand the need to approach the protection of human rights defenders from a public policy angle.





CRIMINALISATION SERIES #3: THE CRIMINALISATION OF LA LUCHA MOVEMENT IN DR CONGO

In September 2018, Protection International launched the third report in its Criminalisation Series: [The criminalisation of social movements - The case of la Lucha movement in the Democratic Republic of Congo](#) (DR Congo). Available in **French**, this publication is part of a series of reports which take concrete cases that bring to light the criminalisation of human rights defenders in different countries and contexts

Focusing on the case of la Lucha, the report exposes the consequences of the criminalisation process that human rights defenders face in DR Congo on a daily basis.

Since its beginnings in 2012, la Lucha has been the target of aggressive strategies of criminalisation, consisting predominantly of arbitrary arrests and imprisonments, both building on a long process of stigmatisation towards the movement. The rates of criminalisation increased notably after la Lucha began protesting against President Kabila's regime and advocating for transparent elections and a democratic transition.

The publication analyses the ways in which criminalisation directly affects both the members of la Lucha and those who support the movement. Additionally, the report highlights the impact of criminalisation on other national social movements and civil society organisations.

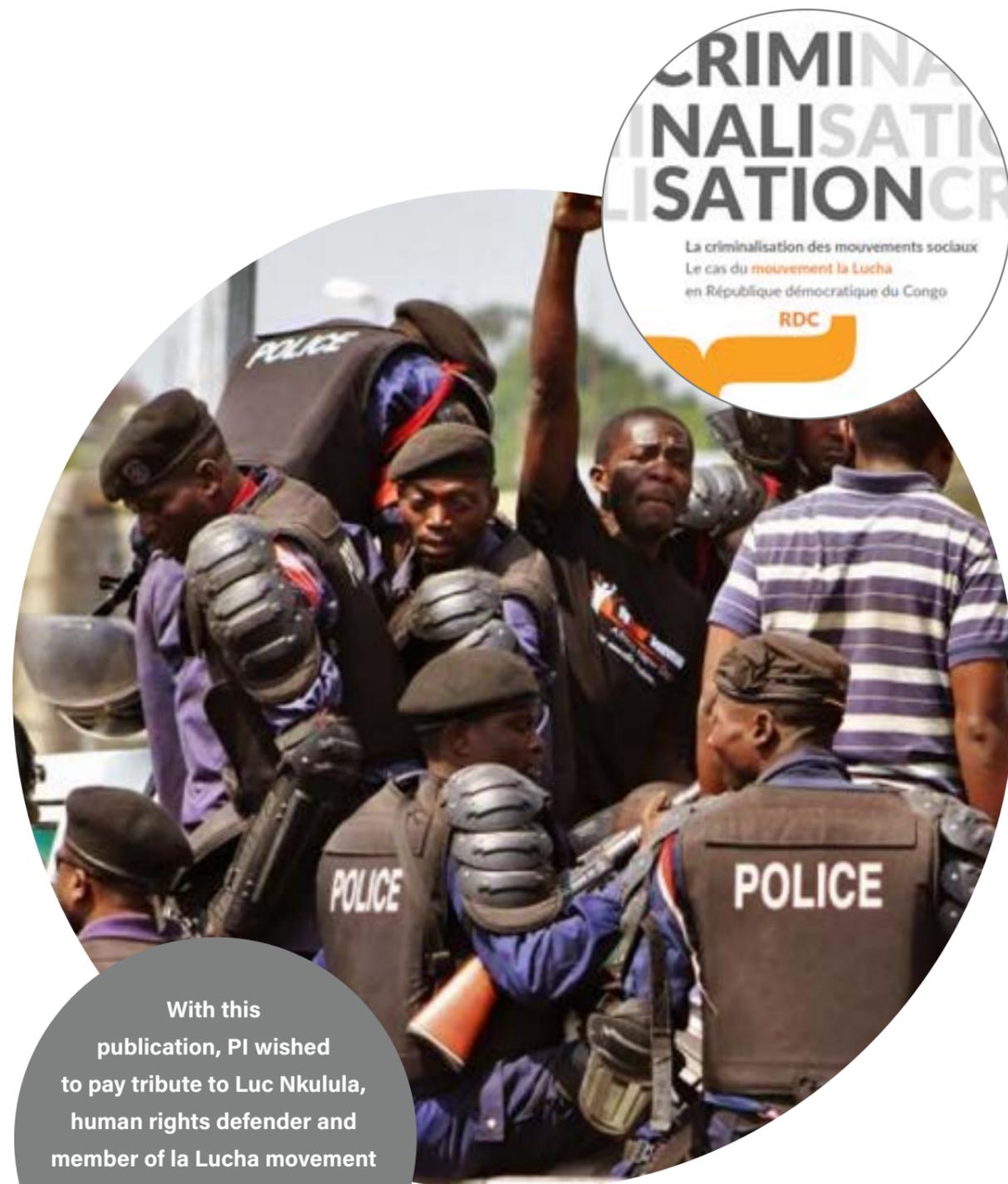
Moreover, it examines the main counter-strategies that HRDs resort to and includes important recommendations to national authorities and decision-makers.

