

Claiming Spaces: Tactical Tools for Human Rights Defenders

7-10 December 2022

Dar-es-salaam, Tanzania

Final Communique:

1. In commemoration of International Human Rights Defenders Day and International Human Rights Day, DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project) in partnership with Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC) co-convened the twelfth edition of Claiming Spaces: Tactical Tools for Human Rights Defenders in Dar es Salam, Tanzania from 7-10 December 2022. The opening ceremony was moderated by **Ms. Memory Bandera**, Director Programs and Administration, DefendDefenders.
2. In his welcome remarks, **Mr. Onesmo Olengurumwa**, National Coordinator THRDC welcomed distinguished guests and noted that this was the second time THRDC was hosting Claiming Spaces, ten years after the event's second edition. He stated that THRDC tries to decentralise the work of HRDs and operates at grassroot levels. He thanked Mr. Hassan Shire- Executive Director DefendDefenders for always standing with Tanzanian HRDs and the THRDC and working at the regional level for the protection of human rights. Mr. Olengurumwa noted that Claiming Spaces will provide HRDs with tools to defend human rights in the country
3. **Mr. Hassan Shire**, Chairperson of AfricanDefenders (Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network) and Executive Director of DefendDefenders recalled that the second edition of Claiming Spaces held in Tanzania in 2012 set out to assess the gaps and needs for HRDs, and to discuss issues affecting HRDs including accountability, transparency, and rule of law. He highlighted DefendDefenders' support to establishment of the Women Human Rights Defenders Network as well as the East African Women Human Rights Defenders Network. Mr. Shire noted that states hold the primary responsibility to protect HRDs, and that President Sulu Hassan is a torchbearer in this effort. He however cautioned that protection of HRDs is a collective responsibility. Mr. Shire further highlighted the challenges faced by HRDs on the continent and concluded by noting that

DefendDefenders provides holistic protection to HRDs and amplifies local voices at all levels including the United Nations in Geneva.

4. The event was graced by **Dr. Lillian Badi**, the Chairperson, of Tanzania's National Council of NGOs. Dr Badi acknowledged the challenges faced by Tanzanian HRDs in the course of their work. She highlighted that the National council of NGOs has a responsibility to speak out on behalf of HRDs to ensure that the HRDs fulfil their work. Dr. Badi further welcomed President Suluhu Hassan's positive approaches including attending THRDC's 10-year anniversary celebrations in May 2022. She noted that the President's attendance signaled an open door considering the country's history, and she urged HRDs to utilise this opportunity.
5. The keynote address was delivered by **Mr. Patience Mtwina**, Executive Secretary Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance, who commended THRDC for co-convening Claiming Spaces and for its achievements over the last ten years. Mr. Mtwina further acknowledged DefendDefenders' contributions to HRDs in the sub-region. He highlighted the mounting pressure on freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression, and the need for state institutions to respect these freedoms. He made the following recommendations to improve the situation of HRDs; (i) Speed up the amendment of restrictive laws including the Cybercrime Act and the Electronic and Postal Communications Act Regulations to comply with international human rights standards; (ii) Hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable; (iii) Strengthen capacity of HRDs; and (iv) State institutions must remain open to dialogue regarding concerns over fundamental freedoms and human rights.
6. DefendDefenders launched a report: [Pushing Boundaries](#); The case of East and Horn of Africa's youth human rights defenders. The report identifies the trends of youth mobilisation which include protests and assemblies, digital activism and activism. It also analyses the challenges faced by youth HRDs in the sub region which include surveillance, digital threats, misconceptions, negative stereotypes, and social cultural barriers. Finally, the report proposes recommendations to several stakeholders to improve the operating environment of youth HRDs.
7. The opening day featured a panel discussion on the human rights situation in Tanzania discussing the challenges faced by HRDs and the opportunities available. Panelists included **Robert Kamakia**, Pastoral Livelihood Support and Empowerment Program (*PALSEP*) **Utti Mwanga'amba**, Executive Director of Center for Widows and Children Assistance (CWCA), and **Fides Uiso**, Tanzania

Epilepsy Organisation (TEO). The session was moderated by Ms Lisa Kagaruki, Head of THRDC Membership Affairs Department.

