



**Safety,
Security, &
Well-being
During COVID-19**

**Guidelines for
human rights defenders**



DEFENDDEFENDERS
East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

SAFETY & SECURITY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS DURING COVID-19.

The coronavirus pandemic has become a global crisis, forcing most states to close their borders and limit in-country movement to curb the spread of the virus. This has led to organisations closing offices and working remotely from their homes.

DefendDefenders' security guide and recommendations are set out to ensure well-being for human rights defenders (HRDs).

Working safely at home

Working from home can be challenging, especially when there are several people and/or limited space.

Ensure that the space you are working from during lock-down is safe and secure, and free from natural elements like rain, severe sunshine or cold. Protect access to your workspace from unwanted persons and potential aggressors. Ensure that your computer and documents are safe from fire and liquids, but also pets or children. Avoid locations exposed to risks of accidents by vehicles.

Clean your computer and mobile phone with sanitizer often. NB: Don't pour the sanitizer on sensitive parts of these gadgets while cleaning them. Remember to wash your hands with water and soap often.

Security of your work

Make sure you put a password on your account so that when you step away from your computer, you lock it using a password. Avoid leaving your laptop, phone, or documents near windows or doors since anyone could easily take them.

Don't leave sensitive information lying about, if it is in hard copy keep it in a secure place preferably under lock and key.

Ensure that the access to your home is controlled where possible and keep abreast of the security situation and trends in your country, district, or village, and take precautions.

Hosting physical and online meetings

If you are hosting a physical work meeting, make sure to follow guidelines in place. Make sure you sit in an aerated space at least one meter apart.

For online meetings, there are several audio and video conferencing tools available. We recommend the use of tools that support end-to-end encryption, especially for sensitive meetings/conversations. Examples of these include, but are not limited to:

- BlueJeans
- Mumble
- GoToMeeting
- Wire
- GoogleDuo
- Facetime
- Signal
- WhatsApp
- Telegram

Signal, Whatsapp, and Telegram provide end-to-end encryption for secure chats and calls. For video conferencing, applications like Wire, GoToMeeting, GoogleDuo, and FaceTime also provide end-to-end encryption.

Be careful what you click on the internet

Unfortunately, during these trying times, some are using this as an opportunity to infect devices through (phishing) emails and other messaging platforms (e.g SMS, WhatsApp, etc). To improve your awareness of how to identify phishing emails, you can follow the Google quiz link (<https://phishingquiz.with-google.com/>).

To be sure your device is properly secured, ask yourself the following questions:

At times like these, you may forget to do the basic things on your device, ask yourself these questions. Do you have an anti-virus installed? Is the anti-virus updated? Do you have a VPN installed? Is it automatically running? Is your operating system updated? Do you have your information backed up? Is your computer/mobile encrypted? Do you have a

password on your device? Does your device have an automatic screen lock/timeout if left idle?

If you can answer all these questions with a **YES**, then you are good to go. But if you have **NO** somewhere, you should change that NO into a YES.

Online Security

Ensure that your two-factor authentication is turned on for your online accounts.

If you think that your account has been compromised before, change the password immediately.

You can also check your email accounts against this website: www.haveibeenpwned.com – this database shows if your account password has been exposed in previous security breaches and therefore warrants an immediate change of passwords.

Stepping out of your home

First, when stepping out of your home, follow the guidelines in place about movements in your country from your health authorities.

Guidelines from health authorities:

- Don't move out of your house if you have the following symptoms: flu, fever, dry cough, and general body weakness. Stay at home and if you share your home with other people, isolate yourself and call a doctor or any of the numbers provided by the health authorities.
- Avoid sneezing out in public places, if you need to sneeze, do so in your elbow or in a tissue and make sure you dispose of the tissue immediately and clean your hands with either alcohol based sanitizer or wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water and avoid touching your nose, mouth, and eyes.
- If you have flu or cough, wear a mask when moving out of your house to avoid spreading germs.
- When at the supermarket, local market, or just moving about on the streets, maintain at least one meter apart from other people.
- Avoid moving past curfew hours, this ap-

plies for countries that have curfew.

