

Human Rights Defenders • Défenseurs Des Droits Humains
Difaacayaasha Xuquuqda Aadanaha • Watetezi Wa Haki Za Binadamu

YE 10 years

DEFENDING DEFENDERS

The East and Horn of Africa
Human Rights Defenders Project



10 Years Defending Defenders

The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

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content

Eritrea

It is virtually impossible for HRDs to do work in Eritrea, one of the world's most repressive and closed regimes. Many HRDs have been unlawfully detained in deplorable conditions.

Uganda

Uganda is developing a national action plan to fulfill its responsibility to protect and promote human rights. However, the 2016 elections approach, there is fear that HRDs working on civil and political rights will be targeted.

Tanzania

While Tanzania is one of the more stable countries in the region and has a strong National Coalition of HRDs, threats and attacks continue to be carried out against HRDs and journalists ahead of its 2015 Presidential election.

Sudan

HRDs in Sudan face frequent harassment and arrest. Restrictive legislation has been used to criminalise the activities of HRDs, shut down NGOs, suspend newspapers, and confiscate equipment.

South Sudan

Since the war erupted in December 2013, HRDs have been caught in the crossfire of the conflict, and faced with extremely strenuous working conditions.

Rwanda

In Rwanda, the space for activists working on fundamental civil and political rights is becoming increasingly restricted, and very few independent HRDs are able to operate safely and effectively.

Burundi

Most of Burundi's vibrant and dynamic community of HRDs is in hiding or has had to flee the country, due to increased levels of harassment and attacks since the run up to the 2015 election.

Djibouti

Human rights continue to be severely curtailed in Djibouti. There is no independent media, and few human rights defenders are able to operate safely within the country's borders.

Ethiopia

The Ethiopian government has used restrictive legislation to target and restrict the work of HRDs, imprisoning and forcing many of them into exile.

Somalia

Somalia remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for HRDs and journalists, who continue to be violently targeted by both state and non-state actors.

Kenya

Kenya has one of the most robust coalitions of HRDs in the region. However, the space for civil society continues to shrink, particularly due to the passing of anti-terrorism legislation.

LETTER FROM HASSAN SHIRE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear friends,

Over a decade ago, after having had to flee my native Somalia due to my human rights work, I was lucky to find a safe haven in Toronto, Canada. Through discussions with my fellow countrymen, I realised that many others shared the pain and frustration of having to carry out human rights work in exile. I began developing a project that would allow endangered human rights defenders in the East and Horn of Africa region to continue conducting their valuable human rights work while safely staying in the region.

Ten years later, I am proud to see that this idea has blossomed into the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP), a wide-reaching organisation dedicated to supporting and protecting human rights defenders across the sub-region. The network we created has become a family within the human rights community. It surpasses anything I could have imagined in the early days of the project.

Across the sub-region, all of our departments are faced with an increasingly challenging environment for human rights defenders. Over the course of the last ten years, the space for human rights activism has continued to shrink as governments cling on to power. It is in this context that EHAHRDP and its many network members seek to innovate and adapt to these shifting dynamics.

As we reach this important milestone, EHAHRDP will be focusing its energy on preventative measures, ranging from capacity building in digital and physical security to strengthening protection mechanisms allowing human rights

defenders to mitigate the risks with which they are faced.

Our latest report, "Caught up in Bitter Contests", highlights the increasing restrictions faced by human rights defenders prior to, during and after elections in the region. With elections taking place in many countries across the sub-region in coming years, this will become a priority area in our work to support human rights defenders.

With our technology program we have worked to bring HRDs in our region the tools they need to navigate the opportunities and threats of the digital age. Our digital team continually monitors developments in Internet freedom and security, while also tracking new methods for promoting human rights in our increasingly online societies.

Finally, as the number of HRDs forced into exile grows commensurately with government restrictions, we will be working to establish "HRDs Hubs", or shelter cities, across the continent where HRDs in need of protection can get rest and respite, seek to receive training, or further their education.

I am deeply grateful to all those involved in the creation and growth of this organisation, and hope to continue and strengthen this collaboration in new and innovative ways in the future.

With very best wishes, 🍎



Hassan Shire

1998

UN DECLARATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Elaboration of the Declaration on human rights defenders began in 1984 and ended with the adoption of the text by the General Assembly in 1998, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A collective effort by a number of human rights non-governmental organizations and some State delegations helped to ensure that the final result was a strong, very useful and pragmatic text. Perhaps most importantly, the Declaration is addressed not just to States and to human rights defenders, but to everyone. It tells us that we all have a role to fulfil as human rights defenders and emphasizes that there is a global human rights movement that involves us all.



OUR HISTORY



THE JOURNEY FROM ONE MAN'S STRUGGLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOMALIA TO THE CREATION OF THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS PROJECT.

“I can remember passing in one warlord's checkpoint, going to the airstrip, and they asked 'where is Hassan?'” recalls Hassan Shire, Executive Director and founder of EHAHRDP. The prominent activist from Mogadishu disguised himself in nomadic clothing to escape persecution in Somalia. “I was forced to leave by a combination of warlords and jihadist fanatics, who deployed violence on anyone who didn't agree with their narrow viewpoints,” he says.

Hassan left his homeland in 2001, but he never abandoned his work as

a human rights defender. He grew up during the Mohamed Siad Barre military dictatorship in Somalia, who executed a bloodless military coup d'état after the assassination of President Abdirashid Ali Shermarke in October 1969. “The military junta promised that free and fair elections would be held within six months, but they never occurred,” Hassan recalls.

Somalia slipped into more than 21 years of military dictatorship: the Constitution was suspended, freedom of speech was stifled, political parties and independent associations were

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banned, and government officials were arrested and detained without trials. Major human rights violations such as torture and unlawful killings were also

common during that period.

