

FOCUS STORIES

2020



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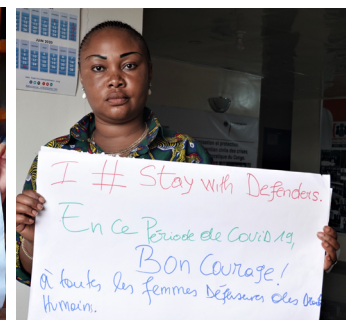
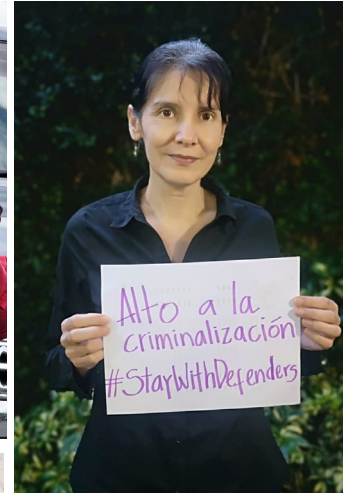
FOCUS STORIES

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PROTECTION INTERNATIONAL is an international non-profit organisation that runs comprehensive protection programmes for both women and men human rights defenders (W/HRD) at risk. Since 2007, Protection International (PI) has been working with local partners in over 40 countries across the globe.



#StayWithDefenders



1 Time to Reinvent Ourselves: Stepping up to Security Challenges in Times of Covid-19

We launched a new cross-regional, interdisciplinary team to combat the rise in digital security threats and improve IT set-up

Where was it?

Online, Global

What happened?

To stay close to defenders during this critical time, we set up a digitalisation task force to operate remotely, safely and securely. The team's two main aims are to improve organisational digital security policies and best practices, and ensure that teams are equipped with the necessary infrastructure and tools to stay connected with W/HRDs.

The task force purposefully includes IT and digital security specialists, senior advisors, communications officers and protection officers from across the whole organisation to make sure that its work plan adequately reflects the needs of staff within varying contexts and disciplines.

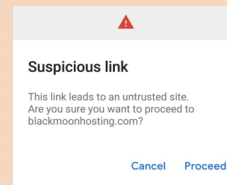
How did we get there?

After launching a diagnostic survey to identify needs and concerns arisen from the COVID-19 outbreak, we ensured that urgent cases received support as soon as possible.

We then designed a PI 2020+ Digitalisation Plan, with a clear timeline to address immediate, medium term and long term needs for the organisation. Meanwhile, we provided insights and suggestions for all team members

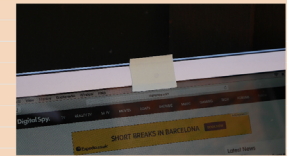
FACT OR MYTH? FACT OR MYTH?

OCTOBER 2020



If I've opened a suspicious website but didn't download anything,

DECEMBER 2020



It is possible that your laptop camera can be accessed/activated against your will to spy on you. Therefore, I should cover my camera

to make informed, autonomous decisions about what is best for adapting their office cultures to confinement conditions. We organised discussions about remote support, capacity building, and preserving protection networks. We drafted suggestions for remote work and remote team management and provided tips for work-life balance online.

The outcome of all these activities is a new IT library of digital security resources and multimedia content. Through video tutorials, podcasts, webinar recordings, infographics and publications, the IT library spans from the most basic tools, including password management and videoconferencing platforms, to more complicated matters, such as secure ways to organise public online meetings and to react in case of attacks or incidents during online meetings. All these elements proved to be helpful for PI staff, who promptly integrated them when carrying out online workshops, trainings, and meetings with partners and W/HRDs.

While new tools, pedagogical materials and policies are being developed for the immediate needs brought on by COVID-19, all solutions are being developed with a longer-term vision in a way that is consistent with our [2019 – 2023 Global Strategy](#).

Why does it matter?

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, it became immediately clear that both PI staff and W/HRDs would need additional support to conduct their work during confinement. Public health measures requiring social distancing meant that nearly all activities PI was carrying out with defenders and partners would suddenly need to take place online. Thanks to the digitalisation task force, we managed to find new, safe ways to stay with defenders, test new IT tools and reinvent our work in a sustainable way. We also established a new working culture that can survive the pandemic.

