FRONT LINE DEFENDERS

GLOBAL ANALYSIS 2022

Cover image: Saqez, Kurdistan, Iran, 26 October, 2022. Iranian people are seen during a protest to mark 40 days since the death in custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, which tragedy sparked Iran's biggest protest movement in over a decade.

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FRONT LINE DEFENDERS

CONTENTS

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS MEMORIAL 5

GLOBAL STATISTICS 6

GLOBAL 9

1. Overview 9
2. Criminalisation of defenders 10
3. Environmental, Land & Indigenous Peoples' Rights 14
4. Freedom of Expression 15
5. Freedom of Assembly and Protest Movements 16
6. Deadly violence against LGBTIQ+ defenders 17
7. Human Rights defenders in the context of conflicts and Crisis 17
8. Digital attacks and closing online space 18
9. The global policy environment for the protection of HRDs 20

AFRICA 23

AMERICAS 34

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC 47

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA 60

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA 72

METHODOLOGY 83

These are the names of the 401 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, from 26 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES, who were KILLED IN 2022, as reported to the Human Rights Defenders Memorial (HRD Memorial).

Afghanistan
Hanifa Nazari
Faizullah Faizi

Brazil
José Francisco Lopes Rodrigues (Quiqui)
José Gomes (Zé do Lago)
Márcia Nunes Lisboa
Joane Nunes Lisboa
Gabriel de Souza Araujo
Jonatas de Oliveira dos Santos
Ilma Rodrigues dos Santos
Edson Lima Rodrigues
Edvaldo Peireira Rocha
Alex Recarte Vasques Lopes
Dominic Mark Phillips
Bruno Pereira
Wesley Flávio da Silva
Victor Fernandes Kaiowa
Moacir de Jesus dos Santos Correa
Márcio Rosa Moreira
Normande Mariano Barbosa
Jheilson Batista Pecla Cordeiro
Janildo Oliveira Guajajara
Jael Carlos Miranda Guajajara
Gustavo Silva da Conceição
Vitorino Sanches
Flávia Amboss Mercon Leonardo
Uilson de Sá da Silva
Raimundo Nonato Silva Oliveira
Estela Verá

Chad
Narcisse Orédjé

Chile
Francisca Sandoval

China
Jigme Gyatso (Labrang Jigme)
Dong Jianbiao
Geshe Tenzin Palsang

Colombia
Efrén Ramos
Víctor Manuel Pacheco
Pablo Alfonso Ortiz Tarazona
Breiner David Cucuñame López
Guillermo Chicame Ipía
Miguel Alexi Amado Carrillo
Luz Marina Arteaga Henao
Mario Jonathan Palomino Salcedo
Wilson Cortés Molano
José Abelino Pérez Ortiz
Simeón Delgado Ruíz
Libardo Castillo Ortiz
Pedro Nel Sánchez Gallego
José Albeiro Camayo Güetio
Álvaro Peña Barragán
Deisy Sotelo Anacona
José Euclides González Marín
Julio César Bravo
Juan Carlos Nieto Calvario
Segundo Cortés Nastuacuás
Luis Chamapuro Quiro
Uladiemiro Vega García
Juan Carlos Jaramillo
Michael Stiven Pérez Salcedo
Elsy Erazo
Steven Loaiza Córdoba
Saulo Moreno
Bolivar Lavin Delgado Guevara
Jorge Alberto Tafur
Teofilo Acuña
Julio Victoria Cárdenas
Jorge Santofimio Yepes
Dilson Arbey Borja Roldán
Gustavo Antonio Torres
Arquímedes Rivera Remolina
Eduardo Emilio Vanegas Mendoza
Luciano Alvino Ortiz Pineda
Julián Andrés Suárez
Marcos Morales
Gustavo Guerrero Ramírez
Santiago Riveros
Andrea Rozo Rolón
Fabián Peréz Hooker
José Miller Correa Vásquez
Luis Carlos Bustamante Fernández
Richard Nilson Betancourth
Freddy Enrique Pallares Amaya
Alcibiades Moreno Moreno
Sarcelino Lana
Didier Hernández Rojas
Pablo Panduro Coquinche
Cristián Camilo Guevara
Alexander Pastrana Losada
Luis Alfredo Castaño Gómez
Carlos Antonio Marcillo Guanga
Alexander Fonseca Peñaranda
José Pascual Quevedo Velásquez
Alexander Tequia Cangrejo
Pablo Emilio Baquero Cárdenas
Fabinson Ducuara Barreto
Luis Alberto Nastacuas Taicus
Víctor Alfonso Giraldo Valencia
Francenet Yolima Pérez Olaya
John Jairo Esquivel
Wilmer Hernández Ormaza
Andrés Eduardo Cruz Gómez
Erminson Rivera
José Obdulio Sánchez
María Elvia Gómez Alzate
María José Arciniegas Salinas
Yesid Caña
Henry Oliveros Vallesilla
Misael Fernando Ávila Solarte
Luis Antonio Tombe Menza
Mauricio Fory Balanta
Rafael Rodríguez Barrios
Ever Ortega Monroy
Aldemar Urquina Cruz
Adin Cerquera Huaca
Socio Fernando Domicó
Edgar Quintero
José Alexander Espinoza Valencia
Pedro Nel Sánchez Sanabria
Elizabeth Mendoza
Marco Tulio Molina
Fabian Ricardo Berjan
Alconides Vallejo Álvarez
Jhon Jerson Camacho Barrera
Edison Gómez Ortiz
Harold Vicente Herazo Castaño
José Ernesto Cuetia Yajue
Jesusita Moreno Mosquera
Óscar Parada Torres
Danilo De Jesús Madrid López
Kelly Urrego
Julio César Ojeda Jara
Roberto Carlos Rivas
Leonardo Mora Calderón
Julián David Ochoa Rueda
Libardo Perdomo Molano
Wilson Nixon Melón Robles
Juan Orlando Moreano
Carlos José García
John Faber Nastacuas Bisbicús

Nolberto Cardona Valencia
Jaime Floriano Losada
Julio César Buitrago Hernández
Jorge Eliécer Mejía
José Edilson Vargas Monroy
Larry Reinoso Sánchez
Maria Piedad Aguirre
Luis Carlos Quiceno Londoño
Olimpo Castillo Sastoque
Helbert Mosquera Hurtado
Jeison Andrés Vásquez Borja
Anyelo Mateo Sánchez Castrillón
María Verónica Pai Cabeza
Dairon Serafin Chacón Paí
Rolfer Ramírez López
José Luis Quiñones Villafañe
Kedinyon Jeider García Cañaveral
Javier Usechi
Salvador Léon Cañas
Ferdi Leandro Tapias
Uber Eliécer Tapias Jaramillo
Juan José Traslaviña Parra
Lisandro Chavarro
Alfredo Chavarro
Mariton Jusayu Ipuana
Elmer Lenin Guerra Castro
Carlos Eduardo Rincón Silva
Elmer Castañeda
José Miguel López Mesa
Juan Quiñones Angulo
Neiber Pertuz
William Pedraza
Edinson Rivas
Eddy Albornoz
Sandra Patricia Montenegro
Ángela Quijano Poveda
Eva Amaya Vidal
Sibares Lamprea Vargas
Nancer Barrera Herrera
Jaime Lasso Chilito
Esneider Ruiz Pinto
Luis Antonio Charry Naranjo
Frai Torres
Jesús Alberto Bautista
Dinael González Criado
Clemencia Arteaga
Natanael Díaz Iriarte
Edinson Murillo Ararat
Ferney Morales
Rigo Alape
Gerardo Pai Nastacuas
Fredy Mena Obregón
Álvaro Bailarín Sapia
Rafael Emiro Moreno Garavito
Johnny Stivent Londoño Pérez
Gildardo Alonso Ríos
Ricardo Antonio Valderrama García
Aldemar Oliveros
Yermy Chocue Camayo
Adelmo Balanta
Jonás Carabalí
Carlos Alberto García Sepúlveda
Édgar Omar Ayala Pinto
Armando Hanipe Cabrera
Juvencio Cerquera Manquillo
Dositeo Ojeda Mena
Francisco Sarco Pipicay
Carlitos Uragama Cano
Carlos Andrés Posada
Mario Oscar Solarte
Juan Alberto Guejia Peteche
Alberto Quina
Oswaldo Eliécer Duglas Bula
Efraín Sánchez
Iván Alejandro Aldana
Ariel Danilo Majin
Ricardo Osorio Vera
Filadelfo Anzola Padilla
Pedro Alirio Guerrero Aguirre
José Ricaurte Quintero
Óscar Roberto Rodriguez Tovar
Óscar Arvey Baena

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

Michael Shukuru
Seraphin Kagheni
Mumbere Ushindi
Nsabimana Mahoro Kimararungu
Jose Lenghe
Kambale Balengeka Claude
Anselme Kipuni
Vyasunza Samson Muhindo

Ecuador

Byron Guatatuca
Jéssica Martínez
Alba Bermeo Puin

El Salvador

Elizabeth De León

Guatemala

Pablo Ramos
Bartolo Pérez Andrés
Tereso Cárcamo Flores
Nesly Consuegra Monterroso (Neshie)

Honduras

Pablo Isabel Hernández Rivera
Thalía Rodriguez
Melvin Geovany Mejía
José Santos Godínez Ruíz
Marlon Feliciano Montez Nunez
Francisco Ruiz
Wilmer Alexis Dominguez Madrid
Justo Benítez Sanchez
Alonso Salgado
Donaldo Rosaldo Meza
Ricardo Alcides Avila Carrasco
Marco Tulio Paredes Molina
Brayan Josué López Guzmán
Melissa Núñez
Marco Antonio Pineda
Mauricio Ezquivel
Santiago Chacón

India

Anil Ochiwar
Subhash Mahto
Ranjeet Soni
Sadakat Wadiwala
R Jegenathan
Narendra Balia
Devjeet Singh

Iran

Baktash Abtin
Emad Heidari
Abdolrahman Bakhtiari
Aida Rostami
Donya Farhadi
Rasoulpour Mohammad Haji
Atefeh Nea'ami
Nasrin Ghaderi

Kenya

Elizabeth Ekaru

Madagascar

Henri Rakotoarisoa

Mexico

Ximena Garcia
Ana Luisa Garduño Juárez
Veronica Patricia Guerrero Vinueza
Francisco Vazquez Domínguez
Jose Trinidad Baldenegro
Patricia Susana Rivas Reyes
Nestor Ivan Merino Flores
Luis Ortiz Donato
Lorena Chantzin Paxacuasingo
Marco Campos Ahuejote
Teofilo Barrera Herrera
Marcelo Carrera Reyes
Omar Herrera Raymundo
Luciano Perez Martinez
Jose Guadalupe Rivas Saldana
Cecilia Monzon Lopez
Humberto Valdovinos Fuentes
Pedro Vázquez Ramírez
Fernando Guerrero Perez
Jesús Bañuelos Acevedo
Joaquin Cesar Mora Salazar
Javier Campos Morales

Elodia Mateos Gutiérrez
Jorge Ulises Zavala
Crispin Reyes Pablo
Gladys Aranza Ramos Gurrola
Álvaro Sebastián Ramírez
Nicolas Perez Zoyateco
Grisell Pérez Rivera
Eusebio Fragoso Faranoni
Susana Villareal
Rosa Salvaje
Blanca Esmeralda Gallardo
Beatriz Rojas Perez
Guillermo Alvaro López
Filogonio Martínez Merino
Jesús Manuel García Martínez
Rosario Lilian Rodríguez Barraza
Adan Linares Silverio
Moises Cuapipistenco
Guillermo Hilario Morales
Maria Carmela Vazquez Ramirez
Karen Sánchez Álvarez
Pedro Pascual Cruz
Francisco Jiménez López

Myanmar
Phyo Zeya Thaw (Zayar Thaw)
U Kyaw Min Yu (Ko Jimmy)
Aye Kyaw
Saw Mo Tun
Poe Thandar Aung

Nicaragua
Salomón López Smith
Gilbert Castro Hernández
David Castro Herrera

Pakistan
Waqar Ahmad
Sunid Ahmad Dawar
Asadullah Dawar
Hammad Dawar

Peru
Juan Julio Fernández Hanco
Ulises Lorenzo Rumiche Quintimari
Genaro Comisario Bitap
Vilca Ampichi López

Philippines
Rosemarie Galias
Silvestre Fortades Jr.
Richard Mendoza
Eugene Lastrella
Berito Rodan
Chad Errol Booc
Gelejurain Ngujo II
Elegyn Balonga
Jimenez Joseph
Ericson Acosta

South Africa
Ayanda Ngila
Siyabonga Manqele
Nokuthula Mabaso
Anton Mzimba
Lindokuhle Mnguni

Sudan
Youseif Yagoub Ahmed
Mohamed Eldai Musa
Mohamed Ibrahim Yahya

Ukraine
Valeria Yutina
Elvira Shchemur
Natalia Skybyna
Yulia Zdanovska
Yevhen Piskotin
Yulia Koval
Volodymyr Domashenko
Zhanna Kamenieva
Pavlo Li
Ruslan Karpenko
Ivan Zori
Anatolii Berezhnyi
Illya Shkliaruk
Mykola Semykin
Stanislav Burdun
Stanislav Eliseev
Serhii Saveliev
Roman Saveliev
Yana Mykhydenko
Serhii Ilchuk
Brent Renaud
Oleksandr Ivashchyk
Volodymyr Kotenko
Yurii Volchkov
Anton Khrustaliov
Oksana Baulina
Volodymyr Vakulenko
Anastasiia Tahirova
Oleksii Antonov
Ilona Kurovska
Mykhailo Suprun
Olha Kurierova
Yurii Zhabin
Mantas Kvedaravičius
Maksym Levin
Serhii Kubrushko
Roman Sementsov
Ihor Hudenko
Andrii Shostak
Andrii Menchynskyi
Denys Butenko
Olha Serhejeva
Denys Selevin
Anton Kushnir
Ihor Karuk
Paul Urey
Sardor Khakimov
Viktoriia Misharina
Hryhorii Zazirnyy
Viktoriia Yaryshkow

Venezuela
Virgilio Trujillo Arana

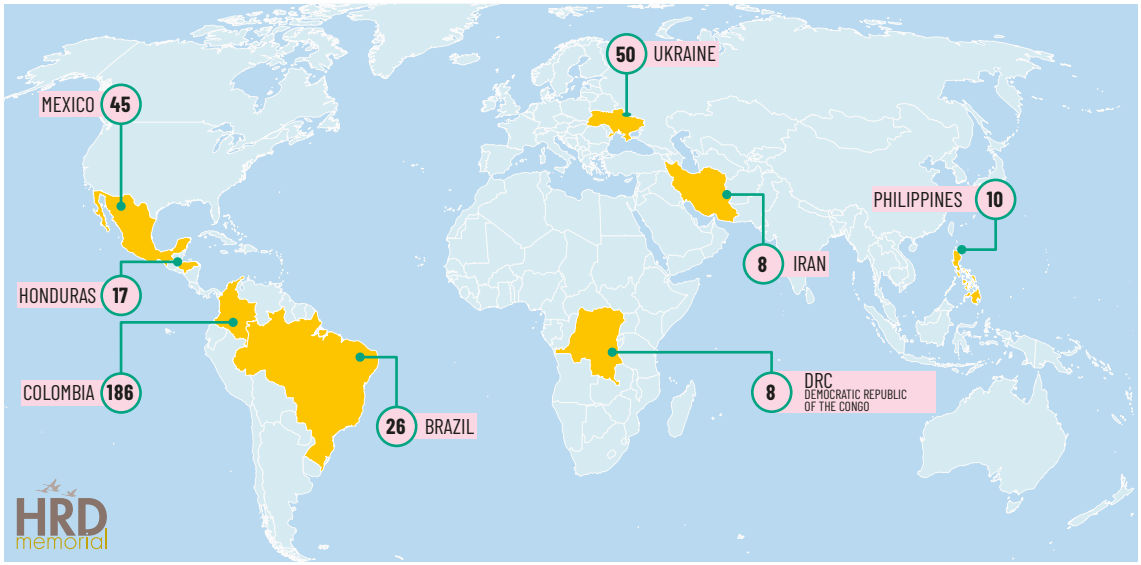
Vietnam
Do Cong Doung

The HRD Memorial data shown here is a presentation of the cases of verified killings of HRDs that have taken place between 1 January – 31 December 2022. It is likely that this dataset is incomplete as partners continue to gather and verify cases. Challenges include: killings in remote areas having gone unreported; self-censorship by communities fearing reprisals; and suppression of information by vested state and non-state interest groups.

The HRD Memorial is a joint, global initiative by a network of human rights organisations including: ACI-Participa (Honduras); Amnesty International; Comité Cerezo (Mexico); FIDH; Front Line Defenders; Global Witness; Human Rights Defenders' Alert – India; Karapatan (the Philippines); OMCT; El Programa Somos Defensores (Colombia); Red TDT (Mexico); and UDEFEGUA (Guatemala).

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS MEMORIAL

https://hrdmemorial.org

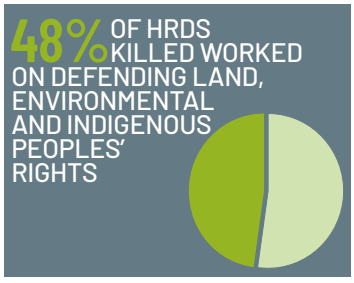


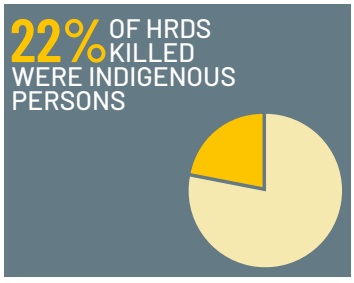
In 2022, the HRD Memorial investigated and verified the killings of 401 HRDs in 26 countries.

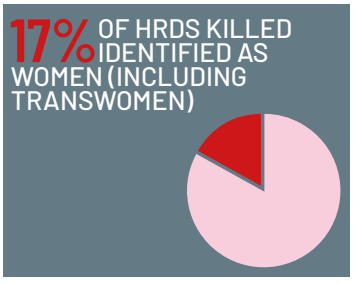
The HRD Memorial is a global initiative led by 12 national and international human rights organisations committed to gathering and verifying data about HRDs who are killed for their human rights work. HRD Memorial partners gather real-time data on the killing of HRDs and historic data on killings dating back to 1998, when the UN Declaration on human rights defenders came into effect.

The HRD Memorial presents a unique, verified dataset that highlights the scale of the killings of defenders worldwide, provides a basis for effective advocacy and campaigning to stop the killings. And keeps alive the memory of defenders who have been killed, celebrating their courage and achievements, and offering solidarity with their families, friends and colleagues.

Colombia	186	Iran	8	China	3	El Salvador	1
Ukraine	50	India	7	Ecuador	3	Kenya	1
Mexico	45	Myanmar	5	Nicaragua	3	Madagascar	1
Brazil	26	South Africa	5	Sudan	3	Venezuela	1
Honduras	17	Guatemala	4	Afghanistan	2	Vietnam	1
Philippines	10	Pakistan	4	Chad	2		
DRC	8	Peru	4	Chile	1		







GLOBAL STATISTICS

HOW HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ARE TARGETED AROUND THE WORLD

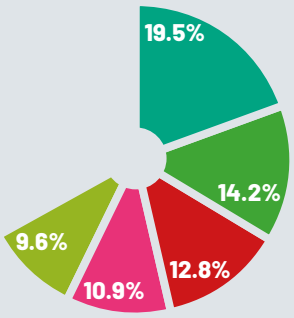
The following statistics are derived from Front Line Defenders' urgent actions and approved grant applications between 1 January and 31 December 2022. The statistics are based on 1,583 reported threats and violations. Front Line Defenders documents multiple threats and violations per case or grant, as this is the reality of the situation for human rights defenders. The data is not exhaustive but reflects key trends reported through these two programme areas.

The information Front Line Defenders receives is dependent on HRDs being aware of the organisation; as such, this data can not be seen as wholly representative for all HRDs in all countries. Therefore, this data should serve as an indicator – but not a comprehensive report – of the scope of the violations, threats and risks that human rights defenders face on a daily basis.

TOP 5 THREATS AGAINST HRDS GLOBALLY

TOP THREATS FOR 2022

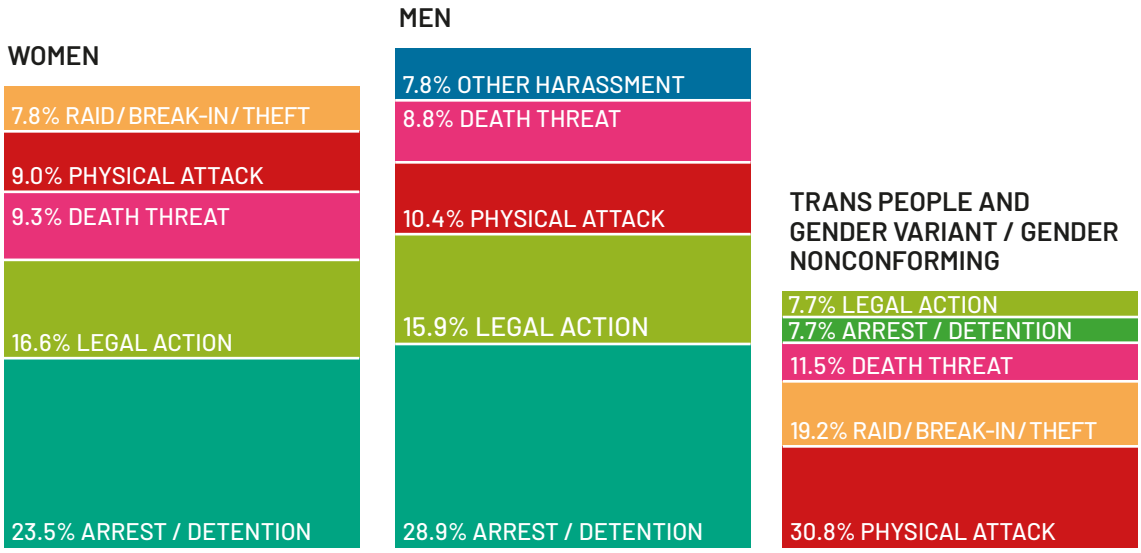
1 ARREST / DETENTION
2 LEGAL ACTION
3 PHYSICAL ATTACK
4 DEATH THREAT
5 SURVEILLANCE



Front Line Defenders' Digital Protection programme provides practical and technical support to hundreds of HRDs and organisations to mitigate risks they face in the digital sphere. The data gathered from that support is reflected in a separate table below. The reporting of the relevant data on killings is reflected through the HRD Memorial Project. All the data in the Global Chapter excludes Afghanistan, as Front Line Defenders had a specific grants programme to support HRDs in Afghanistan and to include this data in the figures would misrepresent global trends. Afghanistan is however incorporated into figures relating to Asia.

TOP 5 THREATS AGAINST HRDS BY GENDER:

The tables below indicate the most common threats HRDs face based on what they identify their gender as.