Dr. Ismail Jumale Ossoble, Hassan's uncle, was the only human rights lawyer in Somalia at the time. The three-time prisoner of conscience relentlessly defended victims of the military regime. “I grew up in that atmosphere and despised the dictatorship,” Hassan says. “I was lucky to be part of a community where the consciousness of liberty and freedom was very much alive and it has never been broken.” Even as a boy, Hassan helped his uncle engage with international human rights organisations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

In eighth grade, Hassan started his own outspoken activism by directing plays in support of human rights. He quickly persuaded others of the value of his cause, including children of the military junta. In the mid-90s, Hassan helped together with other activists establish the Dr. Ismail Jumale Human Rights Centre, the first independent human rights organisation in Somalia. The Centre monitored and documented rights violations during some of Somalia's most violent periods. Amnesty International described the Centre as a “unique organisation, which has had a vital role in creating human rights awareness [in Somalia].” Hassan, as co-director and a prominent activist, became Amnesty's principal research contact – a “most valuable” resource – for six years before fleeing the country.

Hassan decided to leave Somalia for Kenya after warlords shelled his home in Mogadishu. The neighbouring country couldn't provide protection so he sought asylum in Canada. “Without shoes, I walked onto snow in order to say 'what is this safety?' I'm not safe when my colleagues, my friends – from Eritrea, from Ethiopia, from Somalia,

from Kenya, from Sudan – are not being protected,” he says. He arrived in Canada on a Friday and started voluntary work at Amnesty International in Toronto on Monday. Through Amnesty, Hassan also wanted to establish on-the-ground protection for human rights defenders in Africa so others wouldn't have to flee their countries like he did. He explains that while the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (1998) offers an important framework, it “cannot address local protection needs and realities.”

The program Hassan developed was the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP). In June 2002, ahead of the G8, Hassan participated in the Group of Six Billion People's Summit at the University of Calgary in Canada. He joined activists from around the world to discuss the protection gaps they had faced as HRDs.

York University, in Toronto, agreed to host research into the issues. “When I arrived in 2004, there was one small research project that was located here – EHAHRDP,” says Susan McGrath, then-director of York's Centre for Refugee Studies. “It was an opportunity for Hassan to map out and look at who was doing activism work in East Africa.” He kept building on that – a year later, on November 4, 2005, he opened his offices in Kampala, Uganda. “It was really quite amazing!”

“The comprehensive and timely support, which we now offer could have helped me stay in Somalia,” Hassan says. Today, his inspiration for continuing EHAHRDP's mandate extends beyond his own experiences: “it's the thousands of human rights defenders whose lives we have touched and made one day safer than before. Period.”

2004

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN AFRICA



The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders was established by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights with the adoption of Resolution 69 at the 35th Ordinary Session held in Banjul, The Gambia from 21st May to 4th June 2004.



LETTER FROM THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Who protects the Defenders? Perhaps this is more of a rhetorical question, but to Hassan Shire, it begs more action than answers. Born out of his experience as a refugee in Canada, one man was determined to address the plight of Human Rights Defenders and to see a meaningful implementation of the UN Declaration of Human Rights Defenders, 1998.

From a very humble beginning, with limited resources, a largely volunteer team, and a cause to defend, Hassan Shire has turned a dream into reality. Ten years down the road, a little known project, the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP), has become a leading regional network to support those in need of protection and support in the East and Horn of Africa.

As EHAHRDP marks its tenth anniversary, I am proud to associate myself to such a robust, and very successful effort. As Board Chairperson, I salute the EHAHRDP Board members, management and staff, development partners, membership, well wishers and other stakeholders for your relentless support to a cause that has brought smiles and hope to thousands of men and women caught between despair and rejection.

EHAHRDP's unwavering commitment to flag the voices of human rights defenders at risk before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the UN Human Rights Council, National governments, and the broader civic society; that human rights defenders are a vulnerable group that needs emergency assistance, capacity building, and protection continues to gain momentum. Gone are the days when human rights defenders suffered

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in silence, without a rescue plan, or legal redress, thanks to EHAHRDP.

The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders would have little meaning to an ordinary activist in Burundi, South Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, or Uganda if there was no mechanism to offer emergency assistance, to build a security ring, or to speak out. Thanks to EHAHRDP, what were mere ideals, have been translated into opportunities for those at risk.

More, however, needs to be done to change the fortunes of those who due to intolerance, greed, and injustice, continue to seek safe havens. It is a cause that EHAHRDP is committed to serve. To this end, we pledge our

determination, and unwavering support.

On behalf of EHAHRDP's Board, I am proud to say thank you all for your messages of support, partnership, solidarity and good will to this cause. To Hassan and your team, we say, Bravo, and carry on. I wish East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project another illustrious decade.

Aluta Continua!

Dr. Livingstone Sewanyana
Board Chairperson

I've had the pleasure of watching EHAHRDP grow and grow, from its early start-up days all the way to what it is right now. Hassan Shire has assembled a fine group of people and a broad support base. EHAHRDP is a shining example of how the human rights movement can network and organise for its own protection. It is unfortunate that, at its 10-years' anniversary, there is more need for its work than ever. Shelter, moral support, voice, expert advice, recognition, access, inspiration, crucial skills – EHAHRDP keeps bringing invaluable support to many, many members of the human rights movements, on the continent and beyond. Protection International is honoured to have been part of EHAHRDP's journey.

Arjan Van der Waal
PROTECTION INTERNATIONAL



2005

EAST AND HORN AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS PROJECT

The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP) seeks to strengthen the work of human rights defenders (HRDs) throughout the region by reducing their vulnerability to the risk of persecution and by enhancing their capacity to effectively defend human rights. EHAHRDP focuses its work on Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia (together with Somaliland), South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.





ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE

HOW ONE SMALL OFFICE IN KAMPALA PROVIDES VITAL SUPPORT AND PROTECTION TO HRDS ACROSS 11 COUNTRIES

The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP), founded on 4 November 2005 in Kampala, Uganda, has “such a long name,” its founder and Executive Director, Hassan Shire, acknowledges with a laugh. The name, often affectionately shortened to “East and Horn”, has great significance: it covers EHAHRDP’s thematic and geographical area of work. The organisation supports human rights defenders (HRDs) to do their work as safely and effectively as possible in the East and Horn of Africa sub-region, comprising

Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia (including Somaliland), South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

EHAHRDP has 25 full-time African and international staff members and many volunteers who work across four departments: (1) Protection and Security Management, (2) Capacity Building and Programs, (3) Advocacy and Research, (4) Information and Communications Technology and (5) Special Programs. The departments work together to make the lives of HRDs better and safer on a daily basis. “That is our core mandate”, Hassan asserts.

PROTECTION AND SECURITY MANAGEMENT

“We sing for our consciences and for our country,” says Patience Igirukwigomba, the lead singer of the celebrated Burundian band, Lion Story. “We are engaged musicians: we teach people about their rights and duties through music,” he says. “We address the subjects that people are afraid to talk about, like extrajudicial killings and unjust imprisonments that are happening in Burundi.”

“People have done things to us to make us feel scared and to discredit our messages. I was even imprisoned temporarily on fabricated charges in 2009 because of our music’s messages, which often address human rights abuses and denounce dictatorships”, he says. “We have been receiving death threats for a long time, too.”

“The Lion Story musicians are among more than 700 human rights defenders whom EHAHRDP has helped protect over the last 10 years”, says Tabitha Netuwa, head of the organisation’s Protection and Security Management department. “Our department of six full-time staff is divided into two teams – one provides security management training as a preventive strategy for protection and the other manages emergency

responses to react to the crises or major risks that HRDs face.”

“We regularly train HRDs to better protect themselves through security management training. This is a core element of our program because we believe that an HRD, as a teller of truth to power, will always talk about issues that perpetrators of violence and rights violations will not want to be heard. Thus the very nature of their work eventually leads to risks,” Tabitha explains.

To pre-empt these risks, EHAHRDP teaches HRDs to recognise and assess threats, intimidation, and surveillance. The department trains them to follow daily safety protocols, like changing their walking routes, keeping their movements private, and securing their homes. Not all risks can be mitigated, so EHAHRDP also provides emergency responses, such as relocation and evacuation, in the most extreme cases.

HRDs can contact EHAHRDP 24 hours a day through its secure website, by email, or phone. Partner organisations can also refer HRDs. There is a rapid process that is immediately initiated to verify claims, assess a defender’s needs, and organise an appropriate intervention. These emergency responses include legal advice and medical support for defenders and their families, who are often threatened because of their relative’s activism.

“All of this is done with the best interests of the defender and paramount confidentiality in mind,” Tabitha asserts. After the threats to an HRD subside, they are encouraged to resume their human rights work, with some returning home if they had been relocated. If it is not safe for a defender to return, they receive support to resume effective long-term

activism from a distance to avoid gaps in the struggle for human rights.

“Testimonies from HRDs show us that what we are doing makes a difference,” says Tabitha. “It takes time for human rights defenders who have been tortured, who have gone through psychological difficulties, to overcome that,” she says, adding that EHAHRDP offers trauma counselling to HRDs. “When they make progress and the day comes that an HRD gives you a hug or smiles and greets you with a high five - it’s brilliant!”



Equitas

International Centre for Human Rights Education has been pleased to partner with EHAHRDP over many years on training and capacity building programs in the region. We congratulate them on reaching this important milestone and look forward to continued collaboration for many years to come!”

Ian Hamilton
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
EQUITAS

TESTIMONIES FROM HRDS SHOW US THAT WHAT WE ARE DOING MAKES A DIFFERENCE



“EHAHRDP is a valuable partner to KIOS. It has supported many of our partners to develop their security arrangements and facilitate their efforts to work more strategically. Today, this kind of coaching is of huge importance due to the shrinking space for civil society and human rights defenders. The recent developments in Burundi have underlined our limited options to support partners at high risk. KIOS believes that social change towards stronger respect for human rights can only take place with support of vivid civil society.”

Ulla Anttila
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE FINNISH FOUNDATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS KIOS



By supporting the EHAHRDP in the protection and promotion of the right to defend human rights and in achieving a safe working environment for Human Rights Defenders in Africa, Austria lives up to its responsibility to promote and protect human rights. For Austria, Human Rights Defenders are indispensable partners in highlighting violations of human rights and as Austrian Development Cooperation we highly appreciate EHAHRDP's interventions towards protecting Human Rights Defenders and advocating for their rights and work. We look forward to our continued partnership and wish EHAHRDP all the best!

Simone Knapp
AUSTRIAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION



FROM DARFUR TO KAMPALA

How the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies came to be [Mohammed Badawi- African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies]

FROM THE BEGINNING, OUR MISSION WAS VERY CLEAR AND THEY SUPPORTED THAT BY PROVIDING PROTECTION, TECHNICAL, AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT.

In 2009 there was a heavy attack on Sudanese civil society after the indictment of President Al-Bashir by the International Criminal Court (ICC). National and international human rights organisations were shut down. Activists faced harassment, were arrested, and saw their property confiscated. Some were tortured. Bashir's Head of Security released a statement calling



for the "organs to be cut" from anyone cooperating with the ICC.