In September 2018, Protection International and the [European Network for Central Africa \(EurAc\)](#), with support from MEP Marie Arena, organised a conference at the European Parliament to present la Lucha report to key decision makers. The event brought together representatives of la Lucha movement, the European Commission and several civil society organisations. PI used the event to publicly outline its key recommendations which could contribute to the development of resources and good practices in favour of HRDs at risk in DR Congo.

Founded by the Congolese youth, la Lucha defines itself as a non-violent and politically independent movement that advocates for social justice in DR Congo, tackling issues such as unemployment or access to water and electricity. Their actions include non-violent marches, sit-ins, calls for community mobilisation - the so-called "Salongo"³ - and awareness raising campaigns.

(3) The Swahili term 'Salongo' mainly refers to community sanitation works,

CRIMINALISATION SERIES #3: THE CRIMINALISATION OF LA LUCHA MOVEMENT IN DR CONGO



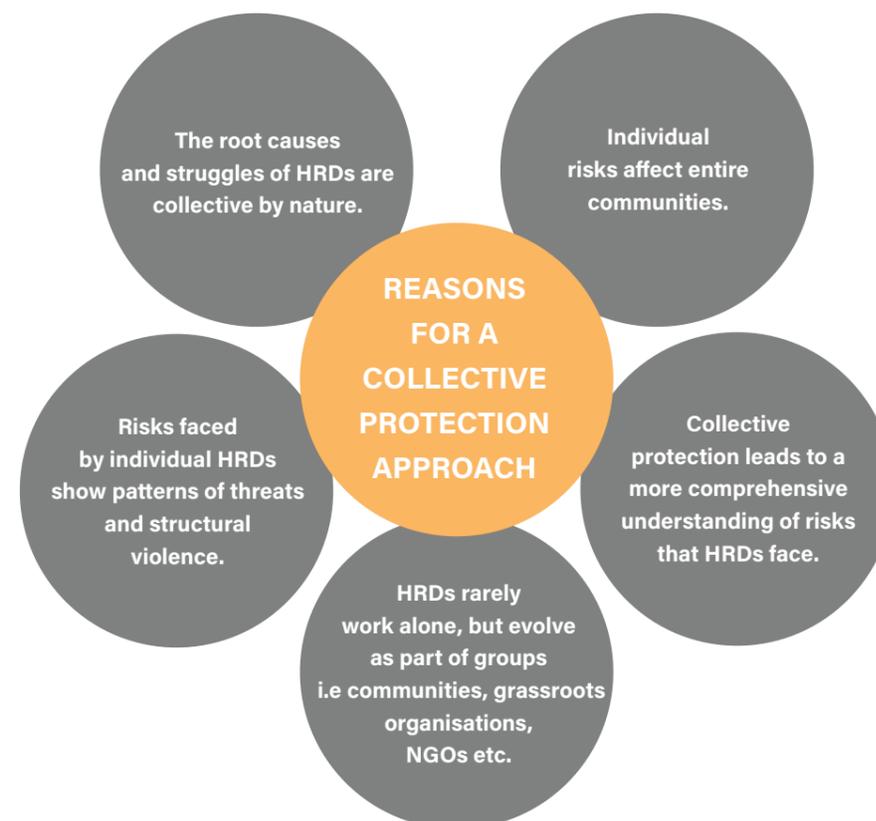
CRIMINALISATION
La criminalisation des mouvements sociaux
Le cas du mouvement la Lucha
en République démocratique du Congo
RDC

With this publication, PI wished to pay tribute to Luc Nkulula, human rights defender and member of la Lucha movement who died in tragic circumstances on 10 June 2018.

A COLLECTIVE APPROACH TO THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

In December 2018, Protection International published Collective Protection of Human Rights Defenders: A collective approach to the right to defend human rights. This publication, the flagship element of our “Communities are HRDs!” campaign, aims to contribute to a **shift in the prevailing individualistic narratives on the protection of HRDs**. For protection to be effective, sustainable and reach a greater number of human rights defenders, a **shift towards a more collective mindset** is crucially needed. This publication presents collective protection as **strategies, measures and actions** that aimed at protecting both a collective actor (an organisation, a community, a group) and the individuals who are part of it. The publication also outlines the challenges which stem from an individualistic approach to the protection of HRDs as well as why collective protection is typically neglected in protection policies.