TOP 5 MOST TARGETED SECTORS:

According to the violations reported to Front Line Defenders in 2022, these are the five most targeted sectors of human rights defence and the most common ways in which these HRDs were targeted:

11% ENVIRONMENTAL, LAND & INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

16.8% ARREST / DETENTION
15.4% LEGAL ACTION
13.0% PHYSICAL ATTACK
12.5% DEATH THREAT
12.0% OTHER HARASSMENT

10% FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

28.0% ARREST / DETENTION
17.6% LEGAL ACTION
8.8% PHYSICAL ATTACK
8.3% DEATH THREAT
7.8% RAID/BREAK-IN / THEFT

9% PROTEST MOVEMENT/ FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

36.0% ARREST / DETENTION
18.0% LEGAL ACTION
12.4% PHYSICAL ATTACK
7.5% OTHER HARASSMENT
5.0% QUESTIONING / INTERROGATION

7% WOMEN'S RIGHTS

18.3% ARREST / DETENTION
17.6% PHYSICAL ATTACK
12.2% LEGAL ACTION
9.2% OTHER HARASSMENT
7.6% SURVEILLANCE

6% IMPUNITY /JUSTICE

21.3% ARREST / DETENTION
16.4% LEGAL ACTION
13.9% OTHER HARASSMENT
7.4% DEATH THREAT
7.4% RAID / BREAK-IN / THEFT

MAIN THREATS ACROSS EACH REGION

AFRICA

ARREST / DETENTION	32.9%
PHYSICAL ATTACK	17.4%
DEATH THREAT	14.4%
LEGAL ACTION	8.4%
RAID / BREAK-IN / THEFT	7.2%

AMERICAS

DEATH THREAT	17.1%
PHYSICAL ATTACK	15.1%
ARREST / DETENTION	14.7%
SURVEILLANCE	14.7%
OTHER HARASSMENT	10.2%

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

DEATH THREAT	41.0%
ARREST / DETENTION	17.7%
PHYSICAL ATTACK	7.8%
OTHER HARASSMENT	6.0%
LEGAL ACTION	5.2%

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

LEGAL ACTION	16.2%
SURVEILLANCE	13.1%
ARREST / DETENTION	12.2%
PHYSICAL ATTACK	10.6%
DEATH THREAT	10.4%

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

LEGAL ACTION	22.0%
ARREST / DETENTION	17.0%
PHYSICAL ATTACK	13.5%
DEATH THREAT	9.0%
OTHER HARASSMENT	7.5%

THE LAW AS A WEAPON

The table below indicates the top 5 most commonly cited legal charges against HRDs in 2022. Front Line Defenders recorded 211 charges used against HRDs from the 206 urgent advocacy actions recorded through our urgent actions.

LEGAL ACTION - CHARGES

21.8%	OTHER CRIMINAL CHARGES
19.0%	NATIONAL/STATE SECURITY/SEDITION
12.8%	TERRORISM/MEMBERSHIP OR SUPPORT OF A TERRORIST ORG
10.1%	DEFAMATION/INSULTING STATE/DAMAGING NATIONAL UNITY
9.0%	SPREADING FAKE NEWS OR RUMOURS/ PROPAGANDA

DIGITAL THREATS

The table below highlights the top 5 types of threats HRDs reported to Front Line Defenders through our Digital Protection Programme.

MOST PREVALENT DIGITAL THREATS

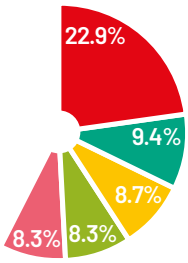
INTERNET/SOCIAL MEDIA / WEBSITE BLOCKAGE

ONLINE THREAT OF VIOLENCE / HARASSMENT

CONFISCATED DEVICES COMPUTERS / PHONE

PHYSICAL SURVEILLANCE

DOXXING



The table below indicates the top sectors that requests for digital protection support came from in 2022.

TOP SECTORS

11.4%	HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT
8.8%	LGBTIQ+
7.7%	ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS
6.2%	CITIZENS PARTICIPATION
6.0%	DOCUMENTING/MONITORING VIOLATIONS IN CONFLICT

GLOBAL

1. OVERVIEW

In 2022, human rights defenders (HRDs) around the world collectively inspired transformative change within their societies with bold, creative and peaceful human rights action. Despite an assault on human rights and the rule of law in many countries, HRDs showed remarkable courage and persistence in advocating for more democratic, just and inclusive societies. Across nearly all countries, human rights organisations, networks and social movements pushed back against deepening authoritarianism and closing civic space, mobilising for change while expanding collective voices and responding to the needs of the most marginalised and targeted communities. Even in the most violent contexts, feminist, women and LGBTIQ+ defenders repeatedly stood up for their communities and against discrimination, while strengthening their networks and forming broader alliances. Nevertheless, this steadfast and courageous defence of human rights often came at significant cost to HRDs.

The HRD Memorial[1] recorded the targeted killings of **401 HRDs** for their human rights work in 2022. Five countries, namely Colombia, Ukraine, Mexico, Brazil and Honduras accounted for over **80%** of the global total. Colombia alone accounted for **46% of killings**, with **186 HRD killings** documented and verified to date by HRD Memorial partner Somos Defensores[2]. Across the different human rights sectors, defenders working on land, environmental and indigenous peoples' rights were most frequently targeted, accounting for **48% of killings**. In the context of the conflict in Ukraine, humanitarian volunteers, whose bravery and compassion for their fellow citizens heightened their risk, were also disproportionately represented amongst the HRD Memorial cases in 2022.

1 The HRD Memorial is a global initiative led by 12 national and international human rights organisations committed to gathering and verifying data about HRDs who are killed for their human rights work. For more information, see page 2.

2 As documentation and verification from the final quarter of 2022 continues in Colombia, this figure of 186 HRDs targeted and killed is expected to rise.

2. CRIMINALISATION OF DEFENDERS

In 2022, criminalisation in all its forms was one of the most pervasive and complex threats facing HRDs and their organisations globally. According to Front Line Defenders data, criminalisation of HRDs, in the form of arrest, detention and legal action, was the most prominent form of attack – comprising **34%** of all violations recorded against HRDs during the year[3]. Unchecked legal persecution particularly impacted those working in the sectors of environmental, land and indigenous peoples' rights and freedom of expression and assembly, while anti-corruption, pro-democracy and refugee and migrants rights defenders were also targeted and criminalised. The endemic criminalisation of HRDs and broader civil society led to the further degradation of the rule of law, fuelling hostile environments wherein violations against HRDs were legitimised and carried out with impunity by the very institutions tasked with protecting citizens and upholding justice.

2.1 THE USE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM AND NATIONAL SECURITY LEGISLATION TO JUDICIALLY PERSECUTE HRDS

Governments continued to justify and intensify judicial harassment and unlawful detention of defenders under the pretext of counter-terrorism, combatting extremism and national security imperatives. The widespread, arbitrary and discriminatory application of counter-terrorism and other national security measures, aimed at punishing and silencing HRDs, had profoundly detrimental impacts on defenders, organisations and communities, depleting their financial resources and morale as well as their capacities to protect those most marginalised and threatened. Under this dominant security paradigm, criminalisation was regularly accompanied by the labelling of defenders as "terrorists", "threats to national security", "foreign agents", "anti-development" and other such terms, further escalating the stigmatisation and risk facing defenders. HRDs in Hong Kong, for example, reported resorting to self-censorship and reducing contact with the United Nations (UN) and other international actors to mitigate the risk of being targeted for "foreign collusion". This deliberate use of false and dehumanising narratives had serious implications for the safety of defenders, effectively sanctioning grave human rights violations against them, including torture and killings, by state and non-state actors.

In many contexts, counter-terrorism legislation allowed governments to override regular laws and due process guarantees, drastically weakening legal protections available to defenders and citizens in general. At the centre of the majority of the criminalisation cases where Front Line Defenders provided support to targeted HRDs was a continuum of violations of due process rights and fair trial guarantees, such as prolonged pre-trial detention, restricted recourse to bail and legal representation, repeated short-term administrative detention and incommunicado detention, accompanied by other violations including torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. It was commonplace for authorities to file multiple criminal cases against HRDs under a combination of counter-terrorism, national security and other criminal legislation with the

3 This data refers to the threats of arrest and detention (19.5% of total violations) and legal action (14.2% of total violations), which together accounted for the top two violations recorded globally by Front Line Defenders. See page 6 for further information.

INDIA

The case of human rights defender and academic **Gokarakonda Naga Saibaba** in **India** is a clear example of how far many states will go to persecute HRDs. Saibaba was originally arrested in 2014 on charges of having links to banned Maoist organisations. In March 2017, he was sentenced to life imprisonment under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), however the Bombay High Court acquitted him and others accused on 14 October 2022. The state immediately appealed and obtained a stay on his release in an emergency hearing of the Supreme Court. Saibaba suffers from chronic health conditions and a severe disability which has left him 90% paralysed. Detained without access to treatment and under constant surveillance through CCTV cameras, his condition has severely deteriorated. Furthermore, his ill-treatment in prison is in violation of India's obligations under international law. Moreover, the Indian authorities' rapid move to appeal the acquittal decision of a lower court demonstrates their contempt and hostility for those speaking out on human rights in the country.

aim of ensuring their prolonged detention even where, for example, bail had been granted in a separate case. Defenders' capacity to navigate compromised legal systems and access justice was, as a result, completely diminished. Moreover, defenders regularly reported being denied adequate healthcare for serious health conditions and long periods of solitary confinement. The often abhorrent treatment of defenders while in detention appeared to be a deliberate effort to dehumanise them, and erode their resilience and that of their families and communities. In addition, office raids, destruction of files and years of human rights investigative work, interrogation, surveillance, intimidation, deportation and other abusive and coercive treatment were inherent to the criminalisation process. For example, seven Palestinian human rights organisations, six of whom the Israeli authorities had designated "terrorist organisations" in 2021, were subjected to office raids, interrogations and threats of closure, while the Palestinian-French lawyer Salah Hammouri was deported to France in December, following nine months of administrative detention without charge or trial.

2.2 COUNTER-TERRORISM AND THE PROLIFERATION OF RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION

In 2022, HRDs were confronted with the ongoing proliferation of restrictive laws targeting civil society organisations, the origins of which could often be found within the legal frameworks that make up the global counter-terrorism architecture.[4] Such regressive laws had serious implications for the right to peaceful protest, freedoms of expression and association and for the safe and effective functioning of human rights organisations. Under the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)[5] states are required to implement and

4 United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures, Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts and Working Groups, The human rights and rule of law implications of countering the financing of terrorism measures, June 2022, https://fatfplatform.org/assets/2022-06-13-SRCTHR-CFT-Position-Paper.pdf

5 The FATF, created in 1989 by the G7 to counter money-laundering and financing terrorism, has expanded its remit significantly since 2001.

report on compliance with 49 recommendations aimed at combating money-laundering and terrorist financing. FATF Recommendation 8 specifically relates to Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) and has been used for years as a pretext by many states to control and repress civil society organisations, particularly those that defend human rights. The FATF amended the language on NPOs in 2016, and later clarified in its guidance documents that member states' implementation of the Combatting the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) standards must be done in a manner which is consistent with international law. However, many of the restrictive interpretations of FATF Recommendation 8 were already codified in domestic legislation and therefore continue to be used by governments against human rights organisations.[6] Common across the plethora of restrictive laws and regulations are a range of arbitrary restrictions that place unnecessary and disproportionate administrative and bureaucratic burdens on civil society organisations in areas such as registration, disclosure of foreign funding, and monitoring and reporting on activities. This affords authorities undue power to scrutinise and sanction organisations. If organisations fail to adhere, they are in turn exposed to further risks of criminalisation, surveillance and closure.

In **Nicaragua** for example, the 2020 Law on Foreign Agents and a 2022 Law on Regulation and Control of Non-Profit Organizations led to the forced closure of at least 2,000 NGOs in 2022 and 176 feminist organisations and women's rights NGOs have been shut down since 2018, according to the ***Iniciativa Mesoamericana de Mujeres Defensoras de Derechos Humanos*** (IM Defensoras). In **Zimbabwe**, the Private Voluntary Organisations Amendment Bill, awaiting presidential assent at the end of the year, if implemented will give the government unfettered control over the governance and operations of civil society organisations as well as the power to revoke organisations' registration. These pieces of legislation are just some examples of governments' over-zealous application of FATF Recommendation 8.

2.3 THE GLOBAL COUNTER-TERRORISM ARCHITECTURE DRIVING THE CRIMINALISATION OF HRDS

The significant deterioration of the protection environment for HRDs and broader civil society cannot be disassociated from the sophisticated global counter-terrorism architecture, which emerged and grew in the aftermath of 11 September 2001. The misuse and abuse of counter-terrorism frameworks have been enabled by the absence of an internationally agreed-upon definition of terrorism and the failure to integrate risk assessments to mitigate potential negative human rights consequences. Despite the fact that the destructive effects on civic space have been widely documented over the years[7], insufficient action has been taken at the multilateral level to rein in states' deliberate manipulation of counter-terrorism goals to further their own repressive ends. Meanwhile, HRDs are left to navigate a destructive web of legal persecution, while mitigating the

6 Global Coalition NPO Coalition on FATF, FATF & NPOs, https://fatfplatform.org/context/fatf-and-npos/

7 See Front Line Defenders, Global Analysis 2021, for further analysis of the patterns and implications of the counter-terrorism architecture

immense toll on their human rights work and their psychological and economic well-being. Key recommendations made by the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism include that the UN establishes an internal independent oversight mechanism of the UN counter-terrorism architecture; revisions to FATF Recommendation 8 are recognised and adhered to by member states; and member states ensure effective and meaningful engagement with affected HRDs and communities in the design and application of CFT measures.

2.4 HRDS COUNTERING CRIMINALISATION

Despite the ever-present and suffocating threat of legal persecution, judicial victories were recorded in many countries including for example in Niger, Honduras, India and Tunisia, with freedom secured for HRDs who had been unfairly accused. Although an acquittal cannot undo years of injustice, physical harm and psychological trauma endured by criminalised HRDs, it serves to reinforce rule of law and sends an important message to those intent on weaponising the law and judicial system against HRDs. Nonetheless, more work is needed to ensure recognition of and accountability for the specific human rights violations experienced by HRDs and an end to impunity.

LONG-TERM IMPRISONMENT

The practice of sentencing defenders to long, arduous prison terms upwards of 10 years for their peaceful and legitimate human rights work persisted in 2022. This trend is seen across all regions. Many of the defenders previously sentenced to long-term prison remained behind bars throughout 2022. These include **Dawit Isaak** (Eritrea, 2001); **Trần Huỳnh Duy Thức** (Vietnam, 2009); **Pablo López Alavez** (Mexico, 2010); **Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja** (Bahrain, 2011); **Mohamed Al-Roken** (United Arab Emirates, 2012); **Ilham Tohti** (China, 2014); **Emir-Usein Kuku** (Crimea, 2016); **Server Mustafayev** (Crimea, 2018); **Kenia Inés Hernández Montalván** (Mexico, 2020); and **Narges Mohammadi** (Iran, 2021). As domestic legal remedies are exhausted, unjust sentences become final. The risk is that these defenders are forgotten behind bars, as their sentences become prolonged and their cases disappear from public attention.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL, LAND & INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

A stark disconnect persisted between the urgency for climate action and the glaring absence of political will to ensure the protection of land, environmental and indigenous peoples' rights defenders on the frontlines of the global climate justice movement. As world leaders, business elites and experts gathered to negotiate climate change mitigation at the 27th session of the Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC (COP 27), communities and defenders dedicated to environmental protection and climate justice continued to be relentlessly and violently persecuted and excluded from decision-making spaces, while their collective ancestral knowledge was frequently disregarded.

Land, indigenous peoples' and environmental rights defenders were the most targeted sector in 2022, with arrest and detention, and legal action recorded as the most prominent forms of violations, followed by physical attacks and death threats[8]. Once again 2022 proved to be a deadly year for these defenders, with HRD Memorial partners recording the **killings of 194 defenders** working on these issues, in 15 countries, accounting for **48% of all the killings of defenders** recorded by the HRD Memorial in 2022. Furthermore, indigenous peoples' rights defenders accounted for **22% of the total killings of HRDs** across all human rights sectors, illustrating the disproportionate levels of killings of indigenous rights defenders globally. In 2022, indigenous peoples' rights defenders were killed in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Philippines and Venezuela. **Colombia recorded the highest number of lethal attacks against HRDs in 2022, with 88 environmental and indigenous rights defenders killed, 47% of the national total of 186.**

Pervasive levels of impunity combined with limited access to justice enabled ongoing criminalisation, combined with other forms of violent attack, to be used to silence and derail the crucial work of indigenous peoples', land, territory and environmental rights defenders. These defenders faced persistent and violent attacks as authorities, companies, landowners and farmers sought to further advance their commercial interests through the violent expropriation of land and ancestral territories. In the face of expanding extractive, agro-industrial and tourism projects, defenders and their communities were subjected to armed attacks, forced evictions and displacement, destruction of property, stigmatisation, surveillance, criminalisation, enforced disappearances and killings. The legitimate and peaceful struggle of these groups to protect their rights and way of life, fundamental to their survival, continued to bring them into direct confrontation with powerful political-business alliances frequently acting in collusion with military, paramilitary and police forces, non-state armed actors and criminal groups. In different contexts, discrimination linked to persisting racism and colonial legacies of land expropriation continued to be an explicit dimension of the disproportionate levels of attacks documented against indigenous and Afro-descendent defenders.

8 According to Front Line Defenders 2022 data arrest/detention accounted for 16.8% of attacks against LIE defenders followed by legal action (15.4%), physical attack (13%) and death threats (12.5%).

COLOMBIA: TEÓFILO ACUÑA AND JORGE TAFUR

On 22 February, prominent land and *campesino* rights defenders **Teófilo Acuña and Jorge Tafur** were murdered by unidentified armed individuals while in a house with their families in the department of Cesar, **Colombia**. Two days prior to the killing, the Interlocution Commission of the South of Bolívar, Center and South of Cesar, South of Magdalena and Processes of the Santanderes (CISBCSC), of which the two defenders were spokespersons, had publicly denounced that the *campesino* communities of Puerto Oculto were being threatened and harassed by people linked to the mayor's office of San Martín, the police and a landowner from the municipality. The case of Teófilo Acuña and Jorge Tafur is emblematic of a pattern of harassment and violence in the region against defenders linked to movements in defence of land, territory and the rights of *campesino*, both by state actors and paramilitary structures.

In May, in retaliation for the Maya Q'eqchi' Las Pilas community's persistence in denouncing logging to the municipal authorities, armed neighbours and other unknown actors, forcibly evicted the community in **Guatemala**, burning down their village, completely destroying their homes and possessions. At the end of the year, more than 125 families remained displaced with no response from the local authorities. Legal persecution in the form of **Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs)** was frequently used against land, indigenous peoples' and environmental rights defenders. Between January and June in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the WHRDs Sunčica Kovačević and Sara Tuševljak were targeted with three defamation lawsuits and warnings by the company BUK d.o.o. The SLAPP suits had been filed as a result of their public campaign against the environmental impact of the company's hydro-power plants on the Kasindolska river.

4. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Journalists and HRDs documenting, collecting evidence of and exposing corruption and human rights violations during protests and in other contexts of serious repression were criminalised and targeted with office raids, intimidation, digital attacks and surveillance. According to Front Line Defenders data, they were the second most targeted sector in 2022, with arrest and detention, legal action, physical attacks and raids and break-ins among the top violations recorded[9]. In some contexts, journalists and defenders were subjected to hate speech, further inciting violence and attacks against them. In **El Salvador**, the authorities went so far as to approve legal reforms criminalising the publication or reproduction of "gang-related" content in the media,

9 According to Front Line Defenders 2022 data, the top violations against defenders working on freedom of expression were arrest and detention (28%); legal action (17.6%) and physical attack (8.8%). For further information see page 15.

further exposing journalists covering human rights violations in the country to criminalisation and stigmatisation.

In Senegal, the HRD and journalist Pape Alé Niang was held for over a month in detention without trial in retaliation for an article he published on judicial proceedings against an opposition leader, before being provisionally released on 14 December. The charges of "disclosure of information likely to harm National Defence" and "dissemination of false news likely to discredit public institutions" among other charges are still pending against him. In an unprecedented decision, in November the Court of Appeals in Kyrgyzstan ruled to deport the anti-corruption defender and journalist Bolot Temirov to Russia, after a sustained period of legal persecution and being stripped of his passport and Kyrgyzstan citizenship.

5. FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND PROTEST MOVEMENTS

Defenders working on the right to freedom of assembly or protest movements were the third most targeted sector in 2022, with arrest and detention, legal action and physical attack accounting for the top three violations[10]. Around the world new waves of social protest erupted as citizens demonstrated against rising inflation, costs of living and fuel, and poor labour conditions, while also denouncing more fundamental grievances around corrupt and abusive governance. Crackdowns using disproportionate and brutal force were widespread, making the act of peaceful protest increasingly unsafe for demonstrators and defenders. Criminalisation of HRDs who led, mobilised or documented violations occurring in the context of protests was also commonplace during the year including in Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Guinea, Iran, Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka and Tajikistan, with authorities frequently invoking state security and counter-terror imperatives to ban protests and punish defenders for their role in the run-up to and during protests.

Governments in Chad, Guinea and Mali, undergoing political transition in the aftermath of military coups, used the political context as a justification to deny freedom of assembly. Demonstrators, including defenders, who mobilised despite bans faced deadly repression and excessive use of force at the hands of security forces, leading to arbitrary arrests, injuries and death. In several countries in Central Asia, civic unrest triggered by increasing economic mismanagement was violently repressed and HRDs were judicially harassed and subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention. In December, the Supreme Court of Tajikistan sentenced the WHRD and journalist Ulfatkhonim Mamadshoeva to 21 years of prison under the Criminal Code in connection to the May protests against police brutality in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous (GBAO) region. In Sri Lanka, authorities used excessive force to repress public demonstrations, arresting thousands of defenders including three student defenders who were detained under counter-terrorism legislation.

10 According to Front Line Defenders 2022 data, the top violations against defenders working in the context of freedom of assembly and protest movements were arrest and detention (36%); legal action (18%) and physical attack (12.4%). For further information see page 7.

6. DEADLY VIOLENCE AGAINST LGBTIQ+ DEFENDERS

A combination of brutal violence, impunity, criminality, discrimination and transphobia against diverse sexual and gender identities continued to impede the human rights work of **LGBTIQ+ defenders** during the year. In several countries including **Ghana, Mali** and **Poland**, governments persisted in their efforts to impose draconian legislation entailing severe punitive measures for LGBTIQ+ communities and disregarding their rights and the states' obligations towards them. Nevertheless, LGBTIQ+ defenders worked to maintain the protection and integrity of their communities in the face of escalating hostility and violence. Widespread political and societal pressure considerably increased the risks facing LGBTIQ+ defenders and forced many to keep a low profile. According to Front Line Defenders data, physical attacks were the top recorded violation against trans women, trans men and gender variant and non-conforming defenders, accounting for a third of total violations, followed by raids and break-ins, and death threats.[11] The level of violent attack against this group of defenders reflects deeper structural patterns of discrimination and violence on the basis of their gender identity.