The people that refused to cooperate were forced to move away, many of whom were the founders of the human rights movement in Sudan. Closing down these organisations was not just a reaction to the indictment; it was an opportunity for the government to close down the whole human rights movement in Sudan.

At this point, human rights defenders had different options. Some left for Europe and received refugee status. One group including myself ended up in Kampala wanting to continue the work we were doing in Sudan. This is where the idea for the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) originated.

Our founding director was Osman Hummada, one of the activists who was arrested and tortured in 2009. When you talk about Osman, you talk about knowledge and art—someone who was very smart and creative. He was one of the people who could teach you how to see the bigger picture and could bring together different generations of human rights activists. Osman passed on in 2014. His death was an incredible loss and was felt throughout the global human rights community.

The fact that we didn't reach the point where we had to go to America or Europe is because of EHAHRDP. From the beginning, our mission was very clear and they supported that by providing protection, technical, and financial support. They also assisted us with practical things such as getting to know our new country – that is assistance an organisation rarely gives you.

The impression and support given by EHAHRDP kept people focused on continuing their work. We didn't get headaches worrying about our families. By being here in the region, we were able to stay in touch with people. The impact of the ACJPS being located in Kampala has drawn the attention of many organisations that have since also moved here.



Mohammed Badawi is Monitoring

Program Coordinator at the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS).

ACJPS is dedicated to creating a Sudan committed to all human rights, the rule of law and peace, in which the rights and freedoms of the individual are honored and where all persons and groups are granted their rights to non-discrimination, equality and justice.

2006

OBSERVER STATUS AT THE ACHPR



Since December 12th 2006, EHAHRDP has observer status with the ACHPR and sit as a member of the Steering Committee of the Forum on the Participation of NGOs in the Ordinary Sessions of the ACHPR (known generally as the NGO Forum)

CAPACITY BUILDING AND PROGRAMS

EHAHRDP's Capacity Building and Programs department manages the organisation's human resources and administrative tasks, like budget and proposal writing, and organising trainings for HRDs.

"Our organisation has achieved quite a lot in the past 10 years," says Memory Bandera Rwampawnyi, the Director of Programs and Administration. "We have improved our organisational management and programming, and developed new policies to improve our efficacy. Combined with a growth in staff members, we are now able to respond more quickly and effectively when HRDs face emergencies." EHAHRDP operates on the same level as its international counterparts when responding to grievances from HRDs. "That's a huge achievement!" she says.

Tabitha Netuwa was the only one working on Protection when she started at the organisation seven years ago. "The Capacity Building and Programs department supports us logistically to

protect HRDs through evacuation, for example. One case we handled was the son of an activist who had been beaten at a playground because of his father's work. Our teams worked hard to support him to join his father, whom we had previously evacuated due to the threats he was facing in his country."

The Program offers trainings and workshops, as well as more action-based learning and mentoring to HRDs. In Capacity Building, numerous trainings and workshops have been conducted at national and sub-regional levels with over 1,000 HRDs participating in the trainings. Key successes include the formation of various National Coalitions for HRDs, increased networking and collaboration among Network members and with regional and international organisations, and the design and implementation of trainings which have enhanced the skills of HRDs in advocating for their rights in their respective countries.



ADVOCACY AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

“We bring unwanted voices to the United Nations Human Rights Council,” says Hassan Shire. EHAHRDP brings the voices of Sub-Saharan activists that might not otherwise be heard within their communities, countries or regions to the world’s premier human rights forums, including the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR). “This gives activists who are marginalised in African contexts the opportunity to share their experiences on international platforms and engage with major leaders in the human rights field,” he says.

EHAHRDP acquired special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 2012, and Observer Status with the ACHPR in 2006. With this status EHAHRDP is able to engage deeply with both human

rights mechanisms, and the Advocacy Program has since then consistently attended sessions accompanied by delegations of human rights defenders from across the sub-region.

EHAHRDP’s long-term advocacy work at the ACHPR resulted in a landmark resolution being passed at the 55th Ordinary Session in April 2014, condemning all human rights violations by state and non-state actors against persons on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. This resolution demonstrated not only the successful engagement between Commissioners and human rights defenders, but more importantly is proof that even on contentious issues such as LGBTI rights a Pan-African consensus is possible.

“Some of the major advocacy outcomes

related to the East and Horn sub-region, like the establishment of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Eritrea, have come as a direct result of the work of EHAHRDP at the United Nations Human Rights Council,” asserts Eleanor Openshaw, Director of Regional Advocacy at the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR). “EHAHRDP has always been immensely influential at the Human Rights Council.”

EHAHRDP and its partners were also actively involved in the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry into the human rights violations committed by the Eritrean government against its own people. This is only the third such Commission in the UN’s history, following Syria, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. During the same session, EHAHRDP supported and accredited 7 Eritrean human rights

defenders to conduct both public and private advocacy and lobbying activities around the resolution.

“I take away memories, or images, of Hassan and his colleagues when they come to the Council – they’re there, they’re present, they’re active, they’re engaged in the agenda,” Eleanor says. “They deliver thorough oral statements and share knowledge and information about the experiences of defenders in the sub-region, usually bringing several with them to Geneva as part of their delegation. That is invaluable work.”

While the team leads its own advocacy initiatives, it also supports the advocacy efforts of activists in all 11 countries in the sub-region. The Advocacy Program aims to elevate the voices of those who are working in the field. This can be done through access to the mechanisms, but also through the increasingly wide-reaching communication tools available today.

The department organises trainings both to teach HRDs to monitor and document human rights violations and to introduce them to regional and international mechanisms. The organisation works very closely with its focal points to obtain timely and accurate information

when violations against human rights defenders take place, and disseminate the information publicly or privately when appropriate.