The publication provides recommendations on how to implement a collective protection approach into protection strategies. In particular, it highlights that the international community must propose policies and measures aimed at protecting communities or groups that face threats due to their human rights defence activities. The ultimate goal must be to create an **enabling, networked environment for all HRDs to achieve their Right to Defend Human Rights (RDHR)**. Nevertheless, acknowledging and implementing a collective approach to protection should not remove cases where individual protection is necessary. **Individual and collective protection must be two sides of the same coin.**



SOUTHEAST ASIA

COLLECTIVE PROTECTION OF LAND RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN COLOMBIA: THE CASE OF THE NASA INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Situated in the Northern Cauca Region in Colombia, the Nasa indigenous peoples have historically been victims of serious mass human rights violations, including massacres, food blockages or forced displacement. Today, the Nasa communities continue to face stigmatisation, harassment and undue criminalisation due to their human rights work, notably their fight to protect their rights to land and territory. Notwithstanding their difficult history, these indigenous peoples hold a strong sense of their collective identity and are well aware of the collective impact of the longstanding rights violations committed against them.

This is what Protection International and its partner [Pensamiento y Acción Social \(PAS\)](#) identified as an alternative collective protection approach that deserved much attention. Launched in September 2018, "[Collective protection of defenders of the right to land and territory in Colombia: indigenous communities and collective actors. The ACIN case](#)" is the result of a two year investigation carried out by PI and PAS, together with the Association of Indigenous Cabildos⁴ from the North of Cauca (ACIN)⁵.

ABOUT ACIN
The Association of Indigenous Cabildos from the North of Cauca (ACIN) is composed of 17 Indigenous Councils and represents 120,000 indigenous inhabitants of the Northern Region of the Cauca Department. ACIN focuses on five major areas: environmental economics, people and culture, justice and harmony, communication and external relations for truth and life, and the defence of life.

Drawing from research on collective protection and on experience in the accompaniment of indigenous and rural-based communities, the publication attempts to understand and analyse the collective ways in which the Nasa indigenous peoples think and protect themselves. Through both interviews and focus groups with members of the Nasa communities and ACIN, PI and PAS were able to learn about the needs that these defenders face, their vulnerabilities, and also their capacities and counter-strategies to threats and attacks.

Beyond being a contribution to a new approach to HRD protection, one that includes the collective dimension of indigenous peoples' needs, this publication seeks to generate changes in Colombian legislation towards the **recognition of indigenous governance structures and the safeguard of their collective rights**. Research also showed the **need to broaden protection mechanisms and measures** so that they effectively reach the indigenous communities in the North of Cauca.



(4) An Indigenous Cabildo is a special public entity whose members have been elected and are recognised in the community.
(5) In Spanish, *Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca*.

COLLECTIVE POWER! REGIONAL EXCHANGE OF THAI AND INDONESIAN HRDS

December 2018 marked a milestone for Protection International, with our **first ever regional community exchange**. Over 4 days in Southern Thailand, defenders of the Southern Peasants Federation of Thailand (SPFT) met with Indonesian defenders from six organisations of buruh tani (farm workers). The objective was to **foster a South-to-South learning exchange**, bringing together stories of hope and sharing knowledge on the defense of rights in their respective communities.

The SPFT consist of five peasant groups, namely Klongsai, Gao Mai, Nam Daeng, Permsup, and Santi (Prasaeng District), while the Indonesian farming groups came from the provinces of East Java, South Sumatera, Riau, West Sumatera, and Palu.

In both national contexts, community based HRDs face exploitation of their natural resources, with agrarian conflicts against state-owned projects on the rise. The development of power plants, palm oil plantations and national parks continually violate the rights of these communities. Add to this the criminalization of HRDs and widespread impunity, makes an **ever more challenging landscape for defenders in Thailand and Indonesia**.

The exchange allowed the defenders to highlight their successes as well as their struggles, and most importantly **learn from each other**. The SPFT members demonstrated to their Indonesian

companions how, through the application of comprehensive security management and protection measures, the defenders have challenged both institutional and private interest over their territories. As a result, the SPFT have achieved both social and economic development that is sustainable, addressing a variety of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** especially SDG 16 (promote Peaceful & Inclusive Societies), 5 (achieve Gender Equality) and 10 (reduce Inequality).

The SPFT case is emblematic for defenders in Southeast Asia, one where a holistic security and protection approach can safeguard a community and territory for years to come. This was a strong impression taken home by the Indonesian defenders.