In the context of alarming rates of trans-feminicides in the Americas, killings of trans WHRDs were documented by Front Line Defenders and HRD Memorial partners in **Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras** and **Mexico**. On 10 January, **Thalía Rodríguez**, a trans WHRD and member of the **Cattrachas Lesbian Network** was killed in her home in Tegucigalpa, **Honduras**. In **Kenya, Tanzania** and **Uganda**, LGBTIQ+ defenders were persecuted both by authorities and within their communities. Reflecting this increasingly untenable situation for LGBTIQ+ defenders, Front Line Defenders observed an increase in demand for temporary relocation support[12] from LGBTIQ+ defenders in sub-Saharan Africa consistent with the extreme levels of threats they were facing.

7. HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE CONTEXT OF CONFLICTS AND CRISIS

In 2022, HRDs in all regions of the world strove to protect human rights in violent conflict and crisis settings including in Afghanistan, Belarus, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Colombia, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Russia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. Defenders took on crucial roles in these contexts, including protecting vulnerable communities, ensuring humanitarian access, delivering humanitarian support, documenting human rights abuses and advocating for change. Throughout 2022, the **Russian Federation's** full-scale invasion of **Ukraine**, inflicted devastating harm, killing thousands of civilians and destroying civilian property and infrastructure, with alarming implications for the physical safety and mental health of the population. Since the outset of the invasion, the Russian authorities and Armed Forces have consistently and

11 According to Front Line Defenders 2022 data, the top three forms of violations against trans women, trans men and gender variant and non-conforming defenders were physical attack (30.8%), raid/break-in/theft (19.2%), death threats (11.5%). See page 7 for further information.

12 According to Front Line Defenders protection grants data, the majority of protection grants requested from LGBTIQ+ HRDs in sub-Saharan Africa were for temporary relocation (61%) in 2022.

disproportionally targeted HRDs in the Russian-occupied territories for their essential role in documenting and communicating evidence of human rights atrocities committed by the Russian military; work that is essential for guaranteeing future justice and accountability.

7.1 WOMEN AT THE FRONT LINE

Women and the movements they engage with played a critical role in countering the full onslaught against human rights in situations marked by systemic persecution and serious violations of international law. WHRDs refused to accept the status quo of brutal patriarchal regimes built upon regressive values and discrimination against women, LGBTIQ+, and ethnic and other minority groups. In doing so, they inspired broad constituencies to mobilise for change and demand respect for the rule of law and the universality of human rights. Throughout the year WHRDs in many countries including Afghanistan, the DRC, El Salvador, Iran, Myanmar, Sudan and Ukraine continued to mobilise against and denounce the most repressive authoritarian regimes and occupying forces. For this they paid a heavy and gendered cost including attacks against them and their families, online smear campaigns and defamation, sexual violence and other violations impacting their mental health and well-being.

Globally, women working across all human rights sectors were disproportionally targeted by arrest and detention, legal actions and death threats[13]. During the year, WHRDs active in the peaceful resistance in **Afghanistan** and **Sudan** demonstrated remarkable courage and persistence as they continued to take to the streets to demand an end to the widespread violations and discrimination against them. They were targeted with physical attacks, rape, torture and arbitrary detention. From September onwards, as new waves of protest erupted in **Iran**, women's leadership and resistance served as a catalyst to inspire and mobilise broader Iranian society, making them even more of a target for the Iranian authorities. In retaliation for their leadership in the **Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)** in post-coup **Myanmar**, WHRDs were targeted with discriminatory tactics including public humiliation and verbal and sexual abuse by police and military forces. And with limited opportunities for men to leave Ukraine, WHRDs played a crucial role advocating for global support and solidarity, leading civil society calls for accountability for violations of international law, including war crimes, committed by Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine since 2014.

8. DIGITAL ATTACKS AND CLOSING ONLINE SPACE

Governments' tactics of repression transcended digital spaces as they continued to extend their dominion over the online sphere including through a range of cybercrime legislation, collusion with social media companies, digital surveillance and internet shutdowns. The reform or passing of new cybercrime legislation - often on the justification

13 According to Front Line Defenders data for 2022, Women's human rights defenders were targeted with arrest and detention (23.4%), legal action (16,6%) and death threats (9.3%). See page 7 for further information.

of counter-terrorism imperatives - in countries including Cambodia, Libya, Myanmar, Sudan, Thailand, Tunisia, and United Arab Emirates (UAE) further restricted one of the few remaining channels for dissent and access to information. Such legislation enabled provisions ranging from prohibiting VPN use, permitting internet shutdowns, removal of content critical of authorities, surveillance, censorship, interception of communications, retention of user data and penalties for tech and telecommunications companies that fail to cooperate, among other abusive provisions.

Sophisticated digital surveillance used by states and their collaborators remained a very present threat, with new cases of the use of Pegasus spyware uncovered in countries including **El Salvador, Jordan, Mexico** and **Thailand**. Many journalists and human rights organisations resisted these invasive abuses on their rights to privacy, and challenged unlawful surveillance using Pegasus spyware in **El Salvador** and **Thailand**, among others countries.

Partial or full internet shutdowns and disruption of telecommunications were symptomatic of deteriorating human rights situations in many countries. Repressive regimes increasingly relied on disrupting communications to suppress freedom of assembly and expression, particularly during flagrant crackdowns on peaceful protest and mass social mobilisation. In **Iran, Kazakhstan, Myanmar, Sudan** and **Tajikistan** authorities quickly shut down communication channels or entire networks during demonstrations, severely restricting HRDs from documenting and reporting on human rights violations.

The role of social media companies and safe use of their platforms continued to be a major concern for HRDs and their organisations. Challenges included decisions relating to content moderation and the persisting difficulties facing HRDs when they attempted to request that hate speech against them be removed. In contrast to the frequent refusal by social media platforms to remove abusive content relating to HRDs, these same platforms were quick to silence HRDs' voices and legitimate human rights work through the suspension of their accounts. During **Israel's** violent assault on Gaza in August, bloggers and HRDs reported that several social media platforms attempted to block their content at the behest of Israeli authorities. A range of digital and human rights organisations maintained their calls on Meta (formerly Facebook) to conduct an independent review of its content moderation policies in the context of the persistent silencing of Palestinian voices and of those who support them. The risk of social media platforms sharing user data and information with governments also remained a considerable worry for HRDs. For example, in Vietnam under the Decree 53, which came into effect in October to regulate the 2018 Cybersecurity Law, tech companies are required to store user data for a minimum of 24 months and to share this personal data with the government on request.

Online means were also used to attack women's leadership in mobilising against brutal patriarchal regimes. From April onwards, Iranian WHRDs and feminists were targeted through a sinister campaign designed to inundate their social media accounts with

thousands of fake new followers. It is believed that these "bot armies" were orchestrated to saturate their accounts with the aim of intimidating and discrediting WHRDs and feminists, and blocking any genuine engagement on their platform.

9. THE GLOBAL POLICY ENVIRONMENT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HRDS

In 2022, progress was made towards strengthening international norms that have implications for the protection of HRDs, demonstrating increasing formal recognition of HRDs' fundamental role in safeguarding human rights. Notable advances as regards commitments to protect the right to a healthy environment and those who defend it were timely in the context of deepening climate destruction and ongoing brutal reprisals against land, indigenous peoples' and environmental rights defenders. Moreover, HRDs, activists and civil society played a pivotal role in driving forward commitments around human rights, the environment and corporate due diligence at multilateral levels; processes which were years in the making.

The **European Union (EU)** took a significant step in February when it proposed an EU Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence recognising the need for mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence. As the negotiations progress, it is critical that the final text explicitly references HRDs as named key stakeholders and that mandatory, safe and meaningful stakeholder engagement is required throughout the due diligence process.[14]

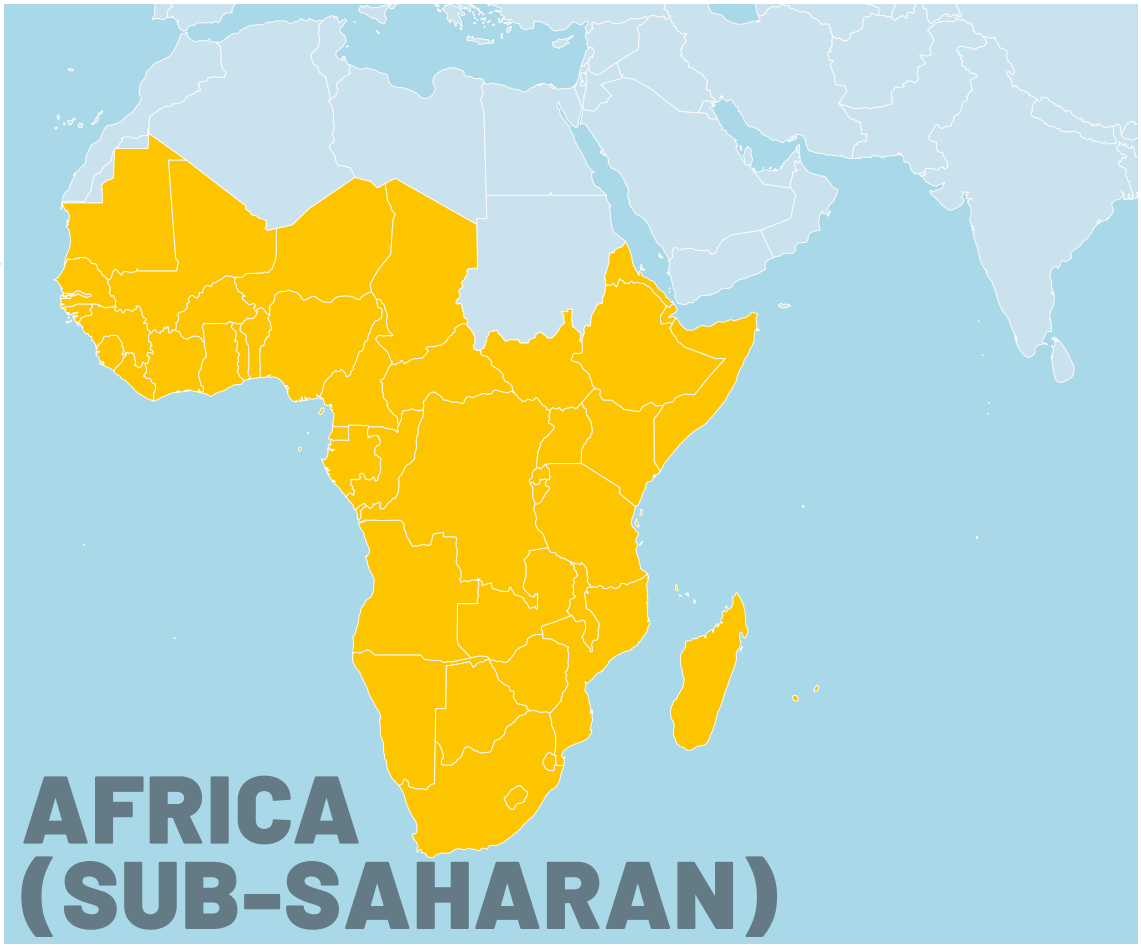
In what is the first-ever mandate specifically relating to the protection of environmental defenders, in June a Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders was appointed under the Aarhus Convention[15]. While the mandate's remit encompasses parties to the Aarhus Convention, it also incorporates an extra-territorial dimension and as such the Special Rapporteur can intervene in relation to complaints concerning European companies operating in territories of non-party states.

Among the recommendations outlined in the July report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change were calls for an international legal procedure be developed to give full and effective protection to environmental and indigenous peoples' rights defenders, including through the establishment of an international tribunal to hold perpetrators of violence and killings accountable.

14 For more information on the importance of addressing reprisals against human rights defenders as part of effective human rights and environmental due diligence see: Front Line Defenders, Preventing Reprisals against human rights defenders through effective due diligence legislation, 2021 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/front_line_defenders_briefing_-_protecting_hrds_through_effective_hredd.pdf

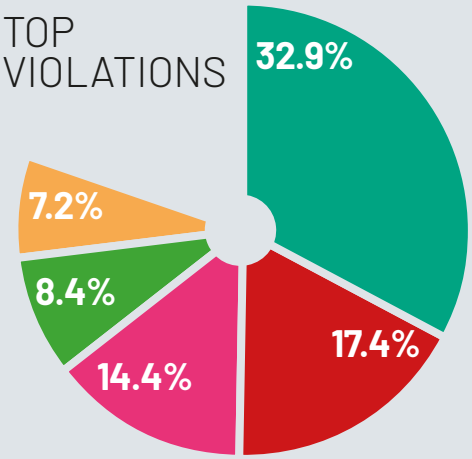
15 The UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) was adopted in 1998.

For the first time the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a report on civic space, specifically recommending the need to safeguard and protect HRDs, while the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) focused in on post-Covid-19 recovery, internet shutdowns and digital privacy in its reports on civic space.



AFRICA (SUB-SAHARAN)

TOP VIOLATIONS



FROM A TOTAL OF 167

55 ARREST / DETENTION
29 PHYSICAL ATTACK
24 DEATH THREAT
14 LEGAL ACTION
12 RAID / BREAK-IN / THEFT

MOST-TARGETED SECTORS

14.6% ENVIROMENTAL, LAND, INDIGENOUS PEOPLE RIGHTS

9.6% FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

9.2% FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY / PROTEST MOVEMENT

9.2% LABOUR / TRADE UNION / ASSOCIATION

8.3% WOMEN'S RIGHTS

AFRICA (SUB-SAHARAN)

In 2022, facing pervasive criminalisation, smear-campaigns and attacks, human rights defenders (HRDs) and human rights organisations across the region, continued to expose legislation restricting freedoms of assembly, association and expression and to mobilise and denounce human rights violations, corruption and authoritarian governments. In several countries, counter-terrorism imperatives were used to justify the restriction of civil society operations and the brutal repression of protests, with security forces using excessive and in some cases lethal force. Land, indigenous peoples' and environmental rights defenders consolidated their networks, enhancing collective strategies of resistance, while denouncing companies responsible for human rights and environmental abuses. Authorities' intolerance for those defending economic, social and cultural rights persisted as did impunity for attacks against them. Women, feminists and LGBTIQ+ defenders faced threats, violence and discrimination and dangerous while regressive legislation to criminalise LGBTIQ+ communities was pursued by several governments during the year. HRDs working in contexts of conflict and crisis faced extreme risks and danger when conducting their human rights work.

In countries including **Burkina Faso**, **Chad**, **the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**, **Guinea** and **Mali**, defenders and their communities were caught in the midst of armed rebels, terrorist groups and security forces, greatly endangering their safety. In Ethiopia, South Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia/Somaliland and Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province, conflict continued, heightening the risks facing HRDs. After a five month humanitarian truce ended in August, violence escalated in the Tigray region of **Ethiopia**, driving further attacks on civilians, increasing forced displacement and exacerbating the already dire humanitarian situation. In November, a peace deal was signed between the Ethiopian Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which the United Nations (UN) regards as an important first step towards lasting peace. In its October review of Ethiopia, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern about the widespread arbitrary arrests and detention, including of HRDs and journalists in the country, as well as the urgency of granting access of local NGOs and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to detainees. Human rights organisations reiterated the importance of

Congolese residents protest the deployment of a regional force which they see as ineffective in tackling the resurgent rebel group in North Kivu following renewed tensions around Goma in the North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo, 1 December 2022.

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prioritising independent investigations into the grave violations and abuses of human rights committed by all parties to the conflict.

Defenders in DRC continued to work in an extremely hostile, volatile and insecure context, exposing them to attacks, intimidation and physical assault, while impeding their access to certain areas to monitor and report on human rights violations. HRDs were particularly at risk in the eastern provinces of DRC, including in North-Kivu and Ituri where ineffective "states of siege" and confrontations between parties to the conflict heightened their insecurity and risk. In certain cases, women human rights defenders' (WHRDs) roles as care-givers and mothers were used as a means to attack and silence them. Since the instatement of the state of siege in North-Kivu, the women's grassroots organisation *Dynamique des Femmes Leaders d'IRUMU* (DYFELE) has been repeatedly targeted by the military. On 4 May, military officers raided DYFELE's office in search of the WHRD Miriam Furaha, during which two computers were confiscated. One day prior, Miriam's home had been raided by three military and two police officers. In her absence they arrested and detained her entire family for several hours, without a warrant, and during which time her family members were interrogated and ill-treated. The WHRD had previously been subjected to three other violent attacks between 2021 and 2022 and had been badly beaten and tortured in April 2022 by men in military uniforms, after which she went into hiding.

The protection of HRDs continued to be undermined by the expansion of restrictive legislation designed to disrupt the ability of HRDs to carry out their work safely and effectively. Governments criminalised HRDs through a range of legal tools including counter-terrorism and national security legislation and related laws restricting the safe and effective functioning of civil society and penalising freedom of assembly and expression.

During the year, the governments of Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique and Niger pushed ahead with "NGO bills"- in several cases under the guise of counter-terrorism imperatives - as a convenient tool to criminalise dissent and disrupt civil society funding and action. The controversial "Private Voluntary Organisations Amendment Bill", close to being enacted in **Zimbabwe**, is linked to compliance with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Recommendation 8[16]. The Bill, which at the end of the year was awaiting presidential assent to pass into law[17], as designed would give the government undue control over the governance and operations of civil society organisations as well as the power to revoke organisations' registration. In the run-up to the 2023 elections and in a context of increasing restrictions and stigmatisation of NGOs by public officials, the abusive contents of the Bill have raised serious concerns for HRDs in terms of their security and operations during the election period and in its aftermath.

Despite strong opposition from civil society in **Malawi**, the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) Bill came into force in May 2022. Defenders fear that the Bill's provisions that grant the government extensive powers to regulate NGOs will limit their work documenting human rights violations. While civil society recognises several positive measures in the legislation, including the removal of mandatory membership of the Council of NGOs in Malawi as a prerequisite for registration, concerns remain around problematic provisions such as the disproportionate sanctions and powers to suspend or revoke the registration of NGOs. In **Niger**, the counter-terrorism agenda continued to be used to restrict human rights work. A Decree issued on 24 February 2022, supplementing the 1984 Ordinance on the Regime for Associations, imposes severe controls and requirements on civil society organisations from registration and accessing foreign funding to the implementation of activities. Defenders fear that the Decree, which comes after several years of increasing restrictions on freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly, will limit their ability to work legally.

Freedom of expression, and in particular press freedom, was increasingly under attack and criminalised in countries such as Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and South Sudan, where HRDs and journalists were subjected to judicial harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, brutal attacks and media suspensions. In response to this onslaught, HRDs reported practising self-censorship to avoid reprisals, criminalisation and smear campaigns. In **Niger**, HRD **Ahmed Bello Issoufou** was summoned

16 FATF, The FATF Recommendations, https://www.fatf-gafi.org/en/publications/Fatfrecommendations/Fatf-recommendations.html

17 At the time of writing, the Zimbabwe law was still awaiting presidential signature. For more information see: New Zimbabwe, "UN warns Mnangagwa against PVO bill; urges him to turn it down", 15 February 2023, https://www.newzimbabwe.com/un-warns-mnangagwa-against-pvo-bill-urge-him-to-turn-it-down/

by the judicial police for a matter of concern on 10 March. The HRD was then arrested on the grounds of a defamation complaint filed against him by an officer of the National Security Forces of Filingue, in relation to a post on the defender's social media page denouncing the release of a teacher accused in a sexual violence case. On 22 March, the defamation case against the defender was dropped as a court ruled the charges to be unfounded. In **Cameroon**, HRD Paul Chouta was abducted by three unidentified men and severely beaten for expressing his support on social media for the "craie morte" teachers strike, where teachers had been protesting against their work conditions, including working in conflict affected parts of the country and in some cases with considerable delays in their salary payments.

During the year there was a notable intensification of crackdowns on journalists who were denouncing corruption, poor governance and abuse of power. In **Senegal**, the HRD and journalist Pape Alé Niang was held for over a month in detention without trial in retaliation for an article he published on judicial proceedings against an opposition leader, before being provisionally released on 14 December. Prior to his release he had gone on a hunger-strike on 2 December in protest against his arbitrary arrest and detention. The charges of "disclosure of information likely to harm National Defence" and "dissemination of false news likely to discredit public institutions" among other charges are still pending against him.

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, the parliament considered a draft bill to better regulate online speech. According to the authorities, the purpose of the bill is to curb xenophobic and abusive language online and to prevent hate speech from becoming the norm. Civil society organisations and HRDs, however, expressed concerns over the bill, which if approved will further restrict online civic space and increase self-censorship. In **Zambia**, where the change of government was generally viewed as positive for HRDs and civic space, the move at the end of the year to repeal the controversial colonial-era legislation that criminalises defamation of the president was largely welcomed as a positive step.

Governments in the Sahel region, Chad, Guinea and Mali, undergoing political transitions in the aftermath of military coups used the political context as a justification to violate the right to freedom of assembly. Requests for authorisation of peaceful demonstrations were systematically refused in many countries, with several governments invoking state security and the war on terrorism to ban and crush peaceful protests. Demonstrators who mobilised despite the bans faced deadly repression and excessive use of force at the hands of security forces, leading to arbitrary arrests, injuries and death. In **Guinea**, the National Front for the Defense of the Constitution (FNDC) called for peaceful protests nationwide in July and August to protest against the ban on demonstrations and the transitional military government. Security forces responded with violent repression and excessive use of force, including the use of tear gas and live ammunition to disperse protesters. Two members of the FNDC were arbitrarily detained during the July protests, before the military authorities dissolved the movement in August. During peaceful protests held on 20 October, at least five more protesters were killed.

In **Chad**, the military transition authorities banned all peaceful demonstrations organised by both the opposition and civil society during the year. On 20 October, a demonstration denouncing the extension of the military transition led by Mahamat Deby Itno was violently repressed by the security forces, killing at least 50 people and injuring over 300. Included among those killed was the HRD and journalist **Narcisse Oredje**, who died after sustaining bullet injuries.

In addition to the use of deadly violence, HRDs were also criminalised for their role in peaceful protests. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, defenders **Kipré Pacome, Diangoné Bi Roland, Dolé Anicet** and **Séry Romuald** - members of Urgences Ivoiriennes a citizen movement working to promote human rights, democracy and peace, were arrested during a peaceful protest in November denouncing the rising costs of living in the country. They were still detained at the time of the writing of this report. In **South Sudan**, protest movement leaders were increasingly targeted for their work particularly by the National Security Service (NSS), which has assumed an outsized role in policing HRDs and protest movements. HRDs from the **Aweil Civil Society Coalition** and **the Jonglei Civil Society Network** were targeted for their leadership role in protest movements with arrests, short and long-term detention, threats and harassment.