The Advocacy team is also on the constant lookout for developing trends and challenges for human rights defenders in the sub-region. Over the

past few years it has strived to stay one step ahead, and has produced original thematic research on the challenges faced by human rights defenders working on natural resource extraction in Uganda and Tanzania, and most recently on elections in Sudan, Ethiopia, Burundi, and Uganda.

“Keeping track of the volatile and unpredictable political situations in our sub-region and looking out for warning signs for HRDs in these contexts are

also responsibilities our team take very seriously,” says Clementine de Montjoye, EHAHRDP’s Advocacy and Research Officer. “When we see that the situation of HRDs in a country is worsening and of particular concern, as is the case in Burundi and South Sudan, we also conduct in-depth country-specific research.”

WE BRING UNWANTED VOICES TO THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL



THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS PROJECT | EHAHRDP

2009

PAN -AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK



From 20 to 23 April 2009 at the Johannesburg + 10: All Africa Human Rights Defenders Conference (Conference report: English | French) 88 HRDs from Africa, and 33 international partners, gathered in Kampala, Uganda with the objective to take stock of the achievements made in the protection of human rights defenders since the first ‘All Africa Human Rights Defenders Conference’ held in Johannesburg in 1998, and to jointly devise strategies to respond to new and persisting challenges in order to effectively improve HRDs’ protection and capacity to work.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

BRAVE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS STEP INTO THE PALAIS DES NATIONS IN GENEVA THREE TIMES A YEAR TO DENOUNCE THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS TAKING PLACE IN THEIR COUNTRIES.



Discussing human rights issues at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, where the United Nations Human Rights Council takes place three times a year, sometimes feels very far removed from the realities on the ground in the sub-region. Bridging the gap between HRDs in the field and those who are at a decision-making level is one of the core objectives of EHAHRDP's Advocacy Program.

"Sharing my own personal experience and views with fellow HRDs and diplomats to inform and influence their decision is one achievement. This

is very important particularly in light of the campaign of misinformation waged by undemocratic governments", says Mesfin Negash, an Ethiopian HRD working with Civil Rights Defenders, and regular attendee of the Human Rights Council.

After years of engagement on the situation of human rights in South Sudan, even pre-dating the country's independence, EHAHRDP continues to support human rights defenders to share their experiences. Since the civil war broke out in December 2013, this can sometimes be risky: one HRD was forced to stay in South Sudan after threats were made to him and his family to dissuade him from attending the Council session. Being present in Geneva allowed EHAHRDP staff to advocate for him, and the President of the Council publically called on South Sudan to respond to the allegations.

In June 2015, a resolution was passed establishing a mission of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to South Sudan to investigate the widespread human rights abuses taking place, the strongest resolution yet to have been passed since the outbreak of the conflict in South Sudan in 2013.

"At a side-event organised on South Sudan, I presented the human rights situation on the ground including issues surrounding the humanitarian

situation, refugees, the protection of civilians, the use of sexual violence and rape against women, the economic crisis, the targeting of humanitarian agencies, and freedom of expression. I was happy to see some of these issues included in the resolution passed later on in the session," said Angelina Seeka, of End the Impunity in South Sudan.

Having human rights defenders present at the Council with the hard truths of what is taking place in the sub-region is one of the most powerful advocacy tools. No one is better placed to speak about human rights in a particular country than those who are involved in protecting and promoting them, whether they are living in country or in exile.

There are of course inherent challenges for human rights defenders taking part in these mechanisms, and EHAHRDP provides crucial support and guidance in navigating these structures – from dealing with nightmarish visa and flight logistics to ensuring that HRDs are able to return safely to their countries without fear of reprisals.



ICT AND DIGITAL SECURITY

First it was Radio, then Television. Soon we had pagers, then mobile phones. Personal computers, the Internet, and smartphones eventually followed. Society, and the media through which it expressed itself, has increasingly moved from purely physical into virtual spaces. And with this move the battle over democratic and human rights norms has also been taken online.

Rather than being marginalised from the digital age, the East and Horn of Africa sub-region has caught the technological wave and is now intensely scrutinised as one of the sources of 'the next billion' internet users. This is true in Somalia, where robust and profitable mobile networks with impressive mobile penetration rates grew in the absence of government or regulatory frameworks, as well as in Kenya where the online community galvanises national discourse with campaigns such as #SomebodyTellCNN.

"To do effective activism, HRDs must have the best contemporary tools to keep themselves safe," says EHAHRDP's ICT Manager Neil Blazevic. "As of late, activists can have their data compromised through spyware deployed by a government half a world away." Although new, the ICT program has already made significant impact by offering technical trainings to activists around the sub-region and continent.

Technological development impacts HRDs in a variety of ways. It provides new tools that they must use (for better or worse) such as word processing, spreadsheets, and e-mail. It also provides new mediums of mass

communication such as web archives and enormous public audiences through social media. Data collection, analysis, and multimedia systems introduce new ways to conduct research and communicate visually to the public. Technology also introduces new threats, as key human rights information travels across complex network infrastructure, protected by uncertain security and access controls. Likewise communication between defenders takes place through new mediums, which may be easily and invisibly surveilled.

"Nowadays, digital attacks are some of the biggest challenges that HRDs in Somalia face," says Abukar Mohamed Nor, a protection officer at Iniskoy for Peace and Development Organisation in Mogadishu, referring to the infiltration of Al Shabaab into Somali telecommunications. "We use phones, email and websites regularly as activists. Before the training we had with EHAHRDP, we had no capacity to address digital security issues. We didn't know how to secure our computers and sensitive information. We have now trained many other activists, including women human rights defenders, to protect themselves digitally."