Passwords





Redefining the Risk Approach: Recommendations for W/HRD-centric minimum standards

2 Room for Improvement: Redefining the Risk Approach Initiative

15 years since the first manual on risk approach for W/HRDs, practitioners work together on a new set of standards

Where was it?

Online, Global

What happened?

The risk approach has become an integral tool for addressing the protection of W/HRDs around the world. Practitioners from Protection International first conceptualised and elaborated the idea back in 2005, which marks 15 years since the launch of the [first Manual on the risk approach](#) for defenders.

We seized this anniversary as an opportunity to reflect critically on how the risk approach is being applied in practice by organising an online consultation among experts to work together on new standards.

The ultimate goal is to produce a set of agreed-upon recommendations about risk analyses and protection plans for defenders, which can be used as a reference (“minimum standard”) and benchmark by W/HRDs, State and government officials, civil society organizations, and all other actors contributing to the protection of W/HRDs.

How did we get there?

We organised asynchronous, online consultation surveys and live virtual meeting sessions to engage experts across continents and time zones. We gradually incorporated their lived experiences, unique specialities, perspectives and cultural contexts into the draft recommendations.

We did so by creating a diverse panel of experts, including members of civil society, protection mechanisms, inter-governmental bodies, W/HRD observatories, W/HRD national or regional networks, and academics—covering the Americas, Africa, Europe, MENA, and Southeast Asia. We worked together to review, edit, and ultimately produce a list of univesally applicable recommendations with the intention of developing further advocacy actions into 2021.

Why does it matter?

The adoption of the risk approach has been very rapid since, among other reasons, it offers simple and easily applicable tools for conducting a situated analysis for W/HRDs under threat, which informs effective decision-making. However, its indiscriminate use has also shown its shortcomings and limitations.

Risk analysis has often become an objective in itself, as if it were the only thing to do, instead of being a step towards what really matters, which is setting a plan of action—a protection plan. In other words, a diagnosis is made, but no treatment is given.

Within protection mechanisms, defenders are given a “quantification of their level of risk” arbitrary figures created within spreadsheets that reduce complex realities into one-dimensional numbers and that determine if State authorities will act. In these processes, W/HRDs sometimes undergo “information extraction”—they are forced to show evidence of being at risk, as if they were under investigation. Often, risk analyses are very general, not contextualised within defenders real situations, and lack a gendered and intersectional approach.

[By revitalising how risk approach is understood and implemented](#), these recommendations offer pragmatic, realistic, inclusive, yet diversely applicable statements to institutions, organisations, and defenders in need of a risk analysis or protection plan.

3 “We Are Isolated, but Definitely not Alone!” New Ways of Working Remotely With Communities

Strengthening protection networks in Colombia despite COVID-19 confinement

Where was it?

La Primavera, Colombia

What happened?

We implemented new ways of working remotely with young people, women and indigenous guards from three different communities, who have been confined within their territories throughout the year due to COVID-19. Compliance with public health measures has not come without its difficulties for communities that, even before the COVID-19 outbreak, have been dealing with limited access to food, drinking water and other basic supplies—coupled with little to no access to information, poor communication infrastructure and high unemployment. Now, COVID-19 has made it even harder for these highly vulnerable communities to enjoy their right to defend human rights. We did not want them to feel further abandoned in the arduous task of defending their rights, even if it was difficult for us to visit them.

How did we get there?