Secondly, if you are allowed to move about, don't use the same route all the time when leaving your home to go for shopping or to exercise or pick other essentials. Make sure you inform someone when you leave your house, including where you are going and when you are coming back so that if you do not make it on time or make it back at all they can follow up.

Avoid carrying excessive amounts of cash and watch out as you access an ATM or exchange cash in public.

Avoid criminal hotspots, like areas known for alcohol consumption or smoking points, or zones where smuggling and human trafficking activities are carried out from. Based on the history of your country, district, or town, map out such areas. Bring your identification card wherever you go.

Emergency contact information

Make sure you have the contacts on speed dial of your local authorities, hospital, & fire brigade.

For countries where you need documentation from your local leader, make sure to get it early in time before an emergency comes up.

Get in touch with DefendDefenders in case of any emergencies:

+256 783027611 (phone, Signal, and WhatsApp)

WELL-BEING & RESILIENCE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS DURING COVID-19.

The spread of the coronavirus, and subsequent lockdown, has brought about a lot of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. Normal life for most people has been interrupted, which might result in high levels of stress and other mental health concerns.

HRDs are not spared, especially as we continue to witness and hear about human rights violations in the enforcement of health directives and guidelines in various countries. It is very possible to be overtaken by negative emotions and health complications.

Coping strategies like going to work, socializing, sports, or other recreational activities might not be possible right now. Therefore, pre-existing conditions, such as hypertension or depression, can easily intensify.

DefendDefenders would like to share some tips on how to maintain your well-being during these tough times:

Accept what's happening. It is a reality and like other realities this too will pass. Stay positive and keep hope alive.

Adhere to national guidelines. It is important to adhere to the guidelines and advice given by health and state authorities, and other reliable information.

Practice conscious breathing. Whenever stressful information comes along, take a deep breath and relax. Regularly practice conscious breathing – at least twice daily. Do not get caught up in information that is not verified, which can result in more stress.

Create a routine. Create a routine for this time you are at home. Do not do the same activity for more than one hour. Include phys-

ical exercises, fun games, and meditation. Participate in household chores too.

Stay connected with family and friends. It is a good opportunity to practice being a good partner to your spouse, a good parent, a good brother, sister, or friend.

Keep yourself busy. Keep yourself busy by learning new skills and hobbies like cooking, reading, crafts, painting, play a musical instrument, indoor games, or storytelling. You can also try short online courses (Alison, Edx, Gymnasium, Udemy, Philanthropy and Coursera have a variety).

However, if this sounds overwhelming to you, know that it is also okay to simply relax. Everyone copes differently with this stressful situation. While some might need extra activities, others might need more rest. Figure out what is best for you.

Go for a walk, if allowed. You should not sit all day reading, working on computers, or watching TV. Please take a walk round in the house, compound, or neighborhood.

Eat healthy. Eat healthy and avoid overindulging. The best treatment for viral infections is to boost the body's immune system by increasing intake of vitamin C which is found in most tropical fruits.

Avoid recreational drugs and alcohol. They are harmful for your health, and your body needs stronger immunity.

Practice self-care
Self-love or self-care is paramount because it will make you feel positive. Do the self-body massage or get someone in the house to provide the therapy; paint your nails; groom your body, and every so often put on your favourite clothes and shoes.

If you are overwhelmed, contact a professional psychologist for support. Start gathering contacts now, so you have them ready once you may need them.

Stay home and keep safe - mentally and physically!

WHAT IS COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a new coronavirus introduced to humans for the first time. There's currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. See more information: www.who.int.

You can protect yourself and help prevent spreading the virus to others if you:

DO:

- Wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds, with soap and water or alcohol-based hand-rub.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a disposable tissue or flexed elbow when you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid close contact (1 meter/3 feet) with people, especially those who are unwell.
- Stay at home and self-isolate from others if you feel unwell.

DON'T:

- Touch your eyes, nose, or mouth if your hands are not clean.
- Don't visit, or at least keep a distance to, at-risk groups (elderly, sick persons etc.)

Are you an human rights defender from/in the East and Horn of Africa in need of emergency protection?

Get in touch: +256-783-027611 (phone, signal, and WhatsApp - 24/7)

For more information about DefendDefenders and the protection & promotion of human rights defenders, please visit www.defenddefenders.org.

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