The ICT team has trained over 700 journalists and HRDs in digital security, and social media and web presence, and has also identified promising next generation leaders to participate in training of trainers programs. Going forward, they plan to consolidate these programs, keep up with latest developments in technology and praxis, and develop data collection, storage and analysis skills to bridge the gap between technology and human rights practitioners.

2013

CLAIMING SPACES

Tactical tools for human rights defenders commission on people's and human rights

From December 9th to 13th, EHAHRDP held our third annual Claiming Spaces workshop in south sudanese human rights defenders with advocacy, risk assesment, and IT skills.



SPECIAL PROGRAMS

EHAHRDP has been working extensively on the issues of Somali human rights defenders (HRDs) ever since its inception in 2005. In 2012, EHAHRDP deemed it necessary to establish a 'special program' cross cutting through its core programs and committing more resources into the work on Somalia (together with Somaliland).

Since the creation of Special Programs, Somali HRDs have benefited from trainings on protection, security tools as well as research methods. They have also been assisted with how to conduct advocacy at the national, regional and international level. Through EHAHRDP's

efforts, Somali HRDs have had the opportunity to raise awareness on the situation in their country at the African Commission of Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), the United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC) and with the Federal Government.

On 20 August 2015, EHAHRDP supported nearly thirty human rights defenders to form the Somalia Human Rights Defenders Coalition. After holding discussions with HRDs, an overwhelming majority viewed the setting up of a coalition as a key aspect of engaging other defenders and intervening faster in cases. "EHAHRDP is committed to supporting human rights defenders to play their vital role in responding to the challenges faced by human rights defenders," says Hassan Shire, Executive Director of EHAHRDP.

"This network is intended to enhance their capacity to conduct human rights work and to improve their protection and working environment."

"I am writing to say to you thank you very much for the Strategic Advocacy Training this week, which I had the opportunity to attend. I really got a great experience and in-depth understanding- that was what I appreciated more than I can ever say in words! I will be ready to play my role in terms for advocating for human rights and press freedom."

Somali journalist and HRD, based in Mogadishu

THE POWER OF NETWORKS

PAN-AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK, EHAHRD-NET, AND NATIONAL COALITIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

"I was struck by the fact that many of the defenders [I have spoken with] don't know how to protect themselves and this is why a network like this one, the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network, and others are useful," says Michel Forst, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders. "International solidarity is the best protection for defenders who are at-risk or under attack," he says.



PAN AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK

The Pan African Human Rights Defenders Network was established in April 2009 following the Johannesburg + 10: All Africa Human Rights Defenders Conference in Kampala, Uganda. Mandate was given to EHAHRDP to host the secretariat of Pan African Human Rights Defenders Network and transfer its experience and best practices to other sub-regions of Africa.

PAHRDP's five sub-regional network members (comprising the West Africa Human Rights Defenders Network, the South African Human Rights Defenders Network hosted by Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights and chaired by the International Commission of Jurists-Africa regional programme, the North Africa Human Rights Defenders Network hosted by Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, the Central African Human Rights Defenders Network) have made tremendous efforts to set up a functional protection programmes in Africa.

"Such is the influence and importance to the human rights defending community in Africa that the operational work of EHAHRDP has given birth to sub-regional human rights defenders bodies such as the human rights defenders networks in Southern, Central, West and North Africa. Kudos to EHAHRDP for achieving this milestone!" said Arnold Tsunga, Executive Director of

International Commission of Jurists-Africa regional programme.

"PAHRDN has contributed to successfully developing effective policies, structures and practices to handle protection cases on sub-regional level, share skills, and establish mentoring relationships on security management and protection. This has led to the strong sub-regional networks we have today," said Joseph Bikanda, Coordinator of Pan African Human Rights Defenders Network.

PAHRDN launched its first African Human Rights Shield Award in 2013. It has also supported the research and publication of guidelines on the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly led by an ACHPR study group, and has initiated periodic research on the state of HRDs in Africa. This research seeks to highlight individual cases of HRD rights violations to demand accountability and end impunity.

Moreover, the network has provided legal support to HRDs including trial observation and strategic litigation. Looking into the future, PAHRDN will effectively fulfill in the coming months the establishment of "HRDs Hub", the establishment of the Pan African HRDs Endowment Fund for the protection of the most at risk HRDs and the support to the ACHPR mandate to fulfill Resolution 273 of the ACHPR on reprisals against civil society and individuals.

www.africandefenders.org

2015

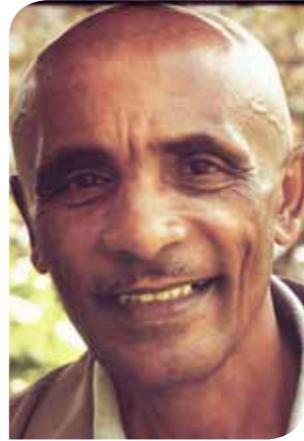
BURUNDI AT A TURNING POINT



2015: Burundi at a Turning Point

Human Rights Defenders Working in the Context of Elections





"EHAHRDP is one of the first civil society organisations I got to know when I first joined the EU Delegation in Kampala. I was immediately impressed with the professionalism of its staff and the amazing work they do in support of human rights defenders. My first impression was not wrong as, since then, we have been working together on several HRD cases and human rights abuses, and the EHAHRDP team has been extremely helpful and supportive."

Sabrina Bazzanella
Operations Governance Adviser
EU Delegation to Kampala

EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK

EHAHRDP also serves as secretariat to the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (EHAHRD-Net). The sub-regional network unites more than 75 HRDs and organisations from the East and Horn of Africa, and aims to maximise the protection of HRDs and raise awareness of human rights work and issues in the East and Horn of Africa. Connecting national, regional and international like-minded organisations across the network helps protect HRDs and develops their individual capacities. EHAHRD-Net consists of a General Assembly, which is made up of all network members and an Advisory Council with focal persons from network countries.