Vigorously contested elections are generally tense and challenging periods for HRDs as civic space is restricted and defenders are often targeted due to their human rights work on issues such as freedom of speech, corruption and good governance. In the lead-up to the general elections held on 24 August, **Angola's** ruling party used repressive tactics such as intimidation, arrests and beatings of citizens who were protesting against irregularities in the electoral process. According to the **Angolan Human Rights Defender Coalition** 24 defenders, mostly journalists, were harassed and arrested, before being later released. Despite apprehension among WHRDs, who feared targeted attacks against women defenders contesting local elections in Kenya in August, no attacks were reported.

Those defending economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) continued to demand states' compliance with their international obligations on wide-ranging ESCR issues including labour rights, land rights, affordable education, health care, sexual and reproductive rights, and adequate housing and protection from forced evictions. ESCR defenders mobilised cohesive networks and strengthened their capacities to articulate their demands, rendering them more of a threat in the eyes of authorities. Against a backdrop of a deepening hostile environment for civil society in **Togo**, members of the Teachers Union of Togo (SET) continued to be targeted for campaigning for better working conditions, with three members, **Joseph Toyou, Kossi Kossikan** and **Ditorga Sambara Bayamina** arbitrarily detained between 8 April and 5 October 2022. **The Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union (ARTUZ)** - a Front Line Defenders Award Winner in 2022 - has been subjected to a sustained campaign to intimidate, criminalise and discredit its crucial work on the right to education and labour rights for rural teachers in **Zimbabwe**. On 12 January 2022, several members were arrested after their peaceful protest outside the National Social Security Offices (NSSA) calling for the restoration of teachers' salaries was violently interrupted

Members of the Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union (ARTUZ) protest in Zimbabwe.

© Front Line Defenders

by the police. Among the arrested protesters were several prominent ARTUZ members, including the Union leader Obert Masaraure and Mash West Provincial Chairperson Munyaradzi Ndawana.

Prevalent impunity for killings of defenders working on ESCR in the region emboldened perpetrators while inflicting a deadly cost on the wider movement. This was especially apparent in South Africa where HRDs working on a range of human rights issues have been killed in recent years. Four defenders from the important social movement Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM), which promotes rights to decent housing, land and basic services for shack dwellers and the urban poor were reportedly killed in 2022. This brings the total killings of members of AbM to 24 since 2009, 22 of which cases remain in impunity. Many of these killings were preceded by threats, and were clearly intended to silence, intimidate and stop HRDs from carrying out their work.

In the midst of the ongoing challenges posed by the expansion of large-scale extractive, conservation and other unethical development projects, affected communities responded by increasing awareness of their rights, mobilising and resisting. Disregarding stated commitments to mitigate and respond to climate change, major polluting nations continued to pursue irresponsible extractive projects and invest in fossil-fuels across the

region. Similarly, in the context of expanding demand for renewable energy resources, extractive projects relating to the sustainable energy transition were also linked to human rights violations.

Across the region a common misconception prevails that indigenous people "are resisting development projects", as they are likely to benefit from them and receive compensation for the dispossession of their ancestral lands. That the land of indigenous peoples, the majority of whom are subsistence farmers, is their sole source of income, food and means of survival while also deeply connected to their culture and way of life, is callously disregarded. Indigenous communities such as Sengwer and Ogiek in Kenya; the Batwa and Benet in Uganda; and the Masai in Tanzania reported rampant and continued cases of sexual violence against women by security forces in the respective countries during evictions, during raids to their homes and as they tried to access the natural resources that they have used for centuries. Despite women being the main custodians of the land and bearing reproductive and productive responsibility for the community, their voices continue to be largely absent in any decision-making spaces concerning land and resources and consequently any development projects that threaten dispossession. Indigenous women defenders supported by Front Line Defenders were at risk of defamation, threats and physical attack within their own communities regardless of the rights they were defending. They were additionally targeted by state security mechanisms for being vocal on issues affecting women as a result of land evictions.

In Zimbabwe, the military was deployed in the Mashonaland Central province where the Australian oil company, Invictus Energy, has been engaged in oil and gas exploration in the Zambezi Valley. In a press statement on 23 September 2022, the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) called the deployment a training exercise aimed at protecting the whole territory of Zimbabwe. Given that this deployment also coincided with Invictus Energy's announcement that drilling had begun on the first of its two test wells, HRDs expressed concern that the military's presence was intended to discourage scrutiny and suppress any resistance or protest by communities. Despite the extensive drilling planned to take place in Cabora Bassa Basin, according to defenders there is no evidence of community consultations having taken place on the potential environmental and social impacts given its proximity to a waterway.

Environmental rights defender and president of the community conservation association Mialo - Henri Rakotoarisoa, was violently killed in June during an attack by a mob in Madagascar. He had been denouncing illegal logging by traffickers in a primary forest near Moramanga, on the east of the island, for two years preceding the attack. On 18 November, eight of his murderers were sentenced to forced labour for life, two other defendants were sentenced to three years in prison for failing to assist a person in danger. The other 23 were acquitted.

UGANDA: BUSINESS IMPACTS ON HRDS

In **Uganda**, HRDs and community members continued to mobilise against the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) backed by France's TotalEnergies and China's CNOOC. The widespread violations linked to this project including the eviction of thousands of people from their land with inadequate compensation – some of whom are indigenous pastoral and fisherfolk communities – and the judicial harassment and arbitrary arrest and detention of HRDs, has been widely condemned by the international community. Nevertheless, the Ugandan authorities, emboldened by a multibillion dollar state-corporate alliance, have become increasingly intolerant of defenders and communities resisting the project. The student HRDs **Barigye Bob, Ivan Kabale, Musoke Hamis Walusimbi** and **Ssemwanga Jackson** were arbitrarily arrested and detained on 9 December during a peaceful protest against the pipeline, before being released on 13 December. They were subsequently detained again on 14 December and charged with "common nuisance", before being released on bail. Of particular concern was that one of the defenders, Ssemwanga Jackson, was held in an undisclosed location for three days. Due to their work challenging the mega-oil project, the Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO) was also subjected to relentless intimidation, harassment and criminalisation by the Ugandan authorities. In just one of many incidents attempting to deter the organisation, in January 2022, AFIEGO's office was raided, with the police confiscating one of their computers, phones and institutional files. After several years of delay, TotalEnergies appeared before a Paris Court on 7 December[18] in relation to a groundbreaking case filed in 2019 by AFIEGO together with five more NGOs**.** The case is the first ever legal challenge using French due diligence legislation – the "Duty of Vigilance Act", which obliges all large French companies to conduct due diligence across the companies they control, their supply chains and sub-contractors.

Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO) members – seen here receiving an award – were subjected to intimidation by the Ugandan authorities for their activism challenging the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP).

© TT News Agency/Alamy Live News

18 The ruling is set for 28 February 2023. For more information see: Le Monde, "TotalEnergies back in court over its mega-project in Uganda", 8 December 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/environment/article/2022/12/08/totalenergies-back-in-court-over-its-mega-project-in-uganda_6006954_114.html

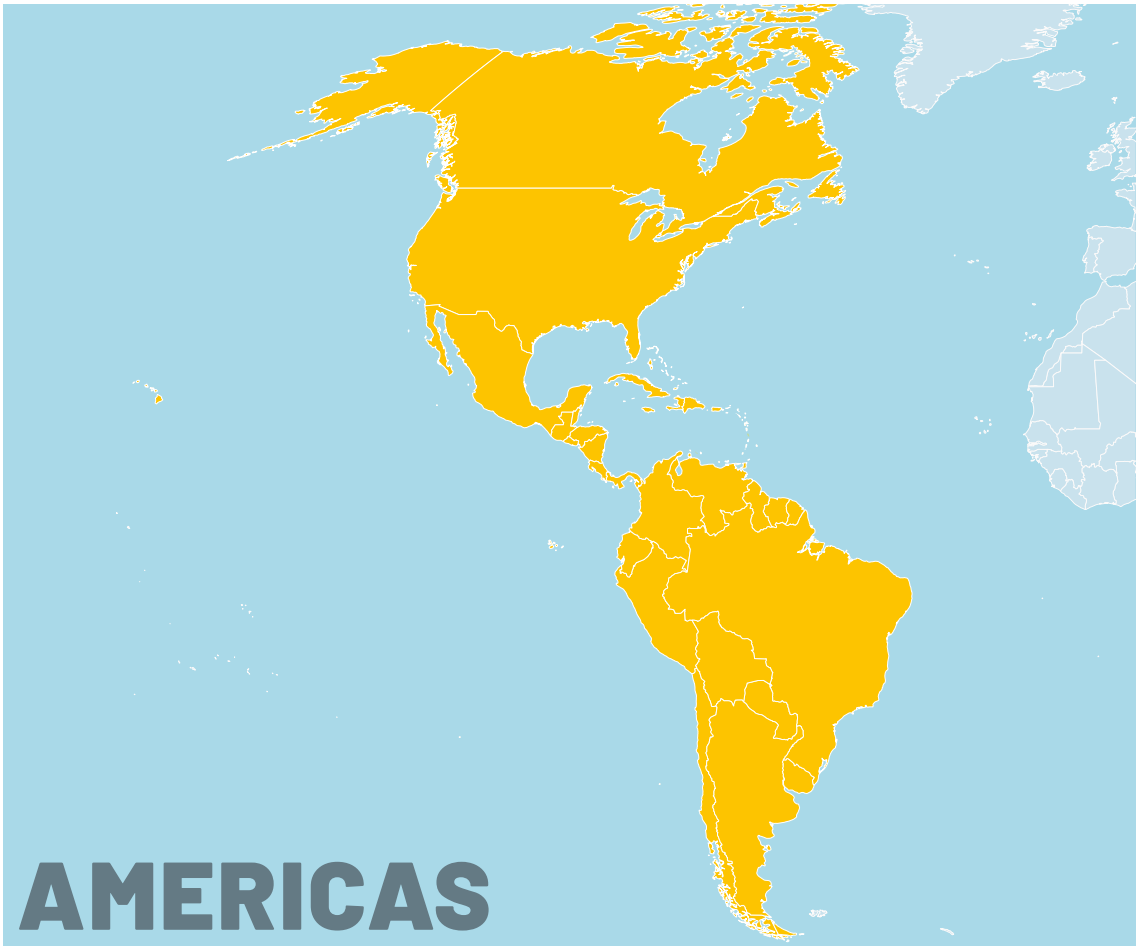
WHRDs and their organisations challenging patriarchal norms faced a multitude of threats in private and public spaces due to their human rights work demanding justice and accountability, defending social, economic and cultural rights and denouncing gender-based violence. In **Uganda**, WHRDs reported being subjected to torture, threats to their family members and continued harassment in public spaces. WHRDs, including indigenous women defenders and gender non-conforming HRDs in **Namibia** reported threats to their local business, evictions, dismissal from employment, as well as surveillance, arrest and detention, interrogation and verbal threats from community members. In the most conservative societies, WHRDs were forced to practice self-censorship. In **Senegal** and **Côte d'Ivoire** for example, women's rights organisations and feminist activists faced smear campaigns, online bullying and death threats for publicly denouncing gender-based violence.

The threats and risks that LGBTIQ+ defenders face are multiple and unique in that they are targeted not only for their human rights work, but also for their gender identity and sexual orientation. During the year, LGBTIQ+ defenders worked to maintain the protection and integrity of their communities in the face of escalating hostility and violence in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo and Uganda. Widespread political and societal pressure, considerably increased the risks facing LGBTIQ+ defenders and forced many to keep a low profile. Across the region, LGBTIQ+ defenders and their communities have been subjected to discrimination, harassment and intimidation. As a life-saving measure, many were forced to seek refuge elsewhere in the region, destabilising in turn their human rights work and accompaniment of the most vulnerable community members.

At the same time, governments persisted in their efforts to impose draconian legislation, disregarding the rights of LGBTIQ+ people and their obligations towards them. One of the more extreme pieces of legislation in the region the "Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill",introduced in June 2021 and currently under review in the **Ghanaian** parliament, contains severe punitive measures for LGBTIQ+ individuals, including the full criminalisation of them and their allies and advocates. A surge in violent attacks and sexual violence against LGBTIQ+ individuals coincided with the introduction of the bill, which indirectly sanctions hatred, violence and abuses. Three WHRDs in the country were sexually assaulted by unknown men due to their accompaniment work with lesbian community members and subsequently were forced to relocate. Meanwhile in **Mali**, HRDs expressed their concern regarding the plans to criminalise homosexuality. In August, the Malian Minister of Justice publicly announced that homosexuality would be criminalised under the revised Malian Penal Code. If approved, this will exacerbate the already high levels of targeting and hostility towards LGBTIQ+ rights defenders and their community.

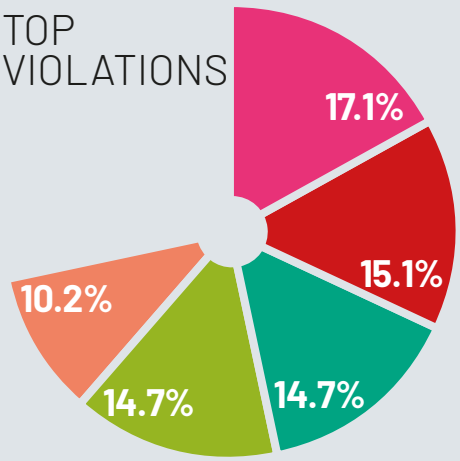
In **Kenya**, LGBTIQ+ defenders reported feeling increasingly at risk, as attacks against them and evictions from their homes and places of work intensified. The extreme situation

facing LGBTIQ+ defenders in the region was also evidenced by the level of requests for protection support in the form of temporary relocation and security advice observed by Front Line Defenders. Moreover the decision at the end of the year by the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) to reject applications for observer status relating to three NGOs working on LGBTIQ+ rights, underscored the serious deficit in commitment to protect LGBTIQ+ communities and defenders as well as the prevailing discrimination and intolerance against them.



AMERICAS

TOP VIOLATIONS



FROM A TOTAL OF 245

42 DEATH THREAT
37 PHYSICAL ATTACK
36 ARREST / DETENTION
36 SURVEILLANCE
25 OTHER HARASSMENT

MOST-TARGETED SECTORS

36.7% ENVIROMENTAL, LAND, INDIGENOUS PEOPLE RIGHTS

7.6% IMPUNITY / JUSTICE

7.6% WOMEN'S RIGHTS

6.1% EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES/ MEGAPROJECTS

5.5% FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

AMERICAS

In 2022, human rights defenders (HRDs) in the Americas continued to transform their societies and communities. Their long-standing role in defending land and territories, access to justice and building peace was fundamental to sustain creative responses to persisting challenges in the region. Despite the adverse context, women human rights defenders (WHRDs) and LGBTIQ+ groups continued to flourish and creatively build new leaderships. Although the region saw positive political changes as a result of important elections, the political will to protect HRDs continued to be largely absent. The criminalisation of defenders, including WHRDs, journalists and anti-corruption defenders was unrelenting during the year. In addition to the threat of criminalisation, those defending indigenous peoples', Afro-descendant communities', land and environmental rights were exposed to persistent and alarming levels of violence by both state and non-state actors, including widespread killings. In the midst of a prevailing rhetoric of "gender ideology" that has become normalised in the region in recent years, the risks to LGBTIQ+ defenders and WHRDs remained particularly acute.

Disputed elections held in **Colombia** and **Brazil** in 2022 were marked by active engagement of civil society, ensuring there was due process and needed political changes were achieved. However, elections took place against a backdrop of ongoing human rights violations, including increased attacks against HRDs, journalists and other political actors. Invoking states of emergency remained a strategy used by governments in **El Salvador**, **Guatemala** and later in the year **Honduras**, placing defenders at increasing risk with suspensions of key constitutional rights and extraordinary powers given to security forces. By the end of the year, **Peru** was plunged into a severe institutional crisis. In the aftermath of the detention of the then President of Peru, protests that erupted in the more remote parts of the country were harshly repressed by the police, leading to hundreds of people injured and dozens of killings.

In June, in a case that has particular resonance across the region, the former president of Desarrollos Energéticos Sociedad Anonima (DESA), David Castillo, was sentenced to 22 years and six months for his role as a co-collaborator in the murder of the environmental Lenca rights defender, **Berta Cáceres Flores**. The landmark ruling in 2021 and sentencing in 2022 are both significant steps in the search for justice for Berta Cáceres' family, her

Activists in Peru gather in front of the Peruvian Foreign Affairs Ministry to demand the signing of the Escazú Agreement and not turn their backs on environmental defenders.

© Fotoholica Press Agency/Alamy Live News

colleagues and broader **Honduran** society. Nevertheless, and in spite of progress made in the case, significant challenges remain to ensure that the intellectual authors of the crime are held accountable.

During the year, the ratification of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement) continued to gain pace, with Colombia and Chile ratifying the landmark treaty[19]. Civil society continued to push for its implementation as a key treaty for the protection of environmental defenders and justice and accountability for violations against them.

Endemic levels of impunity combined with limited access to justice throughout the region enabled ongoing criminalisation, combined with other forms of violent attack, to be used to silence and derail the crucial work of indigenous peoples', land, territory and environmental rights defenders. In Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and the United States (US) HRDs, many of whom are indigenous peoples, faced persistent and violent

19 The Escazú Agreement has now been signed by 25 Latin American and Caribbean countries and ratified by 14 of those. The Treaty is the first in the world with binding provisions on the rights of environmental defenders.

attacks, harassment and forced displacement as authorities, companies, landowners and farmers sought to further advance their commercial interests through the violent expropriation of land and ancestral territories. A common feature of such attacks was the presence of armed actors, be they police, military or paramilitary forces, private security companies, or other armed groups, effectively undermining any legal protections or community consultations where they existed. Moreover, violent attacks against and the displacement of these communities went hand in hand with the deliberate destruction of their livelihoods and means of survival. These tactics, combined with the dismantling of legal and environmental protections, particularly in Brazil, increased the danger facing defenders.

The criminalisation of indigenous, *campesino*[20] and Afro-descendent land and territory defenders formed part of a broader pattern of companies using legal strategies against HRDs and communities in the context of ongoing destructive extractive and large-scale development projects. In July, Afro-descendent leaders from the province of Esmeraldas in Ecuador, Nestor Caicedo, Andrés Arce, Luis Quintero and Samir Mina, were convicted and charged for their collective resistance against land expropriation, logging and environmental destruction, spearheaded by the Energy and Palma company. In August, a public trial due to be held against six environmental rights defenders from the *campesino* community, **Muchik Santa Catalina de Chongoyape** in **Peru**, based on the unsubstantiated charge of "altering the environment and landscape", was postponed until 2023 due to international pressure.

During the year, defenders in **Antigua** and **Barbuda** were labelled "economic terrorists" by the prime minister and repeatedly targeted and criminalised for their opposition to a private luxury tourist development. The resort and amenities, set to be developed on communal lands in the communities' possession since the abolition of slavery, pose serious threats to the environment. Similarly, Garífuna communities defending their ancestral lands in the north of **Honduras** continued to be criminalised and violently persecuted. In November, in a combined police and military operation, communities were brutally evicted from their homes, with six defenders detained, including **Melissa Martínez**, member of the Black Fraternal Organisation of Honduras (OFRANEH). They were later released due to international pressure. OFRANEH reported that the operation was preceded by a racist campaign against the communities in the local media.

In **Guatemala**, indigenous peoples' rights and land defenders faced alarming levels of armed attacks, threats and continued forced displacement. State officials, together with powerful businessmen and landowners and in collusion with the National Police, judicial authorities and the military, carried out judicial and extrajudicial evictions in at least eight communities in Alta Verapaz in the last six months of 2022. In May, in response to the **Maya Q'eqchi' Las Pilas community's** persistence in denouncing illegal logging to the municipal authorities,

20 The use of the term *campesino* refers to smallholder farmers in Latin America and the Caribbean.

ECUADOR: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MOBILISING FOR COLLECTIVE RIGHTS

Leonidas Iza Salazar, president of CONAIE.
© Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador

In **Ecuador**, reminiscent of recent years, the authorities once again responded to public protests with excessive and disproportionate use of force. On 13 June 2022, the **Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE)** called on diverse sectors of Ecuadorian society to join a national strike protesting against rising fuel and food costs and high levels of unemployment. Their demands also included the recognition of the collective rights of indigenous communities, halting the expansion of extractive industries and reparation for socio-environmental damage. Indigenous protesters were later joined by other sectors – students and workers, also negatively impacted by Ecuador's economic policies. The military and police responded with excessive use of force, leading to hundreds of arrests, injured protesters and the death of six people. The President of CONAIE, **Leonidas Iza Salazar**, was arbitrarily detained and held incommunicado for 15 hours. In the aftermath of the strike, the authorities continued to criminalise and stigmatise indigenous peoples, contributing to a permissive environment for attacks against indigenous peoples' rights defenders.

Strike against extractive industries in Colombia.
© Front Line Defenders

armed neighbours and other unknown actors forcibly evicted the community – burning down their village and completely destroying their homes and possessions. At the end of the year, more than 125 families remained displaced with no response from the local authorities.

In 2022, **Colombia** once again recorded the highest number of lethal attacks against HRDs, with HRD Memorial partner **Somos Defensores** recording a staggering 186 killings of defenders to date.[21] Limited state presence in remote territories continued to leave HRDs exposed to violence, especially members of local civic structures and social organisations. In the absence of the state, these HRDs have taken on a very visible role in the promotion of the 2016 Peace Accords in their territories, including the implementation of some of the provisions of the Accords and the protection of at-risk populations, but with limited state support and protection. In 2022 alone, 72 defenders working with Community Action Boards *(Juntas de Acción Comunal[22])* were killed.

21 The final number of killings of HRDs in Colombia for 2022 may still increase as Somos Defensores has additional cases in the final stages of verification.

22 A Junta de Acción Comunal (JAC) or Community Action Board is a local association of civic representation at community-level. It is a non-profit entity, with legal status, and is voluntarily integrated by the residents at a local level. https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=5301

The long-standing practice of criminalisation combined with smear campaigns and trumped-up charges against defenders in Colombia, contributes to sustaining a general climate of violence against defenders, including a high number of killings. In the department of Cauca, indigenous leaders and defenders have long been targeted by armed actors, while national authorities routinely fail to ensure their protection. In January, the **Association of National Indigenous Councils (ACIN)** reported that attacks by armed actors in the Nasa Indigenous territory in Cauca had led to the deaths of three HRDs and members of the Guardia Indígena (indigenous guard) - Guillermo Chicame Ipia, José Albeiro Camayo Güetio and the 14-year-old Breiner David Cucuñame López.