During the 4 days, the defenders actively participated in workshops, information sessions and lively mealtimes. Lessons learned and shared covered a wide range of topics, such as the use of non-violent actions reinforced by legal knowledge and protection, empowering women to recognize their rights, and alternative advocacy through art. The exchange helped to build solidarity and close bonds between the communities, despite the language differences!

Our teams in Thailand and Indonesia are **closely working together**, regularly analysing the situation in the region, and developing and identifying new preventive strategies to **better support HRDs**. On top of this they are collaborating with relevant local, national and regional actors such as the **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights** Regional Office for South-East-Asia, the **National Human Rights Commission** in Thailand as well as the National Commission on Human Right (**KomnasHam**) and the National Commission on Violence Against Women (**Komnas Perempuan**) in Indonesia. Regular meetings and workshops with those institutions aim to identify more creative ways to execute their mandate to protect HRDs.



ART FOR RESISTANCE - WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND HAND-SEWN QUILTS

#ArtForResistance

In Thailand, defending rights is a common struggle where both men and women collectively stand to protect their environment, land and community. Thai women human rights defenders (WHRDs) are subject to systematic violence and discrimination due to their gender and their unyielding struggle for rights, equality and justice. Between 2014-2017, at least 170 community and rural based WHRDs were the target of judicial harassment (from both State and non-State actors) due to their defense of the environment, land rights and equal access to natural resources.



As part of its support to community-based WHRDs in Thailand, Protection International, alongside the [Canada Fund for Local Initiatives](#) (CFLI), created a space for 20 WHRDs to tell their stories, learn from and connect with each other through the collective craft of hand-sewn quilts.

Inspired by “arpillars” (colorful, three-dimensional quilts originating as a symbol of protest in rural areas of the Andes Mountains), the “quilting exercise” allowed the defenders to exchange the struggles which they, their families and their communities face.

Given that quilting is a creative process, one rich in tradition, the women allowed their ideas and inspiration to flow, creating bonds between their respective communities, and together creating powerful quilt designs.

The WHRDs that participated in the project represented their organisations and collectives, such as [EmPower Foundation](#), Southern Peasant Federation of Thailand (SPFT), the [National Human Rights Commission of Thailand](#), Save Lahu group, Rak Ban Heang environmental group, Khon Rak Ban Kerd environmental group, Esan Land Reform Network and Rak Nam Oum group.

Luke Duggleby, a Bangkok-based British photographer who Protection International previously commissioned for the campaign [For Those Who Died Trying](#) and [#SidebySideWHRDsDiary2018](#), used this initiative in his [Quilts of Resistance](#) project. Duggleby portrays each of the 20 defenders in an impacting photo that captures the unique perspective that Thai WHRDs lend to the defense of human rights.

On International Women Human Rights Defenders Day 2018, Protection International [exhibited the quilts at a special event in Bangkok](#), alongside the Canadian Ambassador to Thailand and the 20 Thai WHRDs.

PREVENTING DIGITAL SECURITY THREATS AGAINST HRDS IN CAMBODIA

Between November and December 2018, Protection International (PI) worked together with the NGO [Equitable Cambodia](#) (EC) to tackle **digital security gaps that were exposing EC’s human rights work to digital threats and attacks.**

Before reaching out to PI, Equitable Cambodia had already experienced serious external security incidents, such as blog hacking and threats of confiscation of IT assets after the Cambodian Government closed the organisation down. Adding to this the increasingly unstable environment for human rights work, the need for improved digital security practices was evident.

A six day intervention with EC’s staff took place with the objective of **deploying, upgrading and configuring EC’s local IT environment.** This was followed by a **two day digital security introductory training** with EC’s staff, aimed at improving their skills and knowledge in digital security. In total, around 30 human rights defenders received training and hands-on practice to improve online and offline security concerning data storage, smartphones, internet browsing, anonymity and secure communications.

With the support of PI, Equitable Cambodia continues the process of deploying secure end devices, as well as adding collaborative tools to the e-mail encryption solution initiated during the capacity training workshops.

ABOUT EQUITABLE CAMBODIA

Established in 2012, EC advocates for the protection and defence of housing, land and natural resource rights in Cambodia through policy research, advocacy at the national and international level, coalition-building and community organisation, EC endeavours to transform the land and economic development practices of the country into a model that respects, protects, and fulfils the human rights of the Cambodian people.



FOR THOSE WHO DIED TRYING: A MUSIC ALBUM IN MEMORY OF THAI HRDS

2018 saw a new artistic contribution to the '[For Those Who Died Trying](#)' project, Protection International and [Luke Duggleby's](#) tribute to the struggles of human rights defenders in Thailand. In the format of a photo essay, the project originally looks to remember **those who died defending human rights and protecting the environment**.

