DIGITAL SAFETY TIPS FOR WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM EDITION

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Small steps can block big risks.

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Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) across Africa face a rapidly escalating threat of digital violence. WHRDs defending human rights are constantly targeted through online attacks like harassment, hacking, doxxing, and surveillance.

Over the past 16 days, we focused on providing you with actionable safety tips and tools. This pamphlet compiles them all to empower you to stay safe, visible, and resilient.

Our message remains clear:
- 🟧 Digital violence is real violence.
- 🟧 Protection starts with awareness and practical action.

By using this guide, you are taking a crucial step towards strengthening your security and the security of your collective.

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LIMIT WHAT YOU SHARE PUBLICLY.

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Your photos, routines, locations, family details, or work updates is the gateway to an attack

What to do:

- Avoid posting real-time locations
- Don't share travel plans publicly
- Blur or crop out personal details in photos
- Keep family and home information offline
- Review old posts and delete what you no longer want visible

Reducing your digital footprint reduces your risk.

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REVIEW YOUR PRIVACY SETTINGS REGULARLY

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A quick privacy check can block unwanted access.

What to do:

- Limit who can see your posts (Friends/Close Circle).
- Turn off location tagging.
- Review who can look you up using your phone number or email.
- Remove old or unknown followers.

ⓘ   **Your information = Your power. Protect it.**

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USE STRONG, UNIQUE PASSWORDS FOR EVERY ACCOUNT.

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Avoid reusing the same password across apps — it makes hacking easier

What to do:

- Use long passphrases (e.g., 4–5 random words)
- Avoid using names, birthdays, or common phrases
- Don't reuse passwords across apps
- Consider a password manager to keep them safe

Stronger passwords = stronger protection.

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BE CAREFUL WITH LINKS AND ATTACHMENTS.

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Many digital attacks start with a single click

What to do:

- Don't open links from unknown or suspicious accounts
- Double-check URLs for misspellings
- Confirm with the sender if a file or link feels unusual
- Avoid downloading documents from random WhatsApp groups

🔗LINK

ⓘ **A moment of caution can prevent a major breach.**

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PROTECT YOUR EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING.

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Digital violence doesn't only attack your devices — it targets your confidence, peace, and sense of safety.

What to do:

- Take breaks from triggering online spaces
- Mute or block accounts that harass or drain you
- Talk to a trusted friend, colleague, or support group
- Set boundaries around when you check messages or news
- Practice grounding techniques when feeling overwhelmed

Your wellbeing is part of your protection.

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SECURE YOUR MESSAGING APPS.

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Digital violence doesn't only attack your devices — it targets your confidence, peace, and sense of safety.

What to do:

- Use Apps with end-to-end encryption (WhatsApp/Signal)
- Use disappearing messages for sensitive chats
- Lock your messaging apps with a PIN or fingerprint
- Avoid sharing sensitive info in group chats
- Turn off cloud backups if they expose your messages

**Better control of your messages =
better personal safety.**

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BACKUP YOUR DATA SAFELY.

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Losing access to your accounts or devices can disrupt your work and expose sensitive information.

What to do:

- Regularly back up important files to an encrypted external drive
- Use secure cloud storage with strong passwords and 2FA
- Keep backup copies separate from your main device
- Avoid storing sensitive information in shared or public drives
- Test recovery options to make sure your backups work

ⓘ **Backups give you control and peace of mind**

PRIORITIZE ACCESSIBILITY IN YOUR DIGITAL SAFETY.

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Women defenders with disabilities often face unique barriers when navigating online spaces safely — from inaccessible apps to limited device controls.

What to do:

- Use accessibility settings (screen readers, captions, magnifiers, high contrast modes).
- Choose apps that support accessible security features (like voice verification or simplified 2FA).
- Save emergency contacts in an easy-access format.
- Ask trusted allies to support with reviewing settings or reporting abuse when needed.

(i) **Accessibility is protection**

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REPORT AND DOCUMENT ONLINE ABUSE EARLY.

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Many women defenders hesitate to report harassment or threats — but early documentation can prevent escalation and helps build evidence if you need support.

What to do:

- Screenshot abusive messages or comments
- Save links, usernames, dates, and times
- Keep a separate folder for evidence
- Tell a trusted colleague or support person
- Report the account or content on the platform

ⓘ **You don't have to face digital abuse alone — evidence strengthens your protection.**

ENABLE TWO-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION (2FA)

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Even with a strong password, your accounts can still be at risk. 2FA adds an extra layer of protection that makes it much harder for attackers to break in.

What to do:

- Use an authentication app like Google Authenticator, Microsoft Authenticator
- Turn on 2FA on your email, social media, and messaging apps (especially WhatsApp, Facebook, X, Google, and Instagram).
- Download backup codes and save them somewhere secure.
- Avoid using SMS codes when possible, as they can be intercepted.

ⓘ **2FA keeps your accounts safer even if someone gets your password.**

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BE CAUTIOUS WITH PUBLIC WI-FI

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A passphrase is longer, easier to remember, and much harder for attackers to guess than a short password.

What to do:

- Avoid accessing email, banking, or sensitive work on public Wi-Fi.
- If you must connect, use a VPN to encrypt your traffic.
- Turn off auto-connect on your devices.
- Forget the network once you're done.
- Create a hotspot from your phone when handling sensitive info.

ⓘ **A safer connection protects your communications — and the communities you defend.**

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PROTECT YOUR MENTAL SPACE ONLINE

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Digital threats don't just target your devices — they can drain your emotional energy. Setting boundaries helps you stay safe and grounded.

What to do:

- Limit exposure to violent or abusive content by muting keywords or accounts.
- Set specific times to check messages or social media — avoid constant monitoring.
- Curate your feed with accounts that are supportive, informative, and uplifting.
- Talk to a trusted colleague when something online affects your mental health.
- Take digital breaks: even 10–15 minutes away can reset your mind.

(i)   **Your well-being is part of your security.**

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SECURE YOUR PERSONAL PHOTOS AND FILES

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Women HRDs face higher risks of image misuse, doxxing, and non-consensual sharing. Protecting your personal files reduces these threats.

What to do:

- Store sensitive photos/files in encrypted folders or secure apps.
- Turn off auto-backup for private images.
- Avoid saving personal files on shared or work devices.
- Regularly delete files you no longer need.
- Back up important documents to a secure location.

ⓘ **Your privacy is your protection.**

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CHECK YOUR DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

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Doing a quick "digital footprint" check helps you spot risks like exposed phone numbers, leaked emails, or old posts that could be misused.

What to do:

- Search your name + location and review results.
- Remove personal info from old accounts or posts.
- Update privacy settings on platforms you still use.
- Request deletion where possible.
- Set alerts for your name to monitor new mentions.

ⓘ   **Awareness is protection.**

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SHARE AND TEACH DIGITAL SAFETY

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Empower others by passing on what you've learned. Teaching colleagues or community members about safe digital practices strengthens collective protection.

What to do:

- Share key tips from this campaign.
- Teach peers or local groups.
- Encourage 2FA, strong passwords, and privacy settings.
- Support each other against online harassment.

ⓘ   **Collective knowledge = stronger protection.**

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