In **Mexico**, in particular in the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, Chihuahua and Chiapas, indigenous peoples' rights defenders and their communities defending their land and territory were subjected to armed attacks, enforced disappearances, violence and killings. Across Mexico, as recorded by the HRD Memorial, 18 indigenous peoples' rights defenders were killed because of their work in 2022, including eight in Oaxaca, five in Guerrero, and three in Chihuahua. **Juan Carlos Flores Solís and Miryam Vargas Teutle**, environmental defenders and members of the Frente de Pueblos en Defensa del Agua y de la Tierra de Morelos, Puebla and Tlaxcala (FPDATMPT) in east-central Mexico were targeted with repeated break-ins to their office, death threats and a possible attempted killing in connection with their struggle against mega-projects and the extraction and contamination of water in the region.

In June, **Brazilian** indigenous rights defender **Bruno Pereira** and **British** journalist **Dom Phillips** were attacked and killed as they travelled to investigate a group of illegal fishermen in an indigenous territory in the Brazilian Amazon. Pereira had received numerous threats for his work challenging illegal activities in the area. Despite the case reverberating globally, indigenous leaders in the Javary Valley continue to be threatened and illegal mining, fishing and poaching activities persist.

Moreover, regulations aimed at weakening restrictions on gun ownership in Brazil further contributed to violent attacks against indigenous communities in the Amazon and more deadly forms of land conflict. In Maranhão, the territory of the Ka'apor indigenous people has been affected by constant illegal logging, mining and the expansion of agribusiness facilitated by criminal organisations, with the reported collusion of local politicians. Since 2015, seven community members have been killed, and investigations to date have not identified those responsible.

Elsewhere in the Amazon, unabated attacks and the killings of indigenous leaders were devastating for these communities, inciting fear and paralysing resistance. In response, the authorities were grossly negligent in their obligations to protect the rainforest and its people, generating alarming rates of deforestation and violence against defenders. In July, indigenous leader **Virgilio Trujillo Arana** was killed for his work defending his community's territory against illegal mining and other illicit activities in the Venezuelan Amazon.

RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION

The draft International Cooperation Law in **Venezuela** includes a sanctioning mechanism aimed at local civil society, with the mandate to "prohibit, suspend, restrict, or definitively eliminate" any association that is determined to be directly or indirectly involved in activities that are deemed contrary to national interests. If approved, the law will have a disastrous effect on civil society, severely limiting access to international cooperation among other negative impacts.

Cuba's new Penal Code which came into effect in December, introduced Article 143 stating that individuals or organisations who receive funding from foreign institutions and who are considered to be supporting "actions against the state and the constitutional order" can be punished with prison sentences of up to 10 years. Social media and the internet will also now be regulated under the Penal Code, exposing HRDs to further risk.

In **El Salvador**, the authorities introduced a suite of legislative reforms to further stifle dissent and legitimate human rights work. In February, the Legislative Assembly approved a reform to the Code of Criminal Procedure authorising "digital undercover agents" to collect personal and public information stored on any electronic device when investigating computer crimes, without specifying whether they will require judicial authorisation.

On 2 April, the National Assembly of **Nicaragua** approved the General Law for the Regulation and Control of Non-Profit Organizations which prohibits organisations from taking actions that "violate public order" or that "destabilise" the country, or from engaging in political proselytism. The Law enables the government to cancel the legal status of NGOs and to confiscate their assets. In conjunction with the 2020 Law on Foreign Agents, the new legislation facilitated the closure of an unprecedented number of organisations, during the year, with human rights organisations reporting the closure of at least 2,000 NGOs in 2022. Moreover, according to **IM Defensoras**, 176 feminist organisations and NGOs that promote the rights of women have been shut since 2018.

In **Ecuador**, the Shuar indigenous people, the largest indigenous ethnic group of the Ecuadorian Amazon, were targeted by state and non-state actors due to their opposition to oil and mining extractive companies.

Restrictions against human rights organisations and broader civil society was further enabled by governments' misuse of legislation to control and limit the work of HRDs in a range of countries including Cuba, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Venezuela. Regressive law reforms had serious implications including in relation to freedoms of assembly, association and expression as well as access to international funding.

Pervasive criminalisation of those who denounced corruption, deepening authoritarianism and the erosion of rule of law was documented in countries including Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua and Venezuela where investigations and arbitrary detention

were characterised by extensive violations of due process guarantees. By November, dozens of anti-corruption HRDs, journalists and justice operators had fled **Guatemala** due to investigations or fear of reprisals. Several defenders who had had cases against them dismissed or had even been released, faced new charges or cases by the end of the year. While states of emergency are designed to be exceptional and time-bound, the prolonged application in **El Salvador** led to a surge in arbitrary arrests, detentions and deaths in custody, with over 60,000 people arrested during 2022. Under the state of emergency, journalists fled the country while defenders, in particular community leaders, youth and racialised defenders, were subjected to arbitrary arrest and prolonged detention. In **Nicaragua**, the restricted context for the defence of human rights and freedom of expression contributed to an ongoing hostile environment for civil society organisations. HRDs, as part of a group of 180 political prisoners, continued to be held in appalling conditions in prisons in Nicaragua. Many were suffering from deteriorating states of health, nevertheless the authorities continued to deny access to adequate medical attention and visits from families and lawyers, contrary to international standards.

In Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Nicaragua defenders increasingly risked retaliation for voicing dissent and demanding accountability from public authorities and private companies. During 2022, public declarations by high-level government officials, including presidents, contributed to a challenging environment for human rights journalists. Those who dared investigate and denounce violence and corruption were on the receiving end of threats, digital attacks, surveillance, stigmatisation, intimidation, harassment and criminalisation.

The hostile environment during Bolsonaro's four-year term in **Brazil** culminated in an electoral period marked by aggressive attacks directed at media outlets and journalists. Such attacks were often led by the president himself and magnified by other high-ranking public officials and his supporters. Elsewhere in El Salvador, online hounding by public officials extended to hate speech against journalists and defenders who denounced human rights violations, clearly legitimising and inciting violence and attacks against defenders. As part of the broader gang-related measures introduced in early 2022, in April the government approved criminal reforms that punish journalists who report or share any information on human rights violations in the context of the authorities' crackdown on gangs, with up to 15 years in prison. In **Nicaragua**, the government's ongoing offensive against the country's oldest newspaper *La Prensa*, included criminalisation, arbitrary detention of personnel, defamation, raids of journalists' homes and confiscation of equipment. Meanwhile **Mexico**, yet again, was the deadliest country in the world for journalists, with the killings of 12 journalists recorded during the year.

In March, in **Guatemala**, Maya Q'eqchi reporter **Carlos Ernesto Choc Chub** and member of the community-based media outlet Prensa Comunitaria Kilómetro 169, was the subject of a new complaint filed against him by 13 members of the National Civil Police and the Public Prosecutors Office in Izabal. The criminal charge levied against him and 11 other

indigenous leaders of "incitement to commit a crime" relates to his reporting covering the violent removal of Maya Q'eqchi' people from a peaceful sit-in in Solway's processing plant in 2021, where communities had been protesting against the Swiss-Russian mining company's activities and demanding the right to consultation.

In 2022, WHRDs in the region faced multifaceted and intersectional forms of risk due to their crucial human rights protection work and feminist leadership in local and national spaces. During the year, the continuum of gender-based harassment and violence against WHRDs was characterised by the prevalence of misogynistic language and stigmatisation, gendered impunity, pervasive violence as well as attacks directed against their family members. Moreover, in many countries in the region, however particularly notable in **Puerto Rico** and **the Dominican Republic**, the conservative discourse regarding "gender ideology", compounded further the serious levels of gender-based and racial violence, as well as the threats and intimidation facing WHRDs and LGBTIQ+ defenders.

Systematic and targeted violence continued to be wielded against WHRDs and feminist organisations who were active in denouncing feminicides and other forms of gender-based violence. On 3 April, a group of feminists from various collectives were violently evicted from a protest at the Chimalhuacan Justice Centre of the Attorney General's Office of the State of Mexico. The WHRDs were demanding justice for a woman defender who was disappeared for hours and was tortured by the municipal police.

Indigenous women, with visible leadership roles in their communities and territories were also targeted with violent attacks and judicial persecution. In **Ecuador**, the environmental rights WHRD **Alba Bermeo Puin** was murdered by people associated with illegal mining in the communities of Río Blanco, Cochapamba and Yumate. Alba was five months pregnant at the time. In **Mexico**, **Kenia Hernandez**, the lawyer, feminist and Amuzga indigenous defender and coordinator of the Zapata Vive Libertarian Collective, has had 10 criminal investigations opened against her since 2020 in relation to her legitimate human rights work. In February and in March she was sentenced in two of these cases, to 11 years and three months, and nine years and two months in prison respectively. The WHRD who works tirelessly against the negative impacts of development projects on indigenous and *campesino* communities, has been held in solitary confinement in a maximum security prison in the state of Morelos since 2020, where she has been denied access to her legal representatives and family visits. Human rights organisations denounced the discrimination against her on the grounds of her identity as an indigenous woman.

A combination of brutal violence, impunity, criminality, discrimination and transphobia against diverse gender identities restricted the human rights work of LGBTIQ+ defenders. In Mexico, after the murder of three trans women in Veracruz, the call for justice by trans WHRDs remained low profile, as they feared exposing themselves to more violence and re-victimisation. On 16 January, Natalia Lane, a trans woman and sex worker rights defender, was the victim of an attempted transfeminicide in Mexico City. She was subsequently

re-victimised by the deliberate denial of her identity as a woman and the prejudice against her for being a street-based sex worker, both by medical personnel and by the justice system. In **Honduras**, attacks and assassination attempts in retaliation for their human rights work, as well as gender-based discrimination, remained acute for LGBTIQ+ defenders. The aggressors in most cases were officials of state institutions, such as healthcare staff and police officers, hindering access to the healthcare and judicial system.

In the context of alarming rates of transfeminicides in the Americas, killings of trans WHRDs were documented by Front Line Defenders and HRD Memorial partners in Colombia (1), Ecuador (1), Honduras (2) and Mexico (4). On 10 January, **Thalía Rodríguez**, a trans WHRD and member of the Cattrachas Lesbian Network was killed in her home in Tegucigalpa, **Honduras**. Weeks before her murder, the defender had spoken out about the Inter-American Court of Human Rights' (IACHR) ruling which holds the Honduran state responsible for the murder of human rights defender **Vicky Hernández**, which took place in 2009 in the context of the coup.

Historically, WHRDs in **Colombia** and **Brazil** have led Black, indigenous and rural communities resisting the horrors of conflict and violence in regions marked by the absence of state institutions, further impeding their access to protection and justice. In March, **Yirley Judith Velasco Garrido** – a survivor of the Salado massacre in Colombia and a WHRD who supports survivors of conflict-related sexual violence to demand justice and reparations, received a death threat using misogynistic language and also threatening her mother and women lawyers. Four days after, her family home was set on fire by unknown persons. In July, **Piedad Aguirre**, a 65-year-old WHRD and reference for Colombian Black ancestral culture in Tumaco was a victim of a feminicide at her home. Investigations into her killing had not progressed by the end of the year. Defenders continued to expose and challenge prevailing structural practices of racism and discrimination against the most marginalised groups including migrants and refugees in the region. In December, the office of the **Dominican-Haitian Women's Movement (MUDHA)** was broken into and raided by approximately 20 people, including army personnel and people in plain clothes. MUDHA was targeted in retaliation for their tireless efforts to protect the rights of communities of Haitian descent who have historically been victims of discrimination, racism, and xenophobia.

Those defending the rights of asylum-seekers and migrants continued to be exposed to acute risks and violence for their work advocating for one of the most at-risk groups in Mexico and the US. **Pastor Lorenzo Ortiz**, who works to protect asylum-seekers on the US-Mexico border, was reportedly threatened by cartels again in October after having been kidnapped by them in June. Despite ongoing attacks, in particular by drug cartels, effective protection via state mechanisms remained elusive for these defenders.

Throughout the region, digital threats and surveillance of HRDs made it difficult for those at risk to feel completely safe, even when implementing physical protection strategies. Continual messages and death threats through anonymous phone calls and the hacking

of social media accounts and email was widespread, even when HRDs were no longer in their territory, making it challenging for them to overcome their sense of insecurity and emphasising further the need for holistic protection strategies.

The use of Pegasus spyware against defenders and journalists in **El Salvador**, with the serious security and privacy implications it entailed, posed a new and serious threat. Creating a sense of ever-present surveillance, it had serious destabilising effects on both the work and mental health of journalists who were targeted. In December, in a strategic move, 15 members of El Faro filed a lawsuit in the US against the Israeli-based NSO Group in an effort to denounce and demand justice for the illegal surveillance against their members.

Later in the year revelations emerged regarding the illegal use of spyware by the Mexican military against HRDs. In the investigation *"Ejército Espía"* – "Spying Army", La Red en Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, ARTICLE 19 Mexico and Central America and SocialTIC alongside other allies, exposed the use of Pegasus spyware by the Mexican military to illegally surveil journalists and HRDs. Those targeted had been conducting investigations into human rights violations committed by the armed forces at the time of the illegal surveillance. In a country where the armed forces have accumulated unprecedented levels of power during the presidency of Andrés Manuel López Obrador[23], their access to illegal spyware poses a serious threat to civil society.

Another concerning trend was the growing use of social media to harass and defame HRDs, activists and journalists. Increasingly, online attacks are originating from netcentres in the region in the form of orchestrated online trolling and attacks. A disturbing feature of these online attacks are the levels of online violence directed at WHRDs and journalists, which include the use of misogynistic language, coupled with threats of sexual and other forms of gender-based violence. In 2022, such attacks were leveraged against women journalists to undermine and discredit them professionally and served to normalise violence against them. The torrent of gendered online violence by high-ranking public officials was particularly acute in El Salvador, where women journalists denouncing human rights violations in the context of the state of emergency reported self-censorship and forced exile as the few remaining forms of protection available to them.

23 For further information see Front Line Defenders, Global Analysis 2021, https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/2021_global_analysis_-_final_-_update_15_july.pdf, page 32.

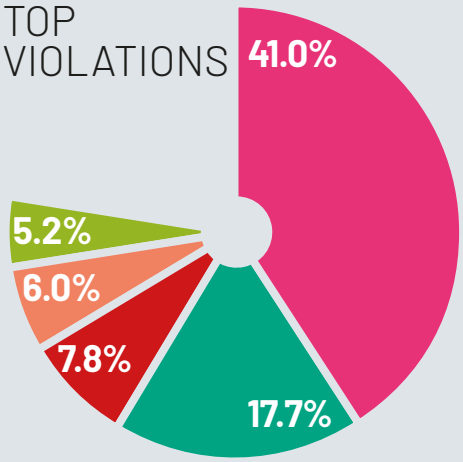
WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN SEARCH OF JUSTICE

In May, **Mexico** reached the grim milestone of 100,000 victims of enforced disappearance, while WHRDs were exposed to increased risks as they continued to search for their missing loved ones. The work of collectives who search for the disappeared is both dangerous and devastating: members travel to different parts of the country, including areas controlled by drug cartels, to dig for remains of their family members. Leading the collectives, WHRDs not only have to contend with the serious risks associated with demanding justice for the disappeared, but also the re-victimisation by the authorities and the unspeakable pain of not knowing the fate of their family members. Members of the collectives risk being harassed, threatened, forced to relocate or even killed for their work, however, despite their human rights work they are generally not recognised as HRDs, further weakening their protection. Women members shoulder the burden for care-taking responsibilities, while also working and participating in the collectives. Moreover, they face additional gendered discrimination; they are often labelled as irresponsible for "neglecting" their family duties and searching for someone who "is gone" or who "might be dead". In 2022, in Mexico alone, eight HRDs from these collectives were murdered because of their human rights work, including six WHRDs. These figures under-represent the true scale of the horrors faced by these collectives, as the level of threat is so high and the desire to continue their work is so deep, that they are known to self-censor certain cases as a form of protection.

The dedication and bravery of the collectives is illustrated by the Front Line Defenders 2022 Award Winners, **María and Javier del Tránsito** from Guanajuato, Mexico. In the aftermath of the disappearance and killing of their daughter **Lupita**, and the subsequent murder of their son **Javier Barajas Piña**, they have continued to accompany other families demanding truth and justice for victims of enforced disappearances.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

TOP VIOLATIONS



FROM A TOTAL OF 485

199 DEATH THREAT
86 ARREST / DETENTION
38 PHYSICAL ATTACK
29 OTHER HARASSMENT
25 LEGAL ACTION

MOST-TARGETED SECTORS

27.6% WOMEN'S RIGHTS

9.9% HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT

8.4% FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

6.1% IMPUNITY / JUSTICE

5.9% FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY / PROTEST MOVEMENT

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Human rights defenders (HRDs) in Asia faced unprecedented challenges in 2022 as they pushed back against regressive states, including legal persecution combined with misuse and abuse of anti-terrorism frameworks and growing restrictions on the rights to privacy and freedoms of expression, assembly and movement. Over the years, state authorities across the region have regularly targeted and vilified HRDs with impunity, branding them as terrorists and exposing them to harm through legal and extra legal means. During the year, women human rights defenders (WHRDs), especially those with intersecting identities that are traditionally persecuted, were particularly affected. While indigenous peoples' rights defenders and those protecting land and environmental rights against corporate and state interests faced heightened risks. Meanwhile, governments extended their extra-territorial reach to target defenders in exile and pursued increasingly sophisticated forms of digital surveillance of defenders and repression of freedom of expression online. Despite this hostile context, HRDs persisted in challenging governments' anti-rights agendas and policies that harm and undermine citizens, while consistently speaking out alongside the most marginalised communities. Defenders steadfastly countered negative misinformation campaigns, exposing the increasingly unconvincing narratives depicting HRDs and their communities as serious security threats.

Women defenders in the region continued to play a critical role especially in response to crisis and contexts of systemic persecution and representing the most oppressed and voiceless in their communities. In **Afghanistan** and **Myanmar**, WHRDs continued to mobilise and protest against brutal regimes, while protecting vulnerable communities. Across the region women defenders paid a heavy and gendered cost for their work including attacks against their families, online violence, and disinformation campaigns and gender-based violence including sexual violence. In **Bangladesh**, WHRD and school teacher Mariyam Akhter Pakhi, along with her elderly mother, two brothers and small child, were severely injured after a group of 20 men violently attacked them in their home in January in reprisal

for her work promoting access to free education for children from low-income households. She was forced to relocate and continues to face death threats from her attackers.

Criminalisation, in the form of legal persecution, was a tool regularly used to target defenders in the region. Laws including anti-terrorism legislation, cybersecurity laws, public properties legislation and even ordinary law aimed at protecting citizens, were weaponised to target defenders, with the objective of punishing defenders with pre-trial detention and raising the cost of doing human rights work irrespective of evidence or the realistic prospect of successful prosecution. Defenders were routinely denied access to bail and received multiple charges in separate cases to ensure their prolonged incarceration.

For years in the region, overly broad and vague anti-terrorism and national security laws have been used by authorities to crush dissent. For defenders from historically persecuted communities such as religious ethnic minorities in India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and the Uyghur Region, the impact of anti-terrorism and public security laws have been particularly devastating as they have further compounded pre-existing discriminatory practices and violence. During 2022, national security and anti-terrorism laws were instrumentalised to criminalise, persecute and imprison defenders in China, Hong Kong, India, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

Under **Sri Lanka's** Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), detainees are denied due process rights including judicial review and access to bail, and can be held in pre-trial detention for prolonged periods of time. Amendments to the PTA enacted early in 2022, did little to bring it in line with Sri Lanka's obligations under international law. In August three student rights defenders, Wasantha Mudalige, Galwewa Siridhamma Thero and Hashan Jeewantha, were arbitrarily arrested and detained under the draconinan PTA for their role in the peaceful protests without acess to bail or judicial review of their detention. Jeewantha and Siridhamma Thero were released in October and November respectively. Sri Lankan courts discharged Mudalige from the case due to insufficient evidence after over 165 days in detention. Despite the discharge, he remained in jail due to multiple separate cases against him.[24] The practice of filing multiple criminal cases including under the anti-terror law, is common also in Pakistan and India, with the objective of ensuring HRDs remain in jail even if they are granted bail in a separate case.

In **India**, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) has been used for years to muzzle HRDs and dissidents while striking fear in their communities. With provisions enabling detention without charge for up to 180 days and restricted recourse to bail, the UAPA allows judicial authorities and the police to override regular law and due process rights and ensures that bail remains out of reach for HRDs. **Khurram Parvez**, a well known human rights defender from Kashmir, remains jailed under the UAPA following his arrest in 2021 on allegations of "terrorism funding", "being a member of a terrorist organisation" and "waging war against

24 Wasantha Mudalige was finally released on 31 January 2023.

the state". Kashmiri defenders, especially those associated with Khurram and his organisation, have faced relentless reprisals including summons for interrogation, labelling and threat of arrest in response to their work. With the trial of the Bhima-Koregaon case yet to commence, 11 defenders have remained in pre-trial detention since 2020, with only Sudha Baradhwarj, Varavara Rao and Anand Teltumbde released on bail to date. A fourth defender in the case, Gautam Navlakha, was released on house arrest for a period of one month due to serious ill health. While eighty-four year old Stan Swamy, another co-accused, died in custody on 5 July 2021 due to lack of medical care. Of those arrested in relation to peaceful protests against the draconian Citizenship Amendment Act in India, at least six defenders remained in jail through 2022. Meanwhile, in Pakistan, Professor Muhammad Ismail continues to face fresh cases, including under anti-terror law, due to his work and support for his daughter Gulalai Ismail, who was forced to flee the country due to threats.

In the **Philippines**, HRDs and their organisations continued to be labelled as terrorist "fronts" and their assets frozen under the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act (TFPSA); one of the anti-terrorism laws most frequently relied upon by the government to vilify HRDs. In August, the WHRD and human rights lawyer Czarina Golda Musni, also a member of the National Union of People's Lawyers (NUPL), together with 15 nuns of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, was targeted with baseless accusations and charged under the TFPSA for allegedly providing funding to government-designated terrorists.

Arbitrary detention and prosecution of HRDs on public order or national security charges continued unabated during the year in **China**. Detention and trial procedures were increasingly less transparent and abusive, with more severe restrictions on due process and fair trial rights. In cases against defenders it was common for the police and prosecutors to exhaust every possible provision under China's Criminal Procedure Law to extend the investigative and prosecution stages to the maximum period allowed. In October, the detention of WHRD and lawyer Li Yuhan approached the five-year mark. Although she has reportedly suffered at least three heart attacks while in prison, she was refused adequate medical treatment. Moreover, the harsh conditions and ill-treatment during detention further contributed to the deterioration of her health. While detained, HRDs routinely have their legal representation of choice severely limited or denied completely. In some cases, HRDs were coerced into dismissing their lawyers, who were then replaced by government appointed lawyers, and thus greatly hindered any possibility of a fair trial, such as in the cases of WHRD Huang Xueqin and health rights defender Cheng Yuan. In contravention of the Criminal Procedure Law, external observers including diplomats, journalists and even family members were denied the right to observe trials.