Frank Horvat, Canadian classical composer, describes the **overwhelming emotion** he experienced when **first seeing the photographs of the missing or deceased Thai HRDs** featured in Duggleby's photoessay. Many Thai HRDs continue in their struggle to protect their environment and their communities against illegal dumping, deforestation, land grabbing and extractive projects. But **enforced disappearance is still a reality in Thailand**. Apart from raw emotion, Horvat's response was also artistic, manifesting into a musical album for string quartet.

Horvat composed the **70-minute, 35-movement album "For Those Who Died Trying"** based on each photo in Luke Duggleby's photo-essay. Performed by New-York based Mivos Quartet, **each movement is played alongside a photo of the Thai HRD subjects**, utilizing only the musical letters found in the names of each victim – implanting their unique musical DNA in every piece. National and international media covered the World Concert Premiere, held in Toronto in August 2018.

After its launched, the album grew into the international campaign [#music4HRDs](#), with the **classical music community raising awareness on the plight of HRDs** through the performance of movements from For Those Who Died Trying. This initiative is the **first campaign that unifies music and the work of HRDs**. To date, 49 string quartets around the globe have joined the campaign by posting videos of their performances of particular movements from Horvat's album.

The number of quartets engaging in this initiative continues to grow, with all videos viewable online at www.music4hrds.com.

In October 2018, Protection International brought the photo exhibition of "For Those Who Died Trying" to the [Human Rights Defenders World Summit in Paris](#).





AFRICA

WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN DR CONGO: A CASE STUDY

There are many challenges that make the work of human rights defenders increasingly threatening and unstable in Democratic Republic of Congo, and the situation of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) deserves specific attention. **WHRDs are exposed to gender-oriented threats, attacks and forms of criminalisation which make them a highly vulnerable group** with specific security and protection needs. In order to better respond to this situation, at the end of 2018, Protection International carried out **a baseline study to analyse and better understand the risks and specific needs of women human rights defenders** in the North and South Kivu regions of the DRC.

Throughout the development of the study, a total of **222 defenders**, including 138 WHRDs, were surveyed in 20 focus groups and 23 individual interviews. The participants in the study were members of local and international HRDs organisations, civil society organisations and political-administrative authorities in charge of citizen protection issues.

By analysing several indicators that play a key role in protection of WHRDs, the PI teams in DR Congo were able **to review existing internal tools and define the missing gaps in order to adapt their support to the specific needs of WHRDs.**

According to the study, **women HRDs not only face security challenges that involve**

their physical and psychological integrity (e.g. sexual harassment, discrimination related to traditional gender roles) but they **also face inequalities that have structural roots**, such as being fewer in number, rarely occupying positions of responsibility in organisations, or having a very limited presence in civil society organisations and public institutions.

With this study, PI was able to assess the strengths and the limitations of its support to human rights defenders in DR Congo, and consequently to **develop adapted and informed programmes that respond to the realities of the defenders working in the country.**



SECURITY MANAGEMENT FOR LONG-TERM PROTECTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The issue of land and housing rights is one fraught in South Africa. Out of this context a number of grass-roots movements have grown which campaign for the poor, homeless, and those who live in shacks.

The **PI Kenya team travelled to South Africa in 2018**, carrying out a needs assessment and security management training for HRDs of a grass-roots land rights movement. The defenders of this grass-roots movement



regularly come against threats and security risks from numerous perpetrators, state forces included. This creates an environment that can damage the stability of the movement and its members.

In this context, the PI Kenya team dedicated 2 days to complete the needs assessment, looking at the defenders' environment, activities and processes. The security management training was administered to the **ten most at-risk HRDs**, including both men and women HRDs. Over a series of sessions the defenders were instructed on areas such as digital security, context analysis for risks and threats, stakeholder analysis methods, as well as physical security management.

The trainings had both an individual and collective focus, with a second phase of training taking place 6 weeks later.

The resulting security plan developed by the defenders showed profound understanding and recognition of the risks and threats they face, and despite a resurfacing of the traumatic threats against them, the defenders applied the skills and tools they had acquired. Most notable were the **establishment of a security committee**, and the relocation of the movement's HQ to a more secure premises.

INTRODUCING DIGITAL SECURITY AT THE PANZI FOUNDATION

Founded in 1992 by Dr Denis Mukwege, world renowned Congolese gynaecologist and 2018 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, the **Panzi Foundation** operates to fund and implement critical programs serving survivors of sexual violence as well as the broader community in DR Congo.

