

# WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND THEIR PROTECTION NEEDS

Who is a WHRD?  
What threats do they face?  
What protection is available?



**DEFENDDEFENDERS**

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

## WHO IS AN HRD?

A human rights defender (HRD) is a person who, individually or with others, acts to promote or protect human rights through peaceful means. Anyone can be an HRD irrespective of their age, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, religion or profession. Defending human rights can be their professional source of income or a voluntary engagement.

## WHO IS A WHRD?

A woman human rights defender (WHRD) can be a female HRD defending the rights of all or any other HRDs who work in the defence of women's rights or on gender issues.



*Someone who organises a demonstration (for example for better working conditions, against corruption, environmental degradation or to promote the right to health or education) is an HRD, even if their job is not related to human rights or they do not have a job.*

## WHAT DO HRDs DO?

Anyone who works to promote or protect human rights through peaceful means is an HRD, whether they are paid to do this or not. There are endless ways to promote or protect human rights, here are a few examples:

- Document human rights abuses by collecting evidence
- Raise awareness about human rights abuses (in media, online, or in their community)
- Report human rights abuses to international or regional bodies (e.g. UN or AU)
- Put pressure on perpetrators of human rights abuses, so they stop
- Advocate for human rights with people or entities in power (e.g. politicians or corporations)
- Pursue justice for human rights abuses through the legal system
- Support survivors of human rights abuses (e.g. shelter, legal advice, emotional support)
- Educate people about their rights and teach methods to defend human rights

This is just a small list of examples what kind of work HRDs, including WHRDs, do - there are so many more!



*When individuals document and raise awareness about human rights abuses, they are HRDs.*



*Witnesses who provide information on human rights abuses in court cases or to human rights bodies are HRDs.*

# WHAT THREATS DO HRDs FACE?

Human rights defenders face many threats. Often, those who abuse human rights are in a position of power (whether in politics or in a corporation), so they target HRDs, including WHRDs, who threaten their power. These are the most common threats that HRDs and WHRDs face:

- Physical assault
- Killings
- Intimidation and harassment (offline and online)
- Judicial harassment and criminalisation
- Surveillance and theft of equipment (e.g. computer or phone)
- Stress, depression, and burn-out



*HRDs often face unfounded charges for which they are arrested.*



*Defending human rights can easily wear someone out. Constantly dealing with human rights abuses, personal threats, and sometimes lacking support from friends and family creates stress and other mental health issues.*

# WHAT THREATS DO WHRDs FACE?

Generally, women face gendered threats that men do not face to the same extent. When a woman defends human rights, she is vulnerable to all threats that HRDs face generally, as well as specific gendered threats. The same is also true for sexual minority rights defenders. They may face:

- Sexual abuse and gender-based violence
- Threats to the HRD's family, including children
- Smear campaigns (online and offline)
- Stigmatisation



*WHRDs are faced with a lot of hate online. Not only is this mentally draining, but online threats can quickly become a reality.*



*Those attacking female HRDs often also try to attack their family.*

# WHAT PROTECTION IS AVAILABLE TO HRDs?

DefendDefenders offers a variety of protection measures to HRDs in need. If you are in need of emergency protection, you can reach us 24/7 on **+256-783-027611** (also available on Signal). Some of the protection measures we offer are:

- Relocation (including costs, transport, housing, food)
- Rest and respite
- Medical costs, including psychosocial support
- Support to HRD's family
- Replacement of essential equipment (e.g. computers, phones, cameras)
- Physical and digital security training

You can also find a list of resources on our website:

**[www.defenddefenders.org/WHRD-protection-brochure](http://www.defenddefenders.org/WHRD-protection-brochure)**.



*In emergency situations, DefendDefenders can help HRDs to relocate. This puts them out of immediate danger, can help them to recharge, and allows them to continue with their work from a safe distance.*

*DefendDefenders offers security trainings, to help HRDs protect themselves physically and digitally.*



*DefendDefenders offers wellbeing sessions, where HRDs can get rest and respite, as well as resources for self-care and stress prevention.*

For more information visit **[www.defenddefenders.org](http://www.defenddefenders.org)**

or find us on social media.



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