In **Hong Kong**, HRDs resorted to self-censorship and limiting their engagement with international actors in an increasingly suffocated civic space. Relying on the presumption against bail contained in the Hong Kong National Security Law (HKNSL) and invoking a rarely used sedition provision in the Crime Ordinance, authorities were able to detain defenders without bail for an extended period of time. Through a combination of smear campaigns in

state-controlled or state-owned media and reprisals, the authorities tried to further stifle dissent and silence any public criticism of its human rights record. At risk of being accused of "foreign collusion" under the HKNSL, some HRDs resorted to self-censorship, deliberately reducing contact with foreign governments, UN human rights mechanisms, international human rights organisations and diplomatic missions in Hong Kong.

In **Vietnam**, authorities used the law and other means of persecution to target HRDs, including arbitrary arrest and detention, harassment, surveillance and a long-established practice of restricting freedom of movement. Under the vaguely worded article 117 of the 2015 Criminal Code, prominent activist and independent journalist **Nguyen Lan Thang** was arrested by the Investigation Bureau of the Hanoi Police on charges of "making, storing, distributing or disseminating information, documents and items against the state", for which he may face up to 20 years in detention. Since his arrest, and in violation of due process and fair trial rights, he has been held incommunicado, with no access to his legal counsel or visits from family members, while his health has reportedly deteriorated.

Labelling defenders as terrorists, criminals, or anti-state has a significant impact on their safety and often precedes or accompanies other forms of persecution, including criminalisation and even violence by state and vigilante groups. In **the Philippines**, despite widespread international condemnation, the deadly practice of "red-tagging"[25], or publicly accusing defenders of being communist supporters or rebels, has continued under the new President. This dangerous and nefarious tactic has had dangerous repercussions for HRDs including extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, judicial harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and false charges. According to HRD Memorial partner, **Karapatan, the Alliance for the Advancement of Peoples Rights,** 10 HRDs were killed in the Philippines in 2022.

In August, **Atel Hijos**, the 76 year old WHRD and Secretary General of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Gabriela-Caraga, was arrested in the province of Aguasan del Norte in the Philippines. Her arrest was believed to be in retaliation for her work defending women's rights and campaigning against mining companies. In a typical act of red-tagging, the allegations against her were based on fabricated testimonies by soldiers attesting that she is a combatant and had been involved in armed confrontations. This is despite the fact that the WHRD has to rely on a wheelchair and suffers from pulmonary tuberculosis, making the accusations made against her absurd. In 2022, judicial harassment was ramped up against **10 defenders** from Karapatan, GABRIELA – the National Alliance of Women, and the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP), as part of an ongoing effort to crush their vital human rights work[26].

In Bangladesh, China, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, there was no accountability or redress for families of the disappeared who were campaigning for justice and truth about the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones. Defenders from victim communities such as families

25 See Front Line Defenders 2021 Global Analysis for a detailed overview of the practice of "red-tagging" in the Philippines, https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/2021_global_analysis_-_final_-_update_15_july.pdf, page 10

26 The ten defenders were acquitted in January 2023.

On the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearances (30 August 2022), victims' families in Dhaka, Bangladesh call for investigations.

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of the disappeared faced violence, surveillance, physical, psychological and online abuse and legal challenges due to their work. In **China**, authorities continued to maintain a veil of secrecy around cases of defenders, concealing details of the place of detention, charges, their trial and sentence. October 2022 marked two years since WHRD He Fangmei was disappeared after conducting a protest in front of a local government office in Huixian, Xinxiang, Henan province. She was reportedly tried in March 2022, but no details of the trial's outcome have been made public. The authorities have maintained a shocking lack of transparency regarding details of her well-being and whereabouts, as well of that of her husband and three children, one of whom she had in detention. In **Bangladesh**, relatives of the disappeared were targeted for their campaigns and engagement with United Nations (UN) mechanisms following the sanctions imposed by the United States against high-ranking Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) officials in late December 2021. RAB, the security agency responsible for the majority of cases of enforced disappearances in Bangladesh, is yet to be held accountable domestically.

In Afghanistan and Myanmar regressive and violent regimes returned to power in 2021 at great cost to ordinary citizens and HRDs, especially women. In **Afghanistan** since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, human rights gains and protections rapidly eroded, with a drastic deterioration in conditions particularly for women and girls and ethnic minorities. During 2022, HRDs faced near-daily attacks and violent reprisals including arrest, torture and other threats. Women's rights, which have been hard won over 20 years, were swiftly and severely reversed. Women continued to respond by taking to the streets to demand an end to the widespread violations and discrimination against them. In retaliation for their resistance, they have been threatened, kidnapped, arbitrarily arrested, imprisoned, tortured and subjected to sexual violence as a form of punishment. At the end of the year, in yet another crushing blow to women and girls in the country, the Taliban banned women from attending university and from working in international NGOs. LGBTIQ+ defenders and their communities, already discriminated against prior to the Taliban takeover, faced alarming levels of risk and violence, including rape and murder. The documentation of human rights violations continued to be extremely difficult in such a hostile environment, nevertheless, HRDs continued to do this at great risk to themselves and their families. In a context where effective protection inside the country is nearly impossible, communities have come together to protect those arrested and those likely to be harmed. There are few safe and legal pathways to leave the country, with challenges including difficulties in securing travel documents, and insufficient availability of visas to third countries for those most at risk. Defenders in transit countries also face severe challenges, including violence, and the threat of forced returns.

In **Myanmar**, close to two years on from the brutal military coup, there is increasing evidence that the military has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity against civilians, including killings, forcible transfer of populations, sexual violence and targeting of civilians. Moreover, the barbaric human rights violations against the Rohingya have intensified since the coup, and armed conflict and violent repression at the hands of the military has resurged in other ethnic regions in the country. During the year, HRDs and journalists were subjected to severe reprisals for their work. The Penal Code, particularly sections relating to high treason, defamation and statements causing public disorder, was widely used by the military junta to suppress all forms of dissent. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) 13,217 political prisoners remained in detention, 97 of whom were sentenced to death by the end of the year, including several HRDs. In an escalation of the junta's repression, political activists **Phyo Zeya Thaw, Kyaw Min Yu, Hla Myo Aung** and **Aung Thura Zaw** were executed. In the face of widespread atrocities unleashed by the military junta, the initially peaceful civilian resistance movement fractured into armed civilian militias in some parts of the country. Against this backdrop of a spiralling civil war, HRDs persisted in promoting peaceful resistance movements, while documenting gross human rights violations and providing support to affected communities.

Across the region, protest movements emerged in response to economic crisis and state repression. In Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines and Sri

Police in Colombo violently dispersing protesters in Sri Lanka demanding the resignation of the President and Prime Minister.

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Lanka new groups of defenders joined long standing campaigners to speak out against state failure, corruption, impunity, land grabbing and discriminatory policies. Youth were a driving force in many of the protests. This was particularly evident in **Sri Lanka** where widespread protests across the country took place against government mismanagement, corruption and impunity. Sri Lanka has a history of protest and campaigns from Tamil victims of the armed conflict seeking accountability and redress for violations, to which the state has responded with violence, reprisals and threats. The protest movement in 2022, was responded to with brute force with thousands arrested and three defenders charged under anti-terrorism laws. A state of emergency was imposed by the President which gave widespread powers of arrest, search and seizure to law enforcement.

In **Indonesia**, protests in September led by students and trade union activists expressed discontent at the hike in fuel prices as well as at the deeper systemic problems of democratic backsliding, growing corruption and attacks on freedom of expression under the Jokowi government. Several HRDs were briefly detained and injured. In **Bangladesh**, some of the most marginalised groups, including garment and tea workers organised strikes demanding wage hikes in the context of soaring inflation and fuel prices. During the demonstrations, protesters and labour rights defenders faced excessive use of force, intimidation and trumped-up charges.

Cambodian WHRD and President of the NagaWorld Union, Chhim Sitor, was violently arrested and held for three months in pre-trial detention in Phnom Penh for her role in a peaceful protest outside the NagaWorld Casino, where she and other workers were demanding improved working conditions. She was detained again in November and sent to pre-trial detention in Correctional Centre 2, where she was subjected to horrendous prison conditions.

Land and environmental defenders, many of whom are indigenous peoples, faced severe reprisals across the region in 2022, including the killing of 16 defenders working on these issues. Their concerns for livelihood, environment, access to natural resources and protection of traditional lands came into sharp conflict with powerful state and corporate interest groups. In recent years it has become increasingly risky for defenders to stand up to the combined might of political and corporate interests that threaten their rights to land, food and a healthy environment. Defenders working with and from economically poor communities that intersect with traditionally persecuted identities, such as Dalit and indigenous communities, were particularly vulnerable. In India, indigenous woman rights defender Hidme Markam spent nearly two years in jail on false cases, including under the UAPA, due to her campaign on behalf of Adivasi community rights and against destructive corporate projects, such as the mining project proposed by Adani Pvt Ltd[27].

Also in India, state of Odisha, local communities in the Jagatsinghpur District, mainly Dalit, have been fighting against the illegal acquisition of their land and destruction of their livelihoods and environment for years. If the JSW Utkal Steel Ltd (JUSL) project goes ahead, it is estimated that 40,000 people will be forcibly displaced and the company's activities will lead to further widespread violations. Local communities, often led by WHRDs, have been terrorised by the authorities and their freedom of movement and access to their fields hindered by the presence of police platoons. During the year over 60 community members have been arrested for their resistance to the project, and more than 72 criminal cases have been registered against over 1,000 community members. Several HRDs remained in judicial custody, where some have reportedly been subjected to torture.

WHRD Sukhgerel Dugersuren, who has dedicated her life to supporting herder communities in Mongolia directly impacted by large-scale mining, energy and infrastructure projects, was informed in August, by the General Intelligence Agency of Mongolia (GIA), that she is being investigated for crimes committed under the Criminal Code. This has placed her at serious risk of arbitrary arrest and detention at any time. The baseless charges against her are a clear attempt to silence her and appear to be linked to her support of communities impacted by the Erdeneburen Hydropower Plant funded by China's EXIM Bank.

For defenders fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in third countries in 2022, the risk of reprisals remained, while online violence against them was systemic. Threats of physical violence and even, attacks or killings are difficult to prove when they take place on foreign soil. The cases

27 The WHRD was released in January 2023.

of Pakistani defenders targeted in recent years is illustrative of the extreme risks defenders in exile can face. Transnational cooperation among repressive states remained a serious challenge and took on many forms during the year. Deportations, or forced returns of HRDs, were facilitated through formal and informal cooperation by authorities in several countries.

HRDs in exile play an important role by contributing to the resilience and sustainability of the human rights movement in specific contexts and strengthening inter-generational solidarity among activists, making them an ongoing target including through transnational and other forms of repression. In a case that is illustrative of reciprocal cross-border cooperation to target exiled activists in the region, Chinese human rights defender, Dong Guangping, who had previously been forcibly returned from Thailand to China in 2015, has been disappeared in Vietnam since August when he was arrested by the police. It is feared that he was forcibly deported to China, or is at imminent risk of such, in violation of Vietnam's *non-refoulement* obligations, which prohibit the return of any person to a country where they would be at real risk of serious human rights violations.

Increasing repression in countries like India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and in the midst of ongoing crises in Afghanistan and Myanmar, prompted increasing numbers of defenders to flee their country of origin. It called for regional and international responses commensurate to the needs of these defenders on the move and to ensure effective systems of protection and support. Myanmar defenders who fled to Thailand reported feeling increasingly insecure due to close surveillance of their activities by the Thai authorities. They lived in fear of arrest and deportation to Myanmar due to their irregular migratory status, while several Vietnamese defenders who returned to South East Asia to continue their human rights work were at risk of *refoulement*. Already living with severe restrictions to their rights in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Rohingya HRDs and journalists continued to be violently targeted by the police forces, armed groups and gangs, as demonstrated by the case of Saiful Arakani and Aziz Arakani, two brothers and journalists who report on violations against the Rohingya refugee community. Their father and brother-in-law were physically assaulted and arrested when the Bangladeshi armed police battalion failed to find the two defenders at their residence during a raid.

The impact of defenders working outside of China was reflected in the intensifying scope, scale and level of sophistication of transnational repression conducted by the Chinese government. In March, in a direct example of the extraterritorial application of the HKNSL being invoked in practice and applied to cyberspace, the Hong Kong police sent an official letter to a UK-based human rights group Hong Kong Watch, demanding the removal of its website and threatening legal consequences against its founder.

Digital threats and surveillance were prevalent in the region, with state and non-state actors using digital surveillance as a means to control and punish dissent. Governments sought to increase their surveillance reach and capacity through a range of legislative reforms in Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. In Myanmar, the military junta

Uyghur demonstrators in Istanbul, Turkey, 9 December, 2022.
© REUTERS/Umit Bektas

amended the Cyber Security Bill in early 2022, permitting, among other measures, the prohibition of virtual private network (VPN) use, internet shutdowns, and obliging online service providers to block, or remove, online criticism of junta leaders. The ramifications of the Cyber Security Bill, which effectively eliminated the last remaining channel for dissent and access to information, cannot be overstated in Myanmar, where civil society remains under siege and is reliant on digital tools for their work.

In **Cambodia**, authorities passed a Decree to permit the monitoring of all internet traffic in and out of the country. The National Internet Gateway (NIG) Sub-Decree, which was due to come into effect in February but was later delayed, will permit surveillance of all internet activities, interception and censorship of communications, retention of bulk personal data and severe penalties for telecommunications companies that do not cooperate, among other provisions. As part of long-standing efforts to control access to information and squash freedom of expression online, Decree 53 to regulate the 2018 Cybersecurity Law,

came into effect in **Vietnam** in October. Under the new regulations, tech companies will be required to store user data for a minimum of 24 months and to hand over personal data if requested to do so by the government. Such provisions pose serious risks to activists and defenders, while increasing the risk of tech companies colluding in abuses against them.

HRDs continued to be exposed to risks of sophisticated digital surveillance in the region. In an investigation conducted by Internet Law Reform Dialogue (iLaw), DigitalReach and the Citizen Lab Canada, it emerged in July that at least 30 individuals in **Thailand**, including pro-democracy activists, HRDs and academics, had been targeted by Pegasus spyware during the period 2020-2021, which coincided with the pro-democracy protests. In a first of its kind lawsuit in the region, a civil lawsuit supported by Access Now was filed in Thailand against the NSO Group in November. Similar reports of defenders being targeted have been raised regarding India over the past several years.

HRDs within and outside **China**, who advocated for the rights of Uyghurs and Tibetans, were subjected to considerable digital threats including planting of malware, hacking, trolling, and disinformation and smear campaigns. According to digital experts, some of these threats can be attributed to Chinese state actors. Researchers also documented gendered and racialised disinformation campaigns that appeared to target women of Asian or Chinese descent, particularly high profile journalists and activists who were involved in human rights research and investigative journalism into China's human rights record.

Digital risks were not limited to surveillance but included the possibilities of incriminating and false evidence being planted on devices in order to target and prosecute defenders. In India, analysis of devices of at least three defenders held in the Bhima Koregaon case revealed that false material was planted on their devices in the months preceding the raid that led to their arrest. This evidence was later used against them in court. In contexts where defenders are compelled to hand over devices at routine checkpoints such as in Kashmir and Afghanistan or during raids and interrogation such as in India, Pakistan or Sri Lanka, the threat of tampering looms over defenders alongside the fear that sensitive information will be accessed by state authorities without consent.

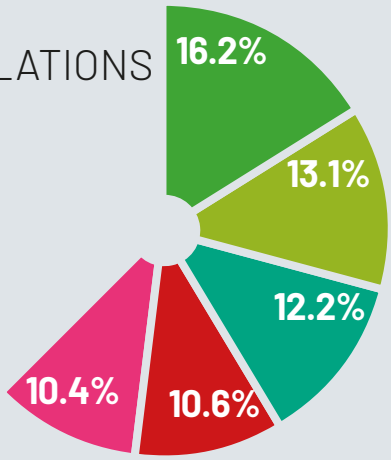
In 2022, defenders faced unprecedented challenges following on from events and crises in 2021. in addition to new forms of abuse and threat, isolation and the lack of protection for defenders were exacerbated by international silence and a lack of concrete responses and benchmarks for engaging with repressive states. While the international community struggled to react in the face of gross human rights violations by brutal and inhumane regimes in Afghanistan and Myanmar, HRDs continued to organise and mobilise. The international community failed to move beyond statements of distress or condemnation to practical action in holding the Taliban to account. This is despite concrete recommendations from defenders, including on the strategic use of sanctions. At the close of the year, the UN Security Council adopted an overdue resolution on Myanmar,

calling for an immediate end to all forms of violence and release of political prisoners, among other demands. Although welcomed, many observers considered the resolution to be insufficient, with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar stating that the Resolution lacked "consequences for the failure to meet them and the imposition of sanctions and accountability for crimes the military has committed to date".

In Sri Lanka, a UN resolution on accountability was passed by the UN Human Rights Council in September, however there is a long road ahead to ensure effective redress to affected communities. In its assessment of the systematic human rights violations in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, released in August, the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) condemned the arbitrary and discriminatory detention of Uyghur individuals and other predominantly Muslim minorities.

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

TOP VIOLATIONS



FROM A TOTAL OF 484

73 LEGAL ACTION
59 SURVEILLANCE
55 ARREST / DETENTION
48 PHYSICAL ATTACK
47 DEATH THREAT

MOST-TARGETED SECTORS

13.1% FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

11.4% LGBTIQ

9.7% HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT

9.0% HUMAN RIGHTS DOCUMENTATION

6.6% FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY / PROTEST MOVEMENT

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Human rights defenders (HRDs) in Europe and Central Asia faced unprecendented challenges in 2022 with increasing violence, racist and anti-refugee and migrant rethoric, targeted attacks and widepsread criminalisation. Throughout 2022, the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine inflicted devastating harm, killing thousands of civilians and destroying civilian property and infrastructure, with alarming implications for the physical safety and mental health of population. The Russian Federation's war against Ukraine significantly shifted the narrative in the region, not only altering political and socio-spatial dynamics, but also prompting HRDs to rethink how Russia's post-Soviet colonialism has impacted defenders' livelihoods and security in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. It has also served as a catalyst for growing momentum around calls for decolonisation from post-Soviet influence.

In the shadow of the war, serious challenges to the rule of law and democracy persisted elsewhere in the region. Due to their legitimate work bearing witness to human rights violations, uncovering corruption and denouncing growing authoritarianism and crackdowns on freedom of assembly and expression, HRDs faced criminalisation, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, surveillance, physical attacks and death threats. Defenders working on violations of environmental rights, LGBTIQ+ communities, women, refugees and migrants, were particularly exposed.

On 24 February 2022, the **Russian Federation** launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, in what represented a significant escalation since the start of its military aggression in 2014. During the ongoing invasion, the Russian Federation has committed gross violations of international human rights and humanitarian law against the civilian population. In October, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine[28]

28 The report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine refers to events that occurred during late February and March in Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and Sumy and was conducted in reponse to the request by Human Rights Council resolution S-34/1. For more information see: https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/10/un-commission-has-found-array-war-crimes-violations-human-rights-and

found reasonable grounds to conclude that a range of war crimes have been committed by the Russian Armed Forces including summary executions, unlawful confinement, torture, ill-treatment and horrific sexual violence including rape. Russia's military aggression exacted an immense toll on civilians in Ukraine, while HRDs tirelessly strove to accompany and protect the population, delivering humanitarian support and conducting their remarkable work in the face of massive devastation and violence. Defenders also found ways to mitigate the significant destruction of digital equipment and infrastructure and the widespread loss of internet connectivity through diverse digital solutions including satellite internet, portable electric generators and solar panels.

Since the outset, the Russian authorities and Armed Forces have consistently and disproportionally targeted HRDs in the Russian-occupied territories for their crucial role in documenting and communicating evidence of human rights atrocities committed by the Russian Armed Forces; work that is essential for guaranteeing future justice and accountability. For this HRDs paid a heavy price: according to the Ukrainian human rights organisation ZMINA, the Russian Armed Forces abducted, forcibly disappeared and unlawfully detained at least 386 HRDs, volunteers and journalists. Many defenders reported torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment during their unlawful detention. Moreover the Russian Federation's Armed Forces forcibly transferred significant numbers of Ukrainians, including HRDs, to Russia or Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine. As documented and verified by ZMINA Human Rights Centre, and by Front Line Defenders in the context of the HRD Memorial project, at least 50 HRDs and humanitarian volunteers were targeted and killed because of their peaceful human rights work in Ukraine in 2022.

In March, in retaliation for his work documenting human rights violations the HRD and journalist, Oleh Baturin was abducted and forcibly disappeared in Kakhovka, Kherson oblast, by Russian military personnel and released after eight days of physical and psychological violence while in captivity. WHRD Iryna Horobtsova, who was providing volunteer support to healthcare workers after the invasion, was abducted from her home in Kherson in May. Reports indicate that she was transferred to Russian-occupied Crimea, where she remains detained with no access to a lawyer nor information regarding the charges against her. In April, Russian Federal Security Services abducted and forcibly disappeared WHRD and journalist Irina Danilovich, while she was travelling to her home in Koktebel, Crimea. Thirteen days later, she was located in the pre-detention centre in Simferopol, where she reported being subjected to ill-treatment and torture. On 28 December she was sentenced to seven years of prison.

The harassment of human rights lawyers in occupied Crimea has been ongoing since its illegal annexation in 2014, and forms part of a broader pattern of systemic persecution including judicial prosecution, office raids, disciplinary penalties and threats of disbarment. Russian authorities continued to persecute Crimean Tatars, an ethnic minority group, in particular through targeting lawyers who form part of the Crimean

HRDs Viktor Kovalchuk and Tetiana Katrychenko receiving flak jackets for the Media Initiative for Human Rights members documenting war crimes in Ukraine.

© Front Line Defenders

Solidarity movement[29] and represent and defend the rights of Crimean Tatars. In May, human rights lawyers **Nazim Sheikhmambetov, Ayder Azamatov and Emine Avamileva** were detained and sentenced to administrative arrests of between five and eight days, in connection to a press event in October 2021 outside the entrance of a police station; a gathering which the court concluded was an "illegal mass meeting of citizens".

In July, the Bar Association of the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation disbarred human rights lawyers **Lilia Hemedzhy, Rustem Kyamilev and Nazim Sheikhmambetov**, in relation to alleged procedural violations concerning the transfer of their membership from the Chechen to the Crimean Bar. Due to the threats from the Bar Association of Crimea, the lawyers had previously sought legal accreditation from the Bar Association of the Chechen Republic in 2019.

29 The Crimean Solidarity movement was established in 2014 by lawyers, journalists and relatives of people arrested following the Russian invasion.

Meanwhile inside Russia, censorship activities and judicial harassment of defenders escalated in the aftermath of the invasion, with the authorities intent on decimating the human rights movement and all forms of dissent in the country, in particular all expression of opposition to the war and to the authorities. The expanded foreign agents law[30] served as a convenient tool to penalise civil society. Accused of non-compliance with the foreign agents law, a range of organisations were penalised by being forcibly shut down or fined, including the Human Rights Centre (International Memorial), the "Sphere" Foundation, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Moscow Helsinki Group. Despite the Committee against Torture shutting down its operations in June after being labelled a "foreign agent", its former chairperson Sergey Babinets was fined in August for not having included a "foreign agent" label on the organisation's publications, regardless of the fact that the documents were published prior to the designation.