Working alongside the Panzi Hospital, the Foundation's staff is exposed to **high levels of risks due to the nature of their work**. Their field missions not only

cover areas with a high presence of active armed groups, but their activities also imply dealing with cases of sexual violence closely linked to prosecution and impunity in the country. These elements build upon the fact that Dr. Mukwege supports

many of the pro-democracy movements in the country and that he continues to take a strong stance towards the authorities. Over the past years, he has been target of daily threats and attacks, including a murder attempt in

October 2012.

As a response to this increasingly dangerous context, in September

2018 Protection

International

conducted a

introductory digital security training

with the staff of the

Panzi Foundation,

the objective being

to improve digital

security awareness and

capacities. 20 staff members of

the Foundation were able to discuss

and practice end device security measures like encryption or strong passwords, and to learn

about secure communication solutions.

As a result of the training, **digital security is now taken into account very seriously in both the planning and deployment of activities by the Panzi Foundation.** Secure internet

communications and data protection software are now aspects that have acquired high priority

for the Foundation. In this line, Protection International and the Panzi Foundation would

pursue their partnership through 2019 with the objective of improving their skills and knowledge

in digital security.

"When defending the rights of others, one must still be capable of protecting his or herself. This is what we do with Protection International!"⁶

Dr. Denis Mukwege

In October 2018, Dr Denis Mukwege was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his incredible contribution to women's rights and peacebuilding.



(6) As said by Dr Denis Mukwege at Protection International's 2017 round-table in Brussels.

THE LONG-AWAITED RELEASE OF GERMAIN RUKUKI: WHEN WILL IT COME?

On 26 April 2018 **Germain Rukuki**, a Burundian human rights defender, was sentenced by the Ntahangwa High Court in Burundi to **32 years in prison**, an unprecedented sentence for a human rights defender in the country. His crime: working with ACAT-Burundi, a human rights organisation closed down by the government in 2016.

The decision of the court to impose a harsh verdict on Germain Rukuki is a notable miscarriage of justice and his case is an emblematic example of the deliberate and continuous attempt by the government of Burundi to silence human rights defenders in the country since 2015.

From the moment Germain was arrested in the early morning of 13 July 2017 in Bujumbura, Protection International issued several statements, urgent appeals and global solidarity campaigns to raise awareness about the case and send Germain messages of hope and support. In 2018 particularly, PI continued to **work closely with partners and like-minded organisations to call on the diplomatic**

Other examples of criminalisation of human rights defenders in Burundi are the conviction to 10 years in prison of Aimé Constant Gatore, Marius Nizigama and Emmanuel Nshimirimana (8 March 2018), from human rights organisation PARCEM; the conviction to 5 years in prison of Nestor Nibitanga from human rights organisation APRODH (13 August 2018); and the abduction of Marie-Claudette Kwizera, former treasurer of the ITEKA league (December 2015).

community to take action for Germain's release, including, among others, the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), or the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), notably issuing five **public statements**, sending letters and diplomatic briefings and organising meetings with key EU and UN diplomats. The UN Commission of Inquiry on

Burundi, in its report released in September 2018, stressed that

Germain's conviction is **unfAIR and part of a pattern of systematic attacks against human rights defenders.**

A process teeming with judicial irregularities

Germain was first detained by the National Intelligence Service and then transferred to the Ngozi prison, where he remains unlawfully incarcerated to date. During the first hearing in February 2018, after a 6 month long pre-trial phase, three more charges were added to the two original charges from August 2017. In early April 2018, Germain appeared before court for the second time and on 26 April, Germain was sentenced to 32 years in prison for charges of **"rebellion", "breach of State security", "participation in an insurrectional movement"**

and **attack on a "Head of State"**, despite the complete lack of concrete evidence presented by the prosecutors in court.

Bail under medical and humanitarian grounds

In June 2018, Germain had to undergo a surgical operation in Ngozi hospital after he fractured his ankle in prison. 7 days later, he was transferred back to Ngozi prison although his health condition was still critical. On 26 June, **he applied for bail under medical and humanitarian grounds. To date no response has been given.**

The appeal phase and beyond

On 29 May, Germain Rukuki appealed his conviction. On 26 November, after a 6 month wait, his appeal hearing took place before the Bujumbura Court of Appeal, but no decision came after the 30-day wait period. In March 2019, it would be publicised that his judicial file had been lost.



FREE GERMAIN RUKUKI



You can join **PI's global campaign** to release Germain by posting a message of solidarity using the hashtag **#Rukuki** and by spreading the word among your social networks.

In 2018 PI continued to support Burundian defenders living in exile, with over twenty Burundian HRDs and organisations receiving capacity building workshops on physical and digital security.

CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA



WE'RE LIKE YOU: THE INVISIBLE FIGHTING FOR LAND AND LIFE IN COLOMBIA

Located in the Magdalena Medio region of Colombia, the peasant communities of El Guayabo, Bella Unión, Nueva Esperanza, Las Pavas and El Garzal have been strongly affected by the armed conflict. With more than 20 years fighting for their land and suffering more than 300 attacks, including land eviction, displacement and destruction of their crops, every day they struggle to protect their land rights and obtain legal ownership of their territories.

For Protection International and its partner partner [Pensamiento y Acción Social](#) (PAS), supporting these communities entailed breaking their isolation and counteracting discriminatory stereotypes promoted by public, economic and media actors. That is how, together with Spanish artist [Ze Carrión](#), they conceived **"We're like you"**.

"We're like you" aimed to **give the five communities from the Magdalena Medio region a voice and to make the world aware of their situation and struggles**, which reflect those of thousands of other communities across the world. The initiative had a two-fold objective: First, painting and visualizing their own history and collective memory would gather the communities around a common project that, for once, would not put

them against an enemy but rather provide them with light, hope and strength. Then, these visual stories were shared with the outside world.

Ze Carrión, painter and graffiti artist, spent two months living among the five communities. All inhabitants of the communities, gathered to share their stories, visions, dreams and hopes which, with Ze's support through art workshops, they painted onto canvases. In some cases the community participants even embroidered them. Ze Carrión also created his own canvases and painted the walls of the communities' houses, turning their environment into a work of art. Graffiti was used as a means to connect urban and rural realities.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN COLOMBIA: IGNORED & REPRESSED

In 2018, 155 human rights defenders were killed in Colombia⁷. Attacks, threats, criminalisation and defamation are part of HRDs' daily lives. The situation is even more complex in rural areas, due to the conditions of exclusion, abandonment and lack of State presence in most of the Colombian countryside. The only measures adopted by the Government to protect rural communities - limited to providing cell phones, bullet-proof vests and armoured cars - demonstrate the indifference of public authorities towards these communities, which are ultimately invisible. When communities defend their rights, they are accused of being terrorists, guerrillas and criminals as a means to justify repression and attacks against them.

(7) As reported in the 2018 Annual Report of [Programa Somos Defensores](#).

“We’re like you” ultimately sought to show the suffering, struggles, desires and hopes of people, peasants and human rights defenders, striving to protect their territory in order to live with dignity.

It showed their desires as much as their struggle for peace and tranquility in their territories.

In December 2018, PI brought the initiative to the [HRDs World Summit](#) in Paris in the form of a photo exhibition.



DEFENDING LAND RIGHTS: GUATEMALAN INDIGENOUS DEFENDERS MEET EUROPEAN DECISION-MAKERS

As part of a joint project with the NGO [Farmamundi](#) and the [Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation](#), Protection International accompanied two women human rights defenders, representing indigenous communities in Guatemala, during a three-week advocacy tour in Europe.

The objective: **to advocate for their land rights and those of their communities** in the territories of San Pablo (Department of San Marcos) and Ixquisis (Department of Huehuetenango) in the country. The adverse situation of human rights defenders in Guatemala requires inter-institutional and multi-level responses with advocacy capacities also at the international level.

Like many of the peasant and indigenous communities in Guatemala, San Pablo and Ixquisis have been victims of the wrenching impact of extractive projects implemented in their lands. For more than ten years, the members of these communities have suffered the consequences of the construction of hydropower projects, led by private companies with the support of national authorities and international financial institutions. The environmental impact includes the pollution of the rivers, tree felling and destruction of hills, and has very serious repercussions in the daily lives of the communities.

In this line, the advocacy tour included Spain, Belgium and Germany, and comprised of **meetings with civil society organisations**, such as [Amnesty International](#) and [Front Line Defenders](#), as well as **with key policy-makers working at national and international levels**, such as the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At each meeting the two WHRDs explained to the different actors **how the extractive projects being constructed in their territories violate national legislation**, given that they were granted without prior, free and informed consultation as stated in the Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).



They placed special emphasis on how opposing actors, in most cases transnational corporations, carry out **defamation and criminalisation campaigns** that aim at stigmatising and de-legitimising the demands of their communities. In recognition for their work defending land and territorial rights, the Peaceful Resistance of the Microregion of Ixquis, which groups 12 indigenous communities, received the [Front Line Defenders Award for the Americas](#) in May 2018.