It is hard to believe that EHAHRDP has only been around for 10 years. They are everywhere, they are known across Africa and beyond for their hard work, dedicated team, and effective advocacy for the protection of human rights defenders, setting benchmarks and providing much needed protection to those fighting for the rights of others. For us at REDRESS, it is therefore a great pleasure to work with EHAHRDP staff and their committed members. We look forward to further strengthening our collaboration and toast to EHAHRDP and your members and wish you all the best, strength and stamina for the next decades.

Juergen Schurr
REDRESS

NATIONAL COALITIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

To better reach all human rights defenders in the sub-region, especially those in remote areas, EHAHRDP supports the creation of national coalitions. These coalitions are an integral part of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (EHAHRD-Net) through which HRDs working in specific countries can come together to claim their rights and support one another in the national context.

The first national coalition was set up

in Kenya in 2007 and today there are coalitions in Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia,

South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. These national coalitions of HRDs have ensured that the voices of defenders are amplified, increased the levels of collaboration among defenders and organisations both in country and with partners out of the country, and most importantly provided a vital support system to defenders who are at risk as a result of their work.

The coalitions have become self-sustaining with their own operational systems, budgets and staff to coordinate

activities. They often engage in advocacy activities at national and international levels all aimed at bringing to public attention the critical issues affecting HRDs in their countries. They also act as an important source of information.

The most important aspect of national coalitions is their ability to reach out to HRDs working in areas far removed from national capitals, who in most cases lack access to support systems and are often more vulnerable.

EHAHRDP continues to closely engage with the National Coalitions and encourages newly formed Coalitions to undertake peer-learning missions to other coalitions. ♦

ABOUT THE NATIONAL COALITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS - KENYA



The National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders - Kenya was developed in 2007, working under the auspices of the Kenyan Human Rights Commission, and officially named as an independent organisation in 2012.

The coalition was inspired by EHAHRDP, according to Salome Nduta, a Protection Officer and founding member of the coalition:

“Our coalition operates like a small EHAHRDP for Kenyan HRDs. We offer protection services, capacity building, and advocacy education and support to HRDs. We follow EHAHRDP’s model and best practices to support HRDs with medical and psychosocial support, relocation and emergency evacuation.”

“EHAHRDP is a ‘mother’ to us and other national coalitions,” says Salome. “It offers ongoing support whenever we need it. They help amplify the voices of Kenyan HRDs because we don’t have the capacity or status as a coalition to attend major regional and international human rights mechanisms. For example, one HRD had been unjustly jailed in Malindi, a coastal town in Kenya, for seven years. EHAHRDP brought this case to the Human Rights Council and instigated an appeal process, garnering international support and attention for the activist.”

“Regardless of the support we provide to the National Human Rights Defenders Coalition-Kenya, they are a very independent and successful coalition,” Memory from the EHAHRDP remarks.

“They replicate most of the services we offer. We are hoping that, in the coming years, we will be able to strengthen the existing coalitions and establish coalitions in countries that don’t have [them] already.”

“That is a key focus for us,” she says, adding that the EHAHRDP launched its newest national coalition in Somalia in August 2015. “When there are effective local mechanisms in place, particularly for protection and emergency support, we can focus our efforts on other issues and countries. We’re really looking at the concept of national coalitions as one of the most sustainable solutions that we have to take us to where we want to be, to enable all African HRDs to advocate for human rights safely and effectively.” ♦

BATTLING THE ODDS

THE STORY OF SURVIVAL AND SUCCESS OF NJOROGE WAITHERA, A KENYAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER

No single narrative explains the wave of violence that swept through Kenya after the disputed elections of December 2007. Some observers maintain that it was an organised effort by politicians. Others point at the deep ethnic and social divides that were cultivated during the colonial period. Whatever combination of factors contributed to the crisis, ultimately they led to the killing of as many as 1.500 people and displacement of another 600.000.

“There was a lot of looting and demonstrations the first two days, and the government declared all gatherings illegal. That’s when they brought truckloads of the police into the informal settlements, essentially to keep people away from the city,” says Njoroge Waitthera. “And that’s when we got the clues that they had decided to do ethnic cleansing in the settlements.

It was chaotic.”

Like many Kenyan defenders Njoroge’s activism started early. As a student leader he spoke out against the ethnic clashes in the early ‘90s. He was suspended, and only got his degree after 15 years instead of the usual four. Later, as a member of the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), he helped document violations against the Mungiki, a banned ethnic organisation accused of organised crime.

When the violence erupted in 2008, the KHRC turned its attention to the violations that were taking place all over the country. Human rights defenders documented murders,

rapes, and mutilations. The conflict cooled down when a coalition government was formed under the mediation of Kofi Annan.

Although the violence had ended, HRDs continued to seek justice for victims. As international pressure increased, civil society suddenly found itself in the crosshairs. “We started receiving threats that we should stop our work,” says Njoroge. “Initially, I didn’t feel uncomfortable. I’m a hardened activist. I didn’t even feel the heat. But the frequency escalated.”

On the evening of 5 March 2009, a group of HRDs decided to meet and discuss the increasing threats. As they were waiting,

SO AT EHAHRDP I WAS ABLE TO INTERACT WITH THESE TWO INSTRUMENTS AND SEE PEOPLE WHO RECOGNISE THE WORK I DO

experience. “At that point, I was still very naive. I didn’t know about the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. I didn’t know there were European guidelines for HRDs – that I could just go to foreign embassies and seek assistance,” says Njoroge. “So at EHAHRDP I was able to interact with these two instruments and see people who recognise the work I do – for which I almost got killed back home – is valuable and legitimate. And these people will have my back.”