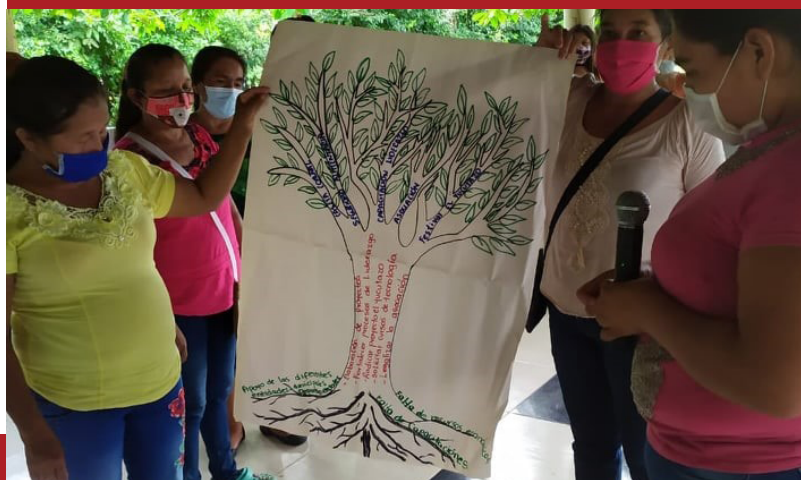
Together with the national human rights NGO Corporación Claretiana Norman Pérez, we developed different activities to keep in touch and work in collaboration with the communities. We organised regular follow-up phone calls with community members and leaders to discuss their concerns in the midst of isolation, as well as ways for us to respond to their needs. We spoke with the leaders at least once a week, and we also arranged a collective phone call for each community in which ten of their members could discuss with our colleagues in Colombia. We provided facemasks, anti-bacterial gel and disinfectant to the indigenous guards and leaders to help them monitor

their territory safely. We also supported the functionality of their communication channels by providing mobile top-ups to enable contact between the community and their support networks. We organised, when possible, a series of online meetings with indigenous guards, young people and women to address human rights and, ethnic-territorial rights as well as ways to claim and defend them. We also provided food and delivered educational materials on human rights, ethnic rights and women's rights to ease their situation and provide them with supplies to organise their own meetings locally, so that they can more easily spread information to a greater number of people in their communities.

Why does it matter?

Communities felt supported, even from afar. Despite isolation and distance, they continued to turn to us for accompaniment in their human rights work and for advice whenever their right to defend human rights was violated. Their activities have not stopped, since communities have managed to adapt to the new conditions imposed by the pandemic. They are maintaining their advocacy activities, as well as meeting internally and reflecting on their own struggles.

Through our online sessions, 36 indigenous guards, 18 young people and 13 women began to deepen their knowledge about the defence of their rights and the advancement of collective projects related to indigenous territorial expansion. This, in turn, allowed indigenous communities to better promote, protect and preserve their cultures, traditions and ancestral wisdoms.



4 Untold Stories: Community Communicator Wins Award for Capturing Quarantine Impact

Human rights defender and member of the Mataquesuintla community communication network, Leonel Rodriguez, wins award at film festival organised by the T'zikín Network

Where was it?

Online, Mesoamerica

What happened?

Leonel Rodriguez, a member of the Community Communication Network, took second place in the 8th Film and Video Exhibition in Defence of Life and Territory for his documentary [Sobrevivencia Campesina](#), ("Peasant Survival").

The exhibition was organised by the Tz'ikin Network, a community communication initiative by filmmakers, audio-visual collectives and community video groups from the Mayan and Ladino Indigenous Peoples of Guatemala.

How did we get there?

In 2019, Leonel participated in a training on how to use your cell phone to create short videos, which is part of our workshop "Communication to face threats". He is also a member of the Community Communication Network, which was established as part of Protection International Mesoamerica's methodology for the strengthening

" Because of the unique opportunity of capturing the intimate life story of a peasant couple affected by the harsh effects of the quarantine. This short film reveals a local reality and a universal message in times of pandemics. We particularly appreciated the film's ability to record an out-of-the-ordinary event through the personal account of the woman peasant, as she claims her rights with absolute dignity.

- Jury of the Defence of Life and Territory Film Exhibition's comments on *Sobrevivencia Campesina*

collective protection. Although Leonel already had some video editing knowledge, the workshop not only earned him recognition as a community communicator but also allowed him to upgrade his skillset by learning how to create impactful content with limited resources—for example, using equipment as basic as a cell phone.

Why does it matter?

Communication, culture and cinema are key to spread community narratives in the current audio-visual landscape. There are many stories that are left untold by the mainstream media, especially now that the pandemic has limited access to territories. Leonel Rodríguez's short film captures the intimate life of a farmer couple afflicted by the harsh effects of COVID-19 confinement.