BUILDING BRIDGES FOR BETTER PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS: INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATION MISSION TO CAUCA, COLOMBIA

Predeominantly inhabited by afro-descendant and indigenous peoples, the **Pacific Coast of the Department of Cauca in Colombia** is one of the deadliest regions for human rights defenders in the country. In 2018 alone, 28 defenders were killed in the region, an increase of 55.5% compared to the previous year⁸.

Protection International and its partner [Pensamiento y Acción Social](#) (PAS) have long accompanied HRDs living in the region, supporting their fight for land rights and their efforts to have their ancestral and ethnic authorities recognised by the Colombian government. As part of their support, an **International Observation Mission on the situation of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders in the Pacific Coast of Cauca** took place in September 2018. The mission was convened by PI and PAS, together with the grassroots organisation [COCOAUCA](#)⁹, which coordinates Community Councils and ethnic-territorial organisations in the region.

Two objectives were at the heart of this mission. The first was to observe **the situation of human rights defenders and ethnic-territorial organisations in the region**, notably after the development of new conflicts as a result of the 2016 Peace Agreement.

The second was **to advocate for informed and effective protection responses before local, regional and national authorities.**

Thirteen diplomatic missions participated in the field visit, including the Delegation of the European Union; the Embassies of Germany, Norway, Italy, Spain, France, The United Kingdom, Finland, Sweden, Belgium and The Netherlands; the UN Verification Mission in Colombia and the Organisation of American States (OEA) Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia.

Throughout the development of the mission, the delegates were able to hear the voices, **the demands and the proposals**

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS PRESENTED TO EU POLICYMAKERS

To the European Parliament: to continue monitoring human rights violation in Guatemala and create spaces for discussion that give visibility to the situation of HRDs in the country.

To the European Union Member States: to put an end to the alleged public funding of extractive projects in the communities of San Pablo and Ixquis.

To all the diplomatic missions: to carry out a field visit to the communities of San Pablo and Ixquis in order to ensure that international bodies are aware of the situation.



(8) As reported in the 2018 Annual Report of [Programa Somos Defensores](#).

(9) In Spanish, COCOAUCA stands for "Coordinación de Consejos Comunitarios y Organizaciones de Base del Pueblo Negro de la Costa Pacífica del Cauca".

from Community Councils, indigenous associations, ethnic-territorial organisations and a demobilised group of FARC ex-combatants. The members of the communities referred to the **stigmatisation, the forced displacement, and the attacks, killings and risks hanging over their territories**, which derive from illicit crops, illegal mining and industrial fishing amongst other factors.

The success of the mission stemmed from the wide presence of the diplomatic community and the atmosphere of trust that surrounded the dialogues between the mission members and the representatives of the communities. At the end of the visit, the social leaders applauded the fact that the broad agenda of the mission reflected the scope of the risks that HRDs are exposed to in Colombia. In their own words, they felt that the international community was able to recognise first-hand what was happening to them and what made them merit the international support they were requesting.

**KEY DEMANDS
TRANSMITTED BY
PI AND PAS TO
THE LOCAL
AUTHORITIES**

To open a municipal space for dialogue that should include Community Councils, Indigenous Authorities and ethnic-territorial organisations, together with the international community.

To recognise ethnic authorities as human rights defenders, to raise awareness about the right to defend human rights and the need to receive necessary protection from the Colombian Government.

To develop campaigns that counter the stigmatisation which hangs over both the Community Council and the ethnic-territorial communities.



FINANCIAL REPORT

PROFIT AND LOSS STATEMENT FOR YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2018

2018 (€)

Income

Revenue - Core

Governmental Agencies	727 535
Trust and Foundations	759 099
Other Revenue	34 257
Total Core Revenue	1 520 891

Revenue - Earmarked

Governmental Agencies	981 233
Trust and Foundations	382 667
Total Earmarked Revenue	1 363 900

Total Income 2 884 791

Costs

Personnel & Related	1 588 579
Programmes	727 910
Operating and Administrative	332 395
Governance & Organisational Development	141 591

Total Costs 2 790 474

Income (Profit) 94 316

BALANCE SHEET AT 31 DECEMBER 2018

2018 (€)

Assets

Fixed Assets	16 957
Cash & Cash Equivalents	1 229 155
Debtors	109 558
Deferred Expenses	-
Grants Receivable - Governmental	141 392
Grants Receivable - Non-Governmental	42 711

Total Assets 1 539 773

Liabilities & Reserves

Liabilities

Current Liabilities	174 788
Provisions	-
Deferred Grants	786 579
Total Liabilities	961 368

Reserves

Social Liability Funds	87 262
Reserve Funds	491 145
Total Reserves	578 407

Total Liabilities & Reserves 1 539 775

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Thank you!

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