Similarly, the crackdown against independent media and journalists intensified in a clear attempt to prevent the media from reporting on the anti-war movement and human rights violations in Russia. As the brutal invasion unfolded, HRDs and their organisations faced mounting pressure from Russian law enforcement due to their open anti-war position and their work monitoring and reporting on human rights violations during peaceful anti-war protests. An illustrative example of attempts to silence dissent include the WHRD and journalist, Isabella Evloeva, against whom law enforcement officials launched three criminal cases on charges relating to public dissemination of deliberately false information about the Russian Federation's Armed Forces. If convicted she could face between three and 15 years in prison.

Elsewhere in the region, governments readily suppressed protests and criminalised, detained, defamed and harassed HRDs. Resorting to the same tactics used repeatedly since 2020 to crack down on civil society, the Belarusian government targeted and criminalised HRDs, primarily through abusing the judicial system to pursue repeated arrests, detentions and trumped-up charges against them. The WHRD Nasta Loika faced continuous retaliation for her work responding to repressive "anti-extremist" laws and protecting migrants and stateless peoples' rights. Between September and December, she was subjected to six periods of 15-day administrative detention based on "petty hooliganism" charges, before being transferred to pre-trial detention on 24 December, where she faced charges under various articles of the Criminal Code. She reported being subjected to torture and inhuman treatment during her administrative detention. After two years of being held in deplorable conditions in pre-trial detention, Maria Rabkova, the WHRD and member of the organisation HRC Viasna, was sentenced to 15 years in prison in September in reprisal for her work documenting torture and other human rights violations during the 2020 protests. Meanwhile, new trumped-up charges were filed in September against the three Viasna leaders Ales Bialiatski, Valiantsin Stefanovich and Uladzimir

30 On 1 December 2022, the law "On Control over Activities of Persons being under Foreign Influence" was enacted in Russia and was intended to simplify placing organisations and individuals on one unified register.

Labkovich, arbitrarily detained since July 2021. Their trials have been marred by multiple violations of human rights and fair trial standards.

In 2022, civic unrest spread across many Central Asian countries, including **Kazakhstan**, **Kyrgyzstan** and **Tajikistan**, triggering the violent repression of HRDs and protesters with excessive and lethal force, criminalisation and internet shutdowns. Authorities in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan invoked 'counter-terrorism' rhetoric to justify the unlawful use of force and to discredit protesters' legitimate demands. In January, peaceful protests in Kazakhstan sparked by the rapid increase in energy prices, were brutally suppressed by the Collective Security Treaty Organisation's troops leading to the deaths of at least 200 protesters. In the days following, HRDs and journalists were targeted with judicial harassment. The journalist **Lukpan Akhmediarov** was arrested and sentenced to 10 days of administrative detention, where he reported being subjected to inhuman treatment, for allegedly "participating in an unlawful public protest". Despite condemnation by the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) and others for the excessive use of force by security forces to quell the protests, by the end of the year the authorities had failed to ensure effective and impartial investigations into the January events and violations committed by the security forces.

In **Tajikistan** protests against police brutality in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous (GBAO) region resumed in May 2022. The security forces engaged in excessive use of force, deploying tear gas grenades and live ammunition against peaceful protesters, resulting in the killing of more than 10 people and the detention of over 100 individuals. In the aftermath, a new internet shutdown was enforced and an "anti-terrorist" operation was announced by the authorities. In December, the Supreme Court of Tajikistan sentenced WHRD and journalist **Ulfatkhonim Mamadshoeva** to 21 years and defender **Manuchehr Kholiknazarov** to 15 years of prison in Dushanbe. The trial was held behind closed doors and the defenders were forced to attend without access to their lawyers or the evidence used against them.

In retaliation for the protests across various countries, governments ramped up censorship and internet shutdowns. In **Kazakhstan**, state-orchestrated internet outages affected the work of HRDs, specifically, their ability to communicate and report human rights violations happening during the protests. This unprecedented act of nationwide digital censorship lasted for five consecutive days, with the Almaty region being most affected. In Tajikistan, the authorities also responded to the protests with an internet shutdown. After nearly four months of no internet access for residents of the GBAO region, on 22 March the internet was restored. It has since been reported that internet connection is either inaccessible or heavily curtailed.

Throughout the year there was a notable deterioration in respect for the rule of law and human rights in the EU, with several EU member states relying on the escalation of the war in Ukraine to detract from rule of law violations within their own borders. While this was an issue of particular concern in countries at the EU's external borders, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency observed evidence of restriction of civic space in nearly all EU member

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER BOLOT TEMIROV

The case against HRD and investigative journalist, **Bolot Temirov**, is emblematic of the persistent judicial harassment of journalists and the deliberate attempts to obstruct and criminalise independent reporting in **Kyrgyzstan**. The HRD published videos reporting the alleged involvement of family members of the Head of the State Committee for National Security in a corruption scheme relating to a state-owned petroleum refinery. Shortly after, the office of his YouTube-based outlet, *Temirov Live*, was raided without a warrant by nine masked police officers. The defender was arrested and he was refused access to his lawyer for several hours. Subsequently, his Kyrgyz passport and ID were deemed invalid by the Ministry of the Interior, and new criminal cases against him on alleged document fraud and illegal border crossings were launched. In September, the defender was partially acquitted by the Sverdlovsk District Court of Bishkek in relation to charges of drug possession and illegal border crossings. He was charged with document fraud, but as the statute of limitation had expired on the forgery charges, he was released.

In November, the Court of Appeals upheld the charges of document fraud against him after the State Prosecutor appealed the Sverdlovsk District Court's ruling. In an unprecedented decision, the Court of Appeals ruled to deport the HRD to Russia, as he also holds Russian citizenship. He was violently detained on site in the courtroom and later that same day he was spotted in Manas International Airport in the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek accompanied by six law enforcement officers heading in the direction of the border control section. The international community denounced his expulsion and called on the authorities to reverse the decision.

Kyrgyzstani human rights defender and journalist Bolot Temirov was stripped of his citizenship and deported to Russia following a violent arrest and trial.

© Front Line Defenders

states. In a report adopted by the European Parliament in July, it concluded that Hungary, an EU member state, is 'no longer a democracy'. This overarching hostile environment for civil society had a direct impact on the work of HRDs during the year.

By the end of 2022, according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), 7.9 million refugees from Ukraine were estimated to have fled elsewhere in Europe. In a sharp departure from the EU's standard approach towards refugee protection - one which is built on cruel policies of externalisation and deterrence - the EU's activation of the Temporary Protection Directive proved that when the political will exists, rights-respecting refugee policies are in fact possible in the region.

Refugee and migrant rights defenders from Greece, Poland and Lithuania reported a significant difference in the treatment of defenders working with Ukrainians as compared to other refugee nationalities. Often members of the same organisations reported receiving support from the police, border guards and a wide range of state and non-state actors while working on the Ukrainian border, whereas they were harassed, detained and interrogated while carrying out the same refugee protection work with refugees fleeing other countries.

The large arrivals of predominantly women and children to **Poland** posed new challenges relating to the risks of human-trafficking and the protection of women's rights. In a highly restrictive Polish environment, local and international organisations working on sexual and reproductive rights were faced with additional challenges around the provision of appropriate support to Ukrainian survivors of rape. In **Moldova**, human rights organisations expanded their mandates to include support to Ukrainian refugees, including the Centre "Diversitate," The Center for Rehabilitation of Torture Victims "Memoria" and the Environmental defenders initiative "Eco-Village" located in Rîşcova village.

Elsewhere the brutal pushback of refugees and migrants continued at land and sea borders in violation of international law. In Poland, four members of "Grupa Granica", a social movement made up of activists including residents of the border areas who provide support to migrants and refugees, were detained near the border with Belarus and interrogated by the police. Members of the group have been subjected to harassment, threats and digital surveillance for years, with serious impacts on their well-being.

In **Greece**, HRDs assisting refugees and migrants continued to be criminalised, interrogated and detained. Defenders who are refugees or migrants themselves refrained from speaking about their work out of fear of repercussions that could affect their living conditions, legal status and asylum processes. In May, a Greek news outlet, D News, leaked information that four NGOs were being investigated by the Greek authorities for knowing the GPS locations of stranded groups of refugees and migrants. The investigation is believed to be related to the fact that several civil society organisations had filed Interim Measures before the European Court for Human Rights, regarding transit groups being trapped on small islets in the Evros river and at risk of pushback.

One case elicited particular concern due to the potential precedent it sets for criminalising humanitarian work. HRDs Seán Binder, Sara Mardini and Nassos Karakitsos have been subjected to ongoing judicial harassment since 2018 for their work with the Emergency Response Center International (ERCI) on the Greek islands[31]. The case, based on spurious charges, is revealing of the shameful lengths that some European governments and their justice systems will go to to criminalise all forms of solidarity with refugees and migrants.

Addressing prevalent racism and xenophobia remained far down the list of priorities for European leaders. Two years on from the inauguration of the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan, limited progress had been made on commitments to address racism. In Portugal, a complaint for defamation and insult against the anti-racist defender Mamadou Ba, was filed by far-right activist and neo-nazi leader Mário Machado in October. There are reasons to believe that the complaint for defamation is an act of retaliation against Mamadou Ba because of his anti-racism work, with the defender being active in denouncing the proliferation of hate speech on social media and in political and public spheres.

In April, the European Commission published its long-awaited proposal for an EU Directive on Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), which sets out procedural safeguards and remedies and will enable judges to dismiss unfounded lawsuits against journalists and HRDs. While it is hoped that the Directive will be adopted by the end of 2023, SLAPPs continue to be the main tool to target in particular environmental defenders in the region. Abusive legal tactics impact not only HRDs themselves, but also broader society as they penalise the dissemination of information of public interest, therefore hindering the possibility of broader public action and solidarity.

Between January and June in Bosnia and Herzegovina, WHRDs Sunčica Kovačević and Sara Tuševljak were targeted with three defamation lawsuits and warnings by the company BUK d.o.o. The SLAPP suits were filed as a result of their public campaign against the environmental impact of the company's hydro-power plants on Kasindolska river. In Montenegro, defenders of Sinjajevina-Durmitor mountain range continued to mobilise, calling for the establishment of a protected area status in order to deter the EU military's use of the UNESCO-recognised Tara River Biosphere Reserve as a testing-ground, which has serious implications for the livelihoods of local pastoralist and farming communities and their unique ecosystem.

In Kyrgyzstan, HRDs, local activists, journalists and political actors established a Committee to Protect the Kempir-Abad reservoir and to oppose the transfer of its water from Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan. In retaliation for a peaceful march held in October, the homes of several Committee representatives were raided by officials from the Ministry of Interior and 24 representatives of the Committee, including WHRDs Gulnara Dzhurabayeva,

31 In January 2023, the Mytilene Appeals Court annulled the espionage charges against the three due to procedural flaws, however, the defenders are still under investigation for felony charges.

Anti-rights protest clashes with Pride march in Wroclaw, Poland, on 11 June 2022.
© Krzysztof Zatycki/ZUMA Press Wire

Klara Sooronkulova, Rita Karasartova and Asya Sasykbayeva, were arbitrarily detained, accused of conspiring to organise mass riots and sentenced to pre-trial detention until 20 February 2023[32].

In Azerbaijan, WHRD Mirvari Gahramanli, Head of the Oil Worker's Rights Protection Organisation, was the target of a defamation campaign on social media and in pro-government media outlets. After a number of unsuccessful attempts to shut down a defamatory Facebook page, Mirvari Gahramanli used her 2022 Human Rights and Business Award to combat the campaign against her using positive media coverage to counteract the defamatory narratives.

Violence against and persecution of feminist and LGBTIQ+ movements continued to be a dangerous reality across the region, most notably during the year in Poland, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lithuania and Kazakhstan. Indicative of the continued backlash against the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ individuals, LGBTIQ+ defenders denouncing

32 At the time of writing of the report the WHRDs remained in detention.

discrimination and anti-transgender and homophobic attacks and policies, and WHRDs defending sexual and reproductive rights and the rights of women to live free from violence, were intimidated, attacked and criminalised.

In Poland, **Justyna Wydrzyńska** founder of the website Women on the Net, and member of Abortion Dream Team, faced charges of 'helping in the performance of an abortion' under the Polish Penal Code and 'possession of unauthorised drugs with the aim of introducing them to the market' under the Pharmaceutical Law. The third hearing took place in the Praga District Court of Warsaw in October, with the trial postponed again until January 2023. This is the first case in Europe of a HRD being charged with aiding an abortion by providing pills. If convicted, Justyna faces up to three years imprisonment. In **Serbia**, **Ljiljana Nešić and Marija Trajkovic from Žene za mir** (The Citizen's Association of Women for Peace),who run a hotline for women and children victims of domestic violence and work to empower women survivors, faced accusations of organised crime charges under Serbia's Criminal Code. The complaint implied the misuse of an SOS hot-line and discrimination against men. On 14 April, **Olena Shevchenko** a **Ukrainian** WHRD and community organiser who works to advance the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ individuals, was tear gassed on the streets of Lviv causing chemical burns to her face, eyes, and hands.

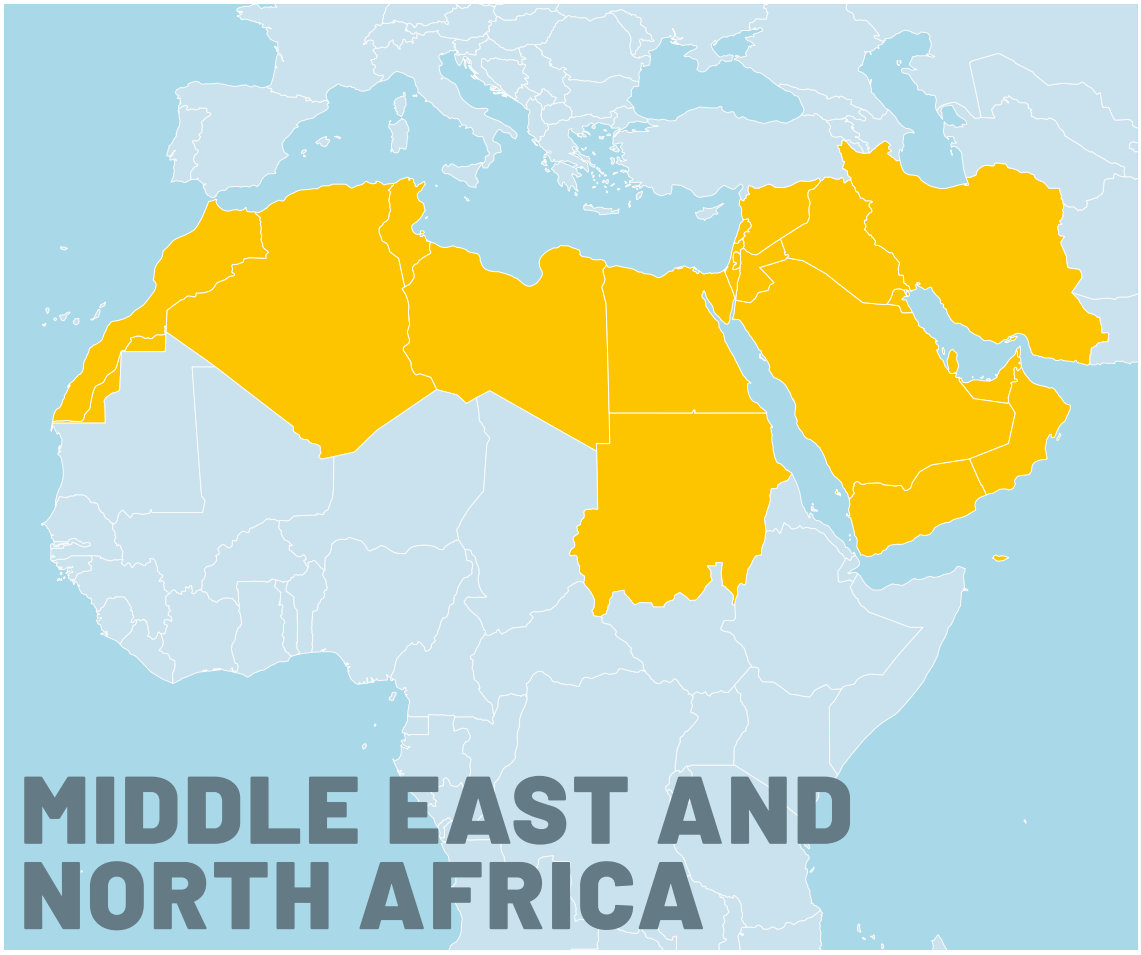
Setbacks on LGBTIQ+ rights posed great risks to HRDs, but despite the challenges LGBTIQ+ movements continued to respond with collective action. In April, a referendum in Hungary on the so-called "anti-LGBTQ law" of 2021, banning the use of materials seen as promoting homosexuality and gender change at schools, was deemed invalid after fewer than 50% of eligible voters cast ballots, following a campaign by civil society organisations. Sixteen non governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in this campaign, including **Amnesty International, the Háttér Society**, and the **Hungarian Civil Liberties Union** were fined by the National Election Committee.

Continuing the trend of SLAPPs being used across the region, Polish LGBTIQ+ defenders, including **Bart Staszewski** and "Atlas of Hate" activists who have documented the impact of "LGBT-free zones" legislation[33], continued to face lengthy and costly lawsuits lodged by state representatives aimed at paralysing their human rights activities. Despite the long-standing hostility of Polish authorities towards the LGBTIQ+ community, in May, the joint Warsaw-Kyiv Pride March took place with a remarkable turnout of approximately 120,000 participants and without any major security incidents.

The killing of two men outside a gay bar in Bratislava in October, sparked calls for better protection of LGBTIQ+ people in Slovakia, and were endorsed by the president and prime-minister of the country. Thousands of people joined the commemorative vigil organised by the LGBTIQ+ group **Iniciativa Inakost'** (Initiative Otherness). In September, the EuroPride,

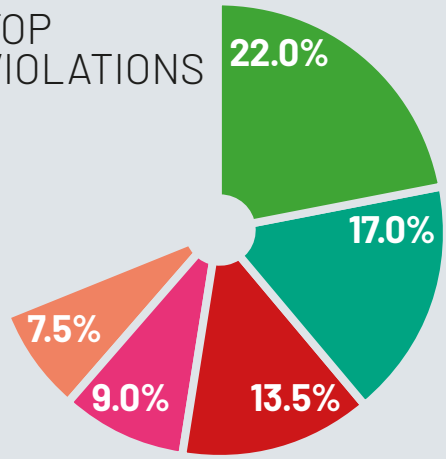
33 In 2019 approximately 100 towns in Poland passed resolutions declaring themselves free of "LGBT ideology". For more information see: Reuters, "Polish court rules that four "LGBT-free zones" must be abolished, 28 June 2022, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/polish-court-rules-that-four-lgbt-free-zones-must-be-abolished-2022-06-28/

a pan European international event, was scheduled to take place in Belgrade with calls on Serbia to legalise same-sex unions, improve the country's record on transgender rights and tackle anti-LGBTIQ+ discrimination. The march went ahead despite various challenges, however, several Albanian LGBTIQ+ activists were reportedly physically attacked in Belgrade.



MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

TOP VIOLATIONS



FROM A TOTAL OF 202

44 LEGAL ACTION
34 ARREST / DETENTION
27 PHYSICAL ATTACK
18 DEATH THREAT
15 OTHER HARASSMENT

MOST-TARGETED SECTORS

12.3% FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY / PROTEST MOVEMENT

11.2% PRISONERS' RIGHTS

9.3% IMPUNITY / JUSTICE

9.1% DOCUMENTING/ MONITORING VIOLATIONS IN CONFLICT

8.3% FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

In 2022, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) continued to operate in the context of protracted armed conflicts, deteriorating political crises, entrenched authoritarian rule, and ongoing repression of civic space by both state and non-state actors. Defenders in the region faced a range of risks and violations due to their human rights work, including criminalisation, torture, travel bans, intimidation, assault, deportation, enforced disappearances and killings, as well as surveillance, defamation and other forms of online violence and repression. Throughout 2022, defenders did not cease to call out judicial harassment and the pervasive violations permitted by the authorities' blatant abuses of counter-terrorism and national security laws. Across the region, HRDs were aggressively targeted for their roles in safeguarding and sustaining peaceful protests. WHRDs and LGBTIQ+ defenders faced severe risks of attack as they were perceived to be threatening traditional gender roles. In spite of the adverse environment, defenders continued to adapt and innovate, while sustaining local human rights movements resisting oppression and promoting alternative visions of democratic and inclusive societies.

Egypt and Qatar's hosting of two major global events – the 27th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 27) and the 2022 FIFA World Cup - attracted heightened international scrutiny of their human rights records. In Qatar, the exploitation and abuses of migrant workers hailing largely from Bangladesh, India and Nepal, received further exposure as did the state's discriminatory laws and practices against women and LGBTIQ+ individuals. Meanwhile, Egypt's appalling human rights record, including the detention of tens of thousands of political prisoners was on full display for the world. On 24 November, the European Parliament denounced Egypt's deplorable repression of civil society, including attacks on freedom of expression,

association and assembly, arbitrary arrest and detention, and intimidation and harassment of women human rights defenders (WHRDs), LGBTIQ+ and Coptic rights defenders, calling on authorities to immediately release all those arbitrarily detained. Following the death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini in September, the Iranian authorities unleashed brutal and widespread repression in response to large-scale social mobilisation in the country. In December, the military and political parties in Sudan signed a deal, the Political Framework Agreement, to support a civilian-led transition towards democratic rule in the coming two-year period; a process in which civil society has played a key role by demanding greater participation and inclusive dialogue.

Unrelenting criminalisation took its toll on HRDs and their organisations in countries including Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), Sudan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Tunisia. A range of overly broad provisions contained within counter-terrorism, national security, cybercrime and other criminal legislation were weaponised by authorities to suppress and punish the work of defenders protecting a wide range of human rights. Trapped in a complex web of criminalisation and litigation, defenders were subjected to prolonged pre-trial and preventative detention, trumped-up charges, violations of rights to due process and fair trial guarantees, ill-treatment and travel bans. Criminalisation was frequently preceded by orchestrated defamation campaigns.

In **Algeria**, the government used counter-terrorism legislation to support its ongoing crackdown of HRDs and political activists. The environmental defender Mohad Gasmi was sentenced to three years imprisonment in April in connection to allegations of "glorifying terrorism" relating to two Facebook posts, for which he had already served 490 days in preventative detention. In September, HRDs Kaddour Chouicha, Jamila Loukil and Said Boudour were summoned to appear for a terrorism-related investigation in connection with allegations of "enrolment in a terrorist or subversive organisation active abroad or in Algeria', among other charges that were brought against them in 2021. Algerian civil society countered this onslaught with its own solidarity campaign, #NotACrime, calling for an end to the misuse of the criminal system to stifle dissent and independent civil society.