The success of this story, like others told by community communicators, lies in its creation—by the community for the community. The video had more than 6,500 views and more than 174 shares, proving once more how social media can be a powerful channel for raising awareness on communities confronted with multinational extractive projects. His award-winning documentary is also proof of the measurable difference the capacity-building can make—helping talented people to realise their vision.



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A Preventive Approach: Security Plans as a Strategy to Deal with Attacks Against WHRDs

Creating safety and protection strategies for women human rights defenders

Where was it?

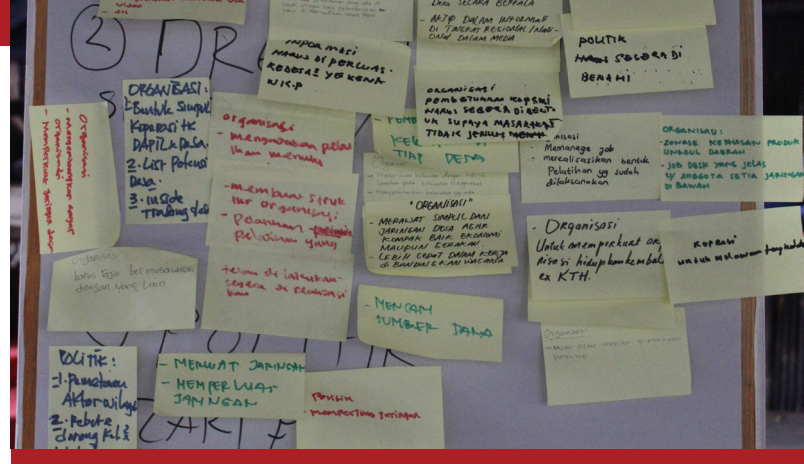
Jakarta, Indonesia

What happened?

The Legal Aid Foundation of the Indonesian Women's Association for Justice (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Asosiasi Perempuan Indonesia untuk Keadilan or LBH APIK) turned to Protection International for advice on how to proceed in the aftermath of the attack on their office in February 2020. The aggression was led by several police officers and other unidentified community organisations.

How did we get there?

We suggested to immediately reach out to networks able to quickly provide aid, such as the Victim and Witness Protection Agency (Lembaga Perlindungan Saksi dan Korban or LPSK) and officially report the incident to the police. We also provided assistance to LBH APIK with the referral of victim emergency funds, in order to quickly mitigate the impact of the attack on the organisation's operational capacity.



At the request of LBH APIK and Indonesia's Anti Violence Against Women National Commission (Komnas Perempuan), we elaborated a threat assessment and a security strategy for LBH APIK and their client. We recommended LBH APIK to increase security efforts in their office and involve a wider network of actors in order to exert pressure on the Indonesian legal authorities investigating the perpetrators of the attack.

Why does it matter?

LBH APIK provides legal assistance and support to women who experience injustice, violence and various forms of discrimination. By guiding the organisation through the protection process, we were able to assist in the development of organisational security strategies and best practices, as well as to facilitate the adoption of security measures for Women Human Rights Defenders.

We also advised LBH APIK's client to adopt the following personal safety measures during their travels: be accompanied on every trip, continually report back about location and identify different route options before travelling. As per the date of this publication, neither LBH APIK or their client have suffered from instances of violence or intimidation since the attack.

Nevertheless, we continue to encourage LBH APIK to be vigilant and to try to access emergency funds in case of imminent danger in order to quickly reinforce their security measures and prevent future harm.



Have a look at Protection International's latest publications:

- [2020 CEDAW Progress Report Card](#)
(available in English and Thai)
- [Cuaderno Gestáltico para el trabajo de protección con Defensoras de Derechos Humanos](#) (available in Spanish)
- [Cuidándonos - Una Guía para la Protección Colectiva de Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos an Áreas Rurales](#)
(available in Spanish)
- [National Human Rights Institutions and the Protection of Human Rights Defenders: Insights from Indonesia and Thailand](#)
(also available in French and Spanish)
- [Política pública de protección para defensores colectivos de la tierra y el territorio](#) (available in Spanish)

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