“In Kampala, I went to Hassan Shire who has operated in exile and understands how people feel in a foreign country with nothing to do,” he says. The next week, Njoroge started to work for EHAHRDP as a rapporteur for a meeting of Ethiopian HRDs.

“It was the first time that I met defenders from Ethiopia. I remember how after they heard my story they volunteered their per diem to help me,” he says. “I was in tears.” Soon after, he and a fellow Kenyan HRD joined Protection Desk Uganda, a joint project of EHAHRDP and Protection International, where he began work supporting HRDs throughout the East and Horn of Africa.

WE RECEIVED A LOT OF DEFENDERS FROM DAFUR WHO HAD EXPERIENCED TRAUMA

“We received a lot of defenders from Dafur who had experienced trauma. Some had been tortured and only just escaped,” says Njoroge. “That’s when I decided to commit part of my life to ensuring that HRDs are safe as they do their work.

Ultimately, EHAHRDP referred Njoroge for a protective fellowship at the Centre for Applied Human Rights Studies at the University of York, UK. He went on to complete a master’s degree in Human Rights. “But after my coursework was done I had to rush back. Why? Because I love my country,” he says.

During a series of visits he slowly laid the groundwork for a permanent return. In 2010, rumours were floating around that Njoroge was a witness in the International Criminal Court trials against Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, once more putting his life at risk. It wasn’t until December 2012 that he felt it was safe enough to return permanently.

There have been no more direct threats since Njoroge returned to Kenya, however that does not mean the risks have disappeared. “There are still mentions on social media,” he says. “Whenever I comment on a critical post, there are still some people who will make a reference to me as witness number five.”

Njoroge got a call. Two of his colleagues had been executed on the streets of Nairobi. Oscar Kingara had been one of the leading investigators behind police killings in Kenya. He was shot together with his assistant John Oluo.

The execution of Kingara and Oluo was a turning point. That same night Njoroge received an anonymous call. “You saw what befell your colleagues,” a voice told him. “Don’t think you are very special, the same thing could happen to you.” After checking with his colleagues he found out everyone got similar calls.

Several defenders were extracted by international organisations. But as his contract had just ended, there was nobody who took responsibility for Njoroge. Then, at three in the morning, he got another call. “Where are your colleagues, someone asked me,” he says. “Of course they were teasing me, telling me I was the only one left.” The next day he took a midnight bus to Kampala where he was received by EHAHRDP. It was the first time he had ever left Kenya.

Although Njoroge had been active as a defender for most of his life, Kampala turned out to be a transformative





CLOSING LETTER BY MICHEL FORST

When the mandate on human rights defenders was established in 2000, its main objective was to examine, monitor and advise on the situation of human rights defenders. Fifteen years later, a lot of work has

been done to better protect those who promote and defend human rights, but the general outlook of the situation of human rights defenders remains bleak and gloomy in many regions of the world. Unfortunately, the East and Horn of Africa is no exception.

My last report to the United Nations General Assembly, presented only a few days ago, captures the essence of the seven regional consultations during which I met 500 courageous human rights defenders from all over the world. Earlier this year, it gave me the opportunity to organise a regional consultation in Uganda with more than fifty human rights defenders from the sub-region and I was appalled by the stories I heard. In many countries, the situation has recently worsened for many rights defenders.

National legislations on counter-terrorism and security are being used to hamper the work of many non-governmental organisations that face multiple legal restrictions and administrative barriers such as registration or funding, attacking very fundamental rights such as freedom of association and freedom of expression. Law is increasingly becoming a tool to silence dissent and critical voices and to insidiously reduce space for civil society movements and organisations. This is also encouraged by a culture of impunity and corruption, a scourge that poison many different State levels.

The misuse of legislation does not only affect organisations, it also affects individuals and their direct environment. Many men and women face threats, harassment, intimidation, criminalization and physical attacks and they are often labelled as “enemies of the State”, as political opponents or as agents of Western values. In several countries of the sub-region, human rights defenders have been witnessing a backlash against sexual orientation and gender identity rights defenders. These attacks are not only perpetrated by States but also by a growing number of non-state actors such as transnational

firms and religious groups who question basic human rights principles in order to serve their own interests.

In such a context, the action of organisations such as the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project is all the more essential. Their ability to engage with many defenders of the region, their capacity to offer them security, advocacy, and capacity building are key to giving defenders the strength and support they may need to continue their valuable work. Over the years, EHAHRDP has developed a comprehensive knowledge of the

sub-region, its advocacy work has contributed to positive change for many defenders and its ability to engage with regional and international mechanisms has been essential to develop and consolidate networks and joint actions.

I share EHAHRDP’s views on the need for constant dialogue. Cooperation and coordinated action are critical to ensure impact and sustainable changes. I truly believe that all stakeholders, such as human rights defenders, civil society organisations, international organisations, national human rights institutions and States, can play

complementary roles in upholding and strengthening international human rights standards.

These are critical years for democracy in the countries of the East and Horn of Africa. The latest developments in Burundi have reminded us of the need for constant support to those who are at the forefront of human rights work, to those who tirelessly advocate for the respect of our fundamental rights and freedoms.

Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders



The African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS) in Banjul, The Gambia hereby congratulates EHAHRDP on the celebration of 10 years of existence. As they are the Steering Committee Member for East Africa on the Forum of NGOs on the Work of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, we have had the opportunity to work closely with EHAHRDP. They have been at the forefront of championing the rights of human rights defenders, building alliances in other regions of the continent through their strategic engagement with other like-minded organisations. As ACDHRS congratulates EHAHRDP once again on a deserved celebration, we say well done!

Hannah Forster
AFRICAN CENTRE FOR DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES



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