8. **Mr. Kamakia** shared his experience living in exile and noted the deteriorating situation for pastoralists and indigenous people of Ngorongoro and Loliondo, noting that approximately 2800 people have been displaced since the conflict. Mr. Kamakia decried the lack of an independent judiciary towards addressing the human rights situation. He applauded the role played by THRDC, along with other civil society organisations during the Ngorongoro crisis, particularly the support offered to HRDs and community efforts to defend their land rights.
9. **Mr. Utti** discussed gender-based violence (GBV), highlighting poverty as one of its main causes. He also highlighted the conservative laws on inheritance, marriage, and children as another enabler of GBV, and noted that harmful negative stereotypes isolate women human rights defenders and exacerbate the GBV vice. Mr. Utti noted that CWCA engages in constructive dialogue with the government to advocate for laws and policy reforms for women and children.
10. **Mr. Fides** discussed the situation of minorities in Tanzania focusing on people living with epilepsy. He highlighted the pervasive social stigma against epileptic persons as one of the biggest enablers of their human rights violations. On the plus side, Fides noted that there is an improvement in awareness and changes in social perceptions on issues of minorities. She narrated how Coalitions like THRDC became helpful in building the capacity of HRDs dealing with marginalized or unattended-to human rights such as those of persons with disabilities.
11. Throughout the week, the HRDs took part in parallel workshops focusing on strategic advocacy at national, regional, and international levels; monitoring, documenting, and reporting of human rights violations; risk assessment and security management; and realising the right to privacy and online data protection for HRDs in Tanzania. They spent time learning from these sessions, sharing their experiences and best practices, and creating strong networks.
12. Claiming Spaces concluded with a closing ceremony to commemorate International Human Rights Day on 10 December 2022. The ceremony was presided over by **Hon. Dorothy Gwajima**, Minister of Community Development, Gender, Women and Special Groups, **HE. Ambassador Manfredo Fanti** (European Union Ambassador to Tanzania), **Mr. Marcelo Akpovo** (Regional

Representative and Director of OHCHR East African Regional Office, and Representative to the African Union), Dr Lilian Badi, Chairperson National Council of NGOs, Retired Judge Joakin Demelo, THRDC Board Chairperson, Mr. **Zlatan Milisic** (United Nations Resident Coordinator), and Ms. **Memory Bandera**. The day was attended by over 200 HRDs from across the country including Zanzibar.

13. On the last day, which also doubled as International Human Rights Day, Mr. **Olengurumwa** delivered welcome remarks recognising the group of HRDs who have spearheaded the 16 days of activism against GBV campaign all over the country this year. He thanked all stakeholders for the support given to HRDs to address violence against women in Tanzania, noting that long term strategies are needed to address violence against women and children in the country. He called on the guest of honour to be the link between development partners and the government to enable the development and implementation of these strategies.
14. **Ms. Memory Bandera** delivered opening remarks on behalf of Mr. Hassan Shire. She highlighted that this year's Human Rights Day marks the beginning of a year-long campaign to commemorate 75 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which is a global blueprint for international, regional, and national legal frameworks and policies, all of which should be aligned to ensure dignity, freedom, and justice for all. Ms. Bandera noted that this year's theme also speaks to the vision and mission of DefendDefenders that has since 2005 sought to ensure the safety & wellbeing of human rights defenders. Additionally, she noted, since 2011, DefendDefenders celebrates International Human Rights Day - and Human Rights Defenders Day before it, in fitting and distinguished company – of HRDs from the East and Horn of Africa to conclude the week of its flagship event- Claiming spaces.
15. In **Mr. Marcelo Akpovo's** remarks, he recognised the invaluable contribution of HRDs and recommitted the support of the East African Regional Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to HRDs as frontline human rights defenders addressing issues of the most marginalised communities. Mr. Akpovo noted that the 2022-2023 year-long commemoration of the UDHR, will embark on 3 issues: (i) Educating with an aim to increase global awareness of UDHR, (ii) Promoting attitude change through understanding and (iii) Countering the scepticism towards HRDs.
16. **Mr. Zlatan Milisic** delivered an address congratulating DefendDefenders and THRDC on organising the week's events and commemorating International Human Rights Day. He noted that this day reminds us of the milestone the UDHR

proclaimed in 1948 - to ensure that the suffering of World War II is never experienced again. He emphasised that the UDHR remains as timely as ever and is abundantly clear that existing crises cannot be used as a pretext to deny people the enjoyment of all rights set out in the declaration. He stated that Tanzania needs to align its laws that contain gender discriminatory provisions such as in marriage and property with international standards.