In the context of spiralling repression in **Egypt**, the widespread use of preventative detention, under the guise of national security and counter-terrorism prerogatives, to silence legitimate dissent and human rights work has been widely documented. In April, HRD Ibrahim Ezz El-Din, who works on the right to housing, was released after nearly three years in detention where he had been held since 2019 on charges of 'spreading false news', 'belonging to a terrorist group' and 'the misuse of the social media', after having being forcibly disappeared and held in an unknown location for five months. Egyptian lawyer and HRD Haytham Mohamadeen was released from prison in September after spending more than four years in preventative detention. Since his re-arrest in May 2019, the defender's detention was renewed every 15 days on charges relating to "membership of a terrorist organisation".

In Saudi Arabia and UAE, as a form of retaliation governments continued to cruelly persecute HRDs after having completed their long-term sentences either by extending their sentences or by retrying them to prolong their detention. Mohammed al-Qahtani a Saudi HRD, academic, and co-founder of the now disbanded Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) was due to be released from prison on 22 November after serving a 10-year prison sentence. Despite the expiry of his sentence, the defender was not released and since 14 October, he has been subjected to an enforced disappearance, with the authorities refusing to disclose any information regarding his whereabouts. Similarly, human rights lawyer Mohamed Al-Roken remained incarcerated in UAE despite having served his 10-year prison sentence. His release date of 22 July 2022 passed with no comments from the authorities.

In Bahrain, authorities persistently targeted HRDs already serving long, unjust prison sentences. In November, a series of new criminal charges were tabled against the award-winning HRD, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, already serving a life-sentence for his human rights activities. These new charges appeared to be a direct reprisal for his continued determination to speak out in the face of injustice and mistreatment at Jau prison. Furthermore, according to reports, between January and April, necessary medical treatment was actively withheld from the HRD by the Bahraini authorities. This tactic of withholding necessary medical treatment to HRDs in prison would appear to be systematic in Bahrain, as a similar practice was also reported in the cases of imprisoned HRDs Naji Fateel and Abduljalil Al-Singace during the year.

A key enabler of the intensifying criminalisation of HRDs in Tunisia has been the increasingly powerful and unaccountable police force, often operating in collusion with police unions and members of the judiciary. Illustrative of the growing trend in the country to convict defenders who document and share criticisms of violations committed by officials including security forces, WHRD Meriem Bribri was sentenced to four months imprisonment on charges of "knowingly harming or disturbing others via public telecommunications networks" in December. Her charge under Article 86 of the Telecommunications Code was in retaliation for a Facebook post in which she had criticised police violence and abuses against civilians. The defender Saif Ayedi was arrested by plain clothes policemen on 19 October before charges against him were dropped on 21 October. The defender is a member of the "Learn to Swim" campaign that aims to put an end to impunity and police violence in Tunisia. As part of his work, he had been providing support to family members of young people who were killed due to police violence, including Melek Selimi and Omar Laabidi who died in 2022 and 2018 respectively.

HRDs in Iran were judicially persecuted for denouncing and seeking justice for human rights violations, frequently on charges relating to collusion against national security and propaganda activities against the state. Teachers also faced relentless judicial persecution for their work promoting teachers' rights. Rasoul Bodaghi and Jafar Ebrahimi, both involved in the Coordinating Council of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association

OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

Through ongoing restrictions on freedom of movement, stigmatisation, intimidation, administrative and judicial harassment, long periods of arbitrary detention, surveillance and travel bans, **Israel** continues to make clear that it will not stop its persecution of **Palestinian** organisations and defenders until their human rights work ceases. Following on from the 2021 designation of six leading human rights organisations in OPT as "terrorist organisations" and "unlawful organisations" under anti-terrorism and military law, in August Israeli security forces raided the offices of the same six organisations, confiscating and destroying documents and sealing the doors. The offices of the Health Work Committee (HWC), which had similarly been declared as "unlawful" in 2020, was also targeted in this raid. In the days following, at least four of the directors of the seven targeted organisations received calls and threats, and two were summoned for questioning and threatened with imprisonment if their human rights work continued. Although the ramifications of the "terrorist designation" in 2021 have been severe for the implicated organisations, Israel's gamble to discredit them before the international community faltered, demonstrating the limits to its unsubstantiated claims. In June, the EU announced that it would unfreeze funding to the six accused organisations, which had been withheld for six months on account of Israel's allegations. Nonetheless, this funding suspension deeply disrupted the work of the affected organisations, and it was only reinstated after Al Haq took legal action to challenge the European Commission's decision.

Activists hang a poster at the entrance to al-Haq human rights organisation in Ramallah, after it was raided and shut down by Israeli military forces, 18 August 2022.

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(CCITTA), were sentenced to five and four and a half years prison sentences respectively in 2022. Rasoul Bodaghi had previously been arbitrarily detained between 2010 and 2016.

Several cases supported by Front Line Defenders during the year were illustrative of Israel's widespread use of administrative detention, with defenders held on the basis of "secret evidence", enabling Israeli authorities to prolong their detention in violation of their rights to a fair trial, liberty and security. In September, the detained Palestinian-French lawyer Salah Hammouri joined a collective hunger-strike together with 29 other Palestinian detainees, in protest against the escalation of administrative detention against Palestinian defenders, students and others. In December, the defender was deported by Israel to France.

Resisting ongoing restrictions and violent repression of freedom of assembly in the region, citizens organised and mobilised on the streets, denouncing the entrenched rule of oppressive regimes and demanding far-reaching political and economic reforms. Governments used a combination of disproportionate use of force and the criminalisation of protesters in Jordan, Iraq, Iran and Sudan, with a range of other online attacks such as disinformation campaigns, blocking of accounts and websites and internet shutdowns. Targeted in retaliation for their leadership roles in mobilising protests, HRDs were at risk not only during protests, but also in the preceding periods and in their aftermath. In Sudan, ongoing protests linked to the pro-democracy demonstrations against the military coup were responded to with widespread arbitrary arrests and detention, and excessive and lethal use of force by the security forces, including firing live ammunition, tear gas, sound bombs and bullets to disperse protesters. At least 117 people were killed and hundreds arrested according to the reports of the UN Human Rights Office in Sudan. WHRDs active in the revolutionary movement and ongoing protests were targeted by the coup forces, detained both during the protests and in their homes and some were reportedly raped. On 20 January, the WHRD and 2022 Front Line Defenders award winner, Ameira Osman was arrested and taken from her home by 30 armed security officers to an unknown location, before being released on bail 6 February.

While the Egyptian authorities were intent on using COP 27 to whitewash their image on the global stage, their duplicity promoting rhetoric around an enabling environment for civil society largely backfired[34]. Intent on disrupting and containing demonstrations in the lead-up to COP 27, Egyptian authorities imposed guidelines to limit protests and arrested individuals actively denouncing the government and calling for protests on social media. HRDs adapted nonetheless and succeeded in using COP 27 as a strategic platform to communicate their calls to their world and to ensure renewed pressure on Egypt. Defenders, such as WHRD Sanna Seif leveraged the high-profile case of her brother Alaa Abd El Fattah to attract global attention, while calling for the release of all prisoners.

34 For further information see Human Rights Watch, "Egypt: A Year of Whitewashing Despite Dire Crisis", 12 January 2023, https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/12/egypt-year-whitewashing-despite-dire-crisis

Sanaa Seif (C), sister of jailed Egyptian-British activist Alaa Abdel-Fattah, takes part in the COP27 Coalition march during the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, 12 November, 2022.

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Elsewhere in the context of deepening contempt for rule of law in Jordan, the Hirak pro-democracy movement continued to use peaceful protest to call for reforms during 2022. Since 2019, Jordanian authorities have escalated their repression of Hirak members, many of whom are HRDs, through surveillance, judicial harassment and travel bans. During the protests late in the year, **HRDs Sabry Al-Mashaala** and **Sufyan Al-Khraisat** and three 'Hiraki' members, **Alaa Malkawy, Omar Abo Rasah** and **Abd Al- Tawahiya** were arrested. By the close of the year, the HRDs had yet to appear before a judge and they remained in detention[35].

35 Three lawyers and human rights defenders who form part of the National Forum for Defending Freedoms; a group which defends Hiraki activists, were also arrested in early 2023 based on charges linked to the Penal Code and Cybercrime Law. Ali Barizat was arrested during his visit to the detained human rights defender Sabry Al-Mashaala on 2 January 2023 and released on bail the following day. Two members of the group have also been victims of surveillance using Pegasus spyware.

IRAN: "WOMEN, LIFE, FREEDOM"

In **Iran**, protests ongoing throughout 2022, escalated following the death in custody of **Mahsa (Jina) Amini**. From September onwards, demonstrations evolved to encompass broader grievances and anger at the repressive regime, demanding accountability for widespread human rights violations and further reforms. In the brutal repression that followed, according to Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRANA) at least 500 people were killed during the protests (including 69 children) and over 23,000 arrested.

Defenders were systematically targeted, harassed, imprisoned and killed in an attempt to minimise their leadership within the protest movement. In particular the Iranian government targeted WHRDs, lawyers, students, journalists, social media activists and those working on labour and digital rights, in addition to minority rights defenders such as Balochi, Kurdish, Arab and Turkish speaking rights groups. Many defenders were charged for their role in the September protests with national security crimes, which are associated with extended prison sentences. Defenders reported being subjected to torture, sexual assault and medical negligence in detention.

The brutal crackdown against women activists forms part of a broader trajectory of severe repression of the rights of women and girls in Iran where for years WHRDs have been arrested and imprisoned for their peaceful human rights work, often on charges relating to national security crimes, blasphemy and the "promotion of prostitution and immorality". In a clear act of reprisal for their human rights work in the context of the context of the protests WHRD **Golrokh Iraee** faced new charges, while pre-existing sentences against WHRDs **Bahareh Hedayat** and **Vida Rabani** were enforced.

Over 200 HRDs were arrested and at least four killed in custody, as verified by the HRD Memorial. Moreover, three WHRDs active in the protests were alleged by the regime to have committed suicide, but the circumstances surrounding these three deaths were highly suspicious. Throughout the protests the authorities continued to shut down mobile internet and disrupt telecommunication services, significantly stifling the right to protest and preventing HRDs from documenting and disseminating information about human rights violations.

Narges Mohammadi, the deputy director of Defenders of Human Rights Centre (DHRC), is currently imprisoned in Tehran's Evin jail. She is among numerous Iranian women human rights defenders who have been judicially harassed and imprisoned for years even before the current wave of protests.

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The risks facing LGBTIQ+ defenders and WHRDs continued to deteriorate across the MENA region, in a context marked by increasing conflict, militarisation and authoritarianism. In **Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq** and **Qatar** **LGBTIQ+ defenders** reported increasing fear for their safety due to growing harassment in public and increased hostility to LGBTIQ+ symbols such as rainbow flags. In Iraq, authorities continued their explicit persecution of the LGBTIQ+ community. A prominent Shite cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr launched a petition to gather one million signatures opposing homosexuality and the LGBTIQ+ community, while the parliament drafted a law to criminalise anyone who would "publish or promote" homosexuality. Elsewhere in **Lebanon**, in June the Minister of the Interior called on security services to prevent all gatherings that "promote homosexuality".

WHRDs faced a range of gendered threats and violence during the year. WHRDs promoting the rights of women and girls and LGBTIQ+ communities in particular faced severe risk of attack as they were perceived to be threatening traditional gender roles. Due to their human rights work and resistance of patriarchal norms, WHRDs were frequently targeted with misogynist online attacks aimed at damaging their reputation, death threats and other forms of violence, while also being subjected to severe social pressure from their families and communities.

In a **Tunisian** case that is indicative of the broader patterns of intimidation suffered by WHRDs on account of their gender as well as of an entrenched culture of police intimidation and harassment, **Arroi Baraket**, a WHRD and journalist who advocates for gender equality and social justice, was due to appear before the Court of First Instance of Tunis in January 2023 on aggravated charges of assault and "extreme violence against a public official". The charges against her relate to an incident in September 2021, when she was stopped in her car by a police patrol car a few minutes after the start of curfew. After she paid the fine, she realised that other cars were not being stopped. She started to film the street on her phone, subsequently the police officer flung open her car door and proceeded to physically attack her while he insulted her with misogynist slurs.

In September, the news agency of the Iranian Judiciary System confirmed that **Zahra Sadeqi Hamedani (Sareh)** and **Elham Choubdar**, two LGBTIQ+ rights defenders had been sentenced to death after the Revolutionary Court in Urumieh, West Azerbaijan province, convicted them of "corruption on earth". In late December, the Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network (6Rang) announced that the death sentence against Sareh had been overturned by the Supreme Court, however the situation of Elham Choubdr remained unknown.

During the year, criminalisation was frequently accompanied by surveillance, defamation and other tactics to curtail freedom of expression online with the objective of intimidating and silencing HRDs. In recent years, states and companies in the region have become increasingly adept in their use of technology to surveil defenders, journalists and political opponents, violating the right to privacy and the rights to freedom of expression and

association. Building on previous research[36] documenting the expanding use of Pegasus spyware by several governments, a digital forensic investigation conducted by Front Line Defenders and Citizen Lab detailed how the highly intrusive spyware has been used by the **Jordanian** government for several years against defenders and journalists with devastating effect. For WHRDs who bear the brunt of digital violence, the impacts of device hacking are severe and include blackmail and harassment, judicial consequences, social impacts, physical and emotional harm, loss of employment, and a negative impact on self-worth and dignity. By the end of the year, a further eight cases of targeted Jordanian HRDs were being investigated.

Online defamation and other forms of online attacks targeting defenders, bloggers and journalists was widespread in Tunisia, Iran, Libya, Morocco and OPT as authorities sought to suppress online freedom of expression and silence alternative democratic voices. In a case documented by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), the **Libyan** authorities published "confession" videos of seven defenders who had been detained between November 2021 and March 2022 for discussing human rights concerns online. The videos, shared widely on social media platforms, incited hate speech, defamation and violence against other defenders.

In **Morocco**, online criticism of authorities was not tolerated. Unfounded criminal charges against defenders and journalists were often preceded by defamation campaigns, supported by pro-regime media outlets and a sophisticated surveillance infrastructure. The use of allegations of sexual assault or "immoral behaviour" charges has been a disturbing dimension of several defamation campaigns against HRDs. The strategy is intended to publicly humiliate and isolate outspoken critics, and bolster judicial persecution on the basis of bogus charges, as exemplified in the case of **Soulaimane Raissouni**. The defender and journalist was sentenced on appeal in February to five years in detention on allegations of "sexual assault" against an LGBTIQ+ activist, which he disputes. Soulaimane Raissouni was arrested shortly after he published an article in 2020 criticising the authorities use of emergency legislation during COVID. His detention is considered arbitrary by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention that concluded that his rights to a fair trial were violated. In April, a journalist and HRD, **Rabi al-Ablaq**, was sentenced in April to four years imprisonment for "publicly violating the duty of reverence and respect for the king's person" in relation to videos that he posted on social media criticising King Mohammed VI and Prime Minister Aziz Akhenoush. The defender had previously been imprisoned between 2017 and 2020.

From May onwards various **Iranian** WHRDs and feminists' Instagram accounts were attacked and trolled with thousands of fake new followers. Research by the digital forensic organisation Qurium traced the fake followers to companies paid to generate these

36 Front Line Defenders, "Six Palestinian human rights defenders hacked with NSO Group's Pegasus Spyware", November 2021, https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/statement-targeting-palestinian-hrds-pegasus; Access Now and Frontline Defenders, Unsafe anywhere: women human rights defenders speak out about Pegasus attacks, https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/unsafe-anywhere_-women-human-rights-defenders-speak-out-about-pegasus-attacks_en.pdf

followers based in another country. The campaign of harassment, using high numbers of fake followers and comments, was intended to intimidate, silence and discredit the targeted WHRDs and feminists.

In more recent years Palestinian defenders have been impacted by increasing censorship imposed by particular social media platforms over content relating to human rights violations in **OPT/ Israel**. During Israel's violent assault on Gaza in August, bloggers and HRDs reported that several social media platforms attempted to block their content at the behest of Israeli authorities. A range of digital and human rights organisations maintained their calls on social media giant Meta to conduct an independent review of its content moderation policies in the context of the persistent silencing of Palestinian voices and of those who support them.

In response to HRDs successfully using online spaces to mobilise locally and internationally, governments increasingly turned their focus to policing online communication, seriously undermining freedom of expression and privacy rights. During the year, countries including **Tunisia**, **Sudan**, **UAE** and **Libya** expanded their web of draconian cybercrime legislation to further crush freedom of expression and independent media. Laws incorporating deliberately vague and overly broad terms, enabled authorities to severely limit online expression, while making it increasingly difficult for activists and ordinary citizens to safely communicate online. A particularly disturbing aspect of the new "Anti-Cybercrime" law in Libya, is the potential for punishing individuals who use encryption without prior authorisation, which is a widespread practice used by HRDs to protect their digital communications.

HRDs in conflict-affected contexts were directly affected by violence, forced displacement and increased use of force. In **Syria**, defenders in areas under the control of the regime continue to be accused by the government of being agents and spies of foreign states due to their human rights work. Defenders in Damascus reported that a number of human rights organisations were forced to close and 48 young HRDs and activists and members of the Scout Movement, were on trial accused of being "spies" due to being recipients of foreign funding. Defenders in Afrin, Northern Syria, were at heightened risk after the Islamist political and armed organisation Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) entered the region. Elsewhere, HRDs in **Sudan** continued to face deadly risks for their work monitoring and documenting human rights violations committed by the government armed forces, affiliated armed militia and other armed groups, despite all parties being signatories to the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement. The grave human rights situation deteriorated further as local conflicts intensified in the Blue Nile and several other provinces of the country. Between 5 and 6 March three HRDs and members of the Darfur Human Rights Monitors Network **Youseif Yagoub, Ahmed Mohamed Ibrahim** and **Mohamed Eldai Mussa** were killed by armed militia while carrying out an assessment of the human rights and humanitarian situation in West Darfur.

While once considered a safe haven in the region for persecuted activists, **Tunisia** has become increasingly less so in recent years. At the end of the year human rights organisations expressed concerns[37] regarding the very real threat of *refoulement* of the HRD **Zakaria Hannache** to **Algeria**. The defender sought asylum in Tunisia in August, to escape legal persecution and avoid facing a sentence of 35 years on spurious charges in Algeria. Meanwhile in December, the Algerian authorities hindered the human rights work of **Yosra Frawes**, a feminist WHRD and Head of the MENA desk at the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) by banning her entry to the country and deporting her to Tunisia.

37 Tunisia set a dangerous precedent in 2021 with the kidnapping and refoulement of the Algerian religious minority rights defender on 25 August, who had been granted refugee status in Tunisia by the UN Refugee Agency. To date no investigation has been opened by the Tunisian authorities and the defender remains in detention in Algeria. For further information see: Amnesty International, "Algeria: Free Activist Granted Refugee Status in Tunisia", 22 September 2022, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde28/6059/2022/en/

METHODOLOGY

FOR STATISTICS RELATING TO THREATS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS.

Each year, Front Line Defenders records hundreds of threats and violations that have taken place against human rights defenders through its public and private advocacy cases and its grants programme.

The statistics presented on pages 6 to 8 are derived from 1,583 reported threats and violations, based on Front Line Defenders' urgent actions and approved grants between 1 January and 31 December 2022.

Front Line Defenders often documents multiple threats and violations per case or grant, as this is the reality of the situation for HRDs, who very often face multiple types of threats and attacks at once.

It is important to note some caveats with the data presented:

1. The information Front Line Defenders receives is dependent on HRDs being aware of the organisation; as such, this data can not be seen as wholly representative for all HRDs in all countries. Therefore, this data should serve as an indicator – but not a comprehensive report – of the scope of the violations, threats and risks that human rights defenders face on a daily basis.

2. Front Line Defenders recognises that there are myriad threats and violations that HRDs may experience, but which go unreported. This may be because they do not believe that the violation they are experiencing is serious enough to seek assistace for or are not in a comfortable position to discuss and report it. There is also the possibility that they do not have access to support to be able to report the threat and violation or may feel that silence is a better option to ensure their safety.

3. The statistics are drawn from 1,583 recorded violations, which combine information from Front Line Defenders advocacy and grants programmes.

4. Incidents of killings and threats have been removed from this dataset. Given that threats is such a common violation, it is inconsistently reported by HRDs. The data on killings are reported separately in the HRD Memorial dataset.

5. In the global statistics datasets, the number of grants and cases excludes those provided to Afghan human rights defenders. The grants programme was used primarily to provide support to Afghan HRDs leaving the country or relocating within due to the type of threats, violations and/or physical violence. There were over 300 grants provided to Afghan HRDs and including this data in the annual statistics would skew the results in a way that would not be helpful to understanding the situation of HRDs on global scale. As noted above, the data on support provided to Afghan HRDs is reflected in the Asia Pacific regional statistics.

FOR STATISTICS RELATING TO KILLINGS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The HRD Memorial brings partner-verified data together under the HRD Memorial umbrella and conducts additional open source research and case-specific verification.

Partners in the HRD Memorial include: ACI-Participa (Honduras); Amnesty International; Comité Cerezo (Mexico); FIDH; Front Line Defenders; Global Witness; Human Rights Defenders' Alert – India; Karapatan (the Philippines); OMCT; El Programa Somos Defensores (Colombia); Red TDT (Mexico); and UDEFEGUA (Guatemala).

Concerning 2022 cases, we are grateful to Justiça Global (Brazil), Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT) (Brazil), Partenariat pour la Protection Intégrée (PPI) (DRC), La Alianza de Organizaciones por los derechos humanos de Ecuador, Kurpa, Kurdistan Human Rights Network, Baloch Activist Campaign, Ahwaz Human Rights Organisation, Association for the Defence of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran (ADAPP), Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI) (Mexico), Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Myanmar/ Burma), Amaru Ruíz, Fundación del Río (Nicaragua), Rabia Mehmood (independent journalist, Pakistan) and ZMINA Human Rights Centre (Ukraine) for their support in providing additional case data and verification on some cases.

The HRD Memorial is a database of HRDs killed since 1998. The data presented here documents the killings that have taken place between 1 January 2022 – 31 December 2022 and is likely to be incomplete as partners continue to gather and verify cases. Challenges include: killings in remote areas having gone unreported; self-censorship by communities fearing reprisals; and suppression of information by state and non-state interest groups.

The HRD Memorial is committed to continuing to develop and refine the methodology and verification processes to ensure that these processes continue to be robust and relevant.

FRONT LINE DEFENDERS

GLOBAL ANALYSIS 2022

The Global Analysis is directly based on Front Line Defenders work with Human Rights Defenders globally over the course of 2022. Front Line Defenders would like to thank all donors who supported its work during the year.

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