17. **Hon. Manfredo Fanti**, European Union Ambassador to Tanzania assured support to human rights defenders promoting and protecting human rights in Tanzania. Ambassador Fanti also highlighted human rights-based approaches including participation, accountability, non-discrimination, equality, empowerment, and Legality. He also commended adherence to rule of law and fundamental freedoms as foundational principles of democratic governance.
18. Following the opening ceremony, a panel discussion was convened on civic Space and Inclusion: Activism against Gender Based Violence. Panellists included **Ms. Tike Mwambipile** (Executive Director, Tanzania Women Lawyers, **Ms. Hilda Dadu** (National Coordinator, Coalition of Women HRDs – Tanzania), **Ms. Stella Jairos** (Executive Director, Voice of Women with Disabilities Tanzania), and **Ms. Anna Kulaya** (Executive Director, Women in Law, and Development, Tanzania). The discussion focused on issues pertinent to women’s rights including WHRDs, and was moderated by Jimmy Luhende, Director ADLG from Mwanza.
19. **Ms. Mwambipile** discussed the major role played by women advocates in supporting women and children to safeguard and enjoy their rights. This includes advocacy to ensure that laws protect women and their right to education are adopted. She highlighted the issues affecting the effectiveness of WHRDs’ work, including the high cost of procuring lawyers’ services and other associated costs in safeguarding the enjoyment of rights. She argued that those that provide probono services are few and such services are almost non-existent at the grassroots.
20. **Ms. Dadu** noted that the Coalition of WHRDs was established four years ago in Tanzania to complement the work of THRDC, because WHRDs have special vulnerabilities and hence need to be prioritised. The coalition therefore seeks to provide support to address the challenges faced by WHRDs through capacity building and providing tools to facilitate them to effectively support their communities.

21. **Ms. Anna Kulaya** discussed the importance of enacting gender sensitive policies and laws to facilitate the elimination of GBV. She also highlighted the progress of 16 Days of activism against gender violence as coordinated by MKUKI Coalition and called for finalisation of the Anti GBV Act.
22. **Ms. Stella Jairos** shared experiences of women activists with disabilities working on disability rights, inclusion, and gender Equity. She noted that women and girls with disabilities face double discrimination from stigma and stereotypes linked to both their gender and impairments. She noted that this can result in the exclusion and marginalisation of their representatives and/or their priority issues. She called for government and stakeholders' support in mainstreaming gender equality and equity.
23. **Mr. Jimmy Luhende**, representing more than 200 human rights organisations, submitted an open letter to the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, **Her Excellency Dr. Samia Suluhu Hassan** on Open Government Partnership (OGP). Tanzania joined OGP in 2011 and withdrew in 2017. In their letter, human rights organisations call on the Government of Tanzania to join OGP as a platform to secure concrete commitments from national and sub-national governments to promote open government, empower citizens, fight corruption, improve public service delivery and government responsiveness, build greater trust and the culture of human rights.
24. **Hon. RTD Judge Joaquine De Mello**, THRDC Board Chair commended initiatives to promote and protect human rights in the country and called upon the government to recognise the work of human rights defenders. Honourable De Mello also urged human rights Defenders to strengthen fights against gender-based violence as a cornerstone of general human rights protection.
25. **Mr. Josia Saoke Butiama** from the Ministry of Community Development, Gender, Women and Special Groups presented a summary report of 16 Days of Activism against GBV before Hon. Gwajima as a presiding Minister. The commemoration of International Human Rights Day coincided with the closing ceremony of 16 Days of Activism Against GBV. The campaign was co-coordinated by Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF) and GBV MKUKI Coalition and the Government.
26. **Hon. Dorothy Gwajima** delivered final remarks congratulating DefendDefenders and THRDC for the coordination of this event and expressed gratitude for the invitation to participate. She noted that a country that respects

good governance acknowledges the contribution of HRDs, highlighting that President Samia has invested a lot of knowledge and resources to create her ministry and ensure that all international organisations that work on human rights create a space for the participation of government. She further noted that the government is committed to supporting these priorities and seeks to collaborate with the Ministry of Constitutional and Legal affairs to seek remedies to the highlighted capacity building challenges of WHRDs and women advocates. She officiated at the closing of 16 Days of activism against Gender Based Violence and called upon all stakeholders to take action to stop violence against women and show their solidarity in the following:

- a. Increasing long-term funding and support for women's rights organisations working on effective solutions to prevent violence against women.
- b. Raising the voices of HRDs and women's movements who defend women's rights in their diversity and encouraging more actors to join the movement to end violence against women and girls.
- c. Promoting the leadership and participation of women and girls in politics, policymaking, and decision making from international to local levels, including development processes.
- d. Strengthening protection mechanisms to prevent and eliminate violence, harassment, threats, and discrimination against human rights defenders

27. The day concluded with the THRDC Annual General Meeting (AGM) attended by 161 HRDs members. The Coalition shared its 3rd Strategic Plan (2023-2027) launched on 22nd November 2022. Towards ensuring the continuity of the Coalition's strategic interventions, the new plan sets out the coalition's direction for the five years towards confronting the drivers of shrinking civic space in the country.