



ANNIVERSARY AGENDA

LOCATION:

SPEKE RESORT MUNYONYO

DATES:

4- 5 NOVEMBER 2025

#20YearsDefending



KARIBU - WELCOME

It is with deep gratitude and pride that I welcome you as we celebrate 20 years of DefendDefenders, two decades of unwavering commitment to protecting those who defend the rights of others. Since 2005, we have helped transform a once perilous landscape for human rights defenders through solidarity, partnership, and innovation. Today, DefendDefenders stands as a pillar of protection, having supported thousands of HRDs through emergency assistance, safe relocation, and psychosocial support. Our Ubuntu Hub Cities Initiative, now active across Africa, embodies the spirit of “Africans protecting Africans.” As we celebrate this milestone, we also reflect on persistent and emerging challenges facing HRDs and commit to advancing collaborative, future-oriented strategies to sustain the human rights movement.



“ONE MAN, ONE LAPTOP, SEATED AT A DESK
IN THE CORNER OF A SHARED OFFICE,
QUIETLY BUILT SOMETHING GREAT”

ABOUT THE ANNIVERSARY

DefendDefenders was established in 2005 as the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project and registered as a foreign Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in Uganda. DefendDefenders exists to strengthen the work of human rights defenders in the sub-region by reducing their vulnerability to the risk of persecution and by enhancing their capacity to effectively defend human rights.

DefendDefenders is dedicated to ensuring the protection, safety, and overall wellbeing of human rights defenders (HRDs). The organisation works to reduce the risks HRDs face and to strengthen their ability to promote and protect human rights. This includes providing emergency support, building skills and capacity, offering safety and protection services, and advocating for HRDs at national, regional, and international levels.

DefendDefenders serves as the Secretariat of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (EHAHRD-Net), representing thousands of HRDs and their organisations across the following countries: Burundi, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia/Somaliland, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. Additionally, DefendDefenders hosts the secretariat of AfricanDefenders (Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network) and holds consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

DAY 1: TUESDAY 4 NOVEMBER 2025

PAST TO PRESENT: CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENTS, SACRIFICES AND IMPACT SPEKE BALLROOM

08:00 - 08:30 AM	REGISTRATION	GUEST ARRIVAL
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WELCOME & OPENING SESSION	Memory Bandera, Director Programs & Administration, DefendDefenders.	
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8:30 – 10:15 AM	SPEAKERS	
	• Ms. Sophie Kyagulanyi, Chairperson, Board of Directors DefendDefenders.	
	• Mr. Hassan Shire, Executive Director, DefendDefenders and Chairperson of AfricanDefenders.	
	• Hon. Mariam Wangadya, Chairperson, Uganda Human Rights Commission.	

10:15 - 10:45	GROUP PHOTO & HEALTH BREAK	
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HIGH-LEVEL PANEL: Standing Strong: reimagining Safety and Solidarity for Human Rights Defenders in Shifting Global Ecosystems	Mr. Hassan Shire, Executive Director of DefendDefenders and Chairperson of AfricanDefenders	
	PANELISTS:	
	• Mary Lawlor, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders.	
	• Gina Romero, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Of Association.	

11:00 – 13:00	• Marcel Akpovo, OHCHR Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa & Representative to the African Union	
	• Rinu Oduala, Executive Director of the Marigold RO Foundation	
	Report Launch and presentation: “They won’t silence the people” Right to Peaceful Protest in Africa in 2025	
	• Brief by Estella Kansiime, Advocacy, Research and Communications Manager DefendDefenders	

This session will be livestreamed on NTV Uganda & YouTube

13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH BREAK	
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14:00 – 16:00	20 Years Exhibition	
	Interactive showcase of 20 years of work, field stories, regional highlights, and creative expressions.	
	*Includes networking spaces.	

GALA DINNER – 4 NOVEMBER 2025

Livestreamed on YouTube

MODERATED BY: Memory Bandera, Director Programs and Administration, DefendDefenders and Joseph Bikanda, Coordinator, AfricanDefenders

16:30 – 18:00	ARRIVAL OF GUESTS	Photo session, welcome drinks cultural troupe performance
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18:00 – 18:30	HRD TESTIMONIALS	Testimonials (Libya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe)
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18:30 – 19:15	FIRST COURSE	Entertainment 20 Years Video Presentation
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19:15 – 20:30	SPEECHES	• H.E. Jan Sadek, EU Delegation Ambassador to Uganda
		• Mary Lawlor, United Nations Special Rapporteur on HRDs.
	MAIN COURSE	• Marcel Akpovo, UN OHCHR Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa & Representative to the African Union
		• Mr. Hassan Shire, Executive Director, DefendDefenders and Chairperson of AfricanDefenders.

	MUSICAL INTERLUDE	• Launch of Endowment Fund • Launch of Mentorship Program
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20:30 – 21:00	DESERT	Awards and Recognitions
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21:00 – 21:10	CELEBRATION	Cake and Toast
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21:10 – 22:00	MUSIC	Networking
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DAY 2: WEDNESDAY 5 NOVEMBER 2025

SHAPING THE FUTURE: BRIDGING GENERATIONS, CULTURES AND IDEAS

08:30 – 09:00

REGISTRATION

09:00 – 10:30

INTERGENERATIONAL
WORLD CAFE: NAVIGATING
GLOBAL UNCERTAINTIES.

Moderated by Tabitha Netuwa, Senior Manager,
Protection and Security Management, DefendDefenders.

Breakout Sessions on Enhancing
Intergenerational Learning and Synergy
Among HRDs in Africa

10:30 – 11:00

HEALTH BREAK

11:00 – 12:30

HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE
21ST CENTURY:
What it takes to win

Moderated by Ryota Jonen, Initiator, Demos Kratos

- Maina Kiai, Chairman Kenyan Human Rights
Commission & former UN Special Rapporteur on FoAA
- Clement Voule, former UN Special Rapporteur on FoAA
- Gina Romero, UN Special Rapporteur on FOAA

12:30 – 13:30

LUNCH BREAK

13:30 – 15:30

PARALLEL SESSIONS

Session 1: Consultation on digital surveillance and
chilling effects.

Moderated by Gina Romero, UN Special Rapporteur on FOAA

Session 2: Roots of Resilience – Speed popcorn

Moderated by Christabell Nephertiti, Program Assistant
AfricanDefenders

15:30 – 16:00

HEALTH BREAK

16:00 – 17:00

CLOSING CEREMONY

Reflections, acknowledgments and forward-looking
commitments

- Hassan Shire, Executive Director, DefendDefenders and Chairperson
of AfricanDefenders.

Final Communique

- Estella Kansiime, Advocacy, Research and Communications Manager
DefendDefenders,
- Joseph Bikanda, Coordinator, AfricanDefenders

REPORT LAUNCH

“THEY WON’T
SILENCE THE PEOPLE”

The right to peaceful protest in Africa in 2025

With substantive case studies on Mozambique,
Senegal, Tunisia, and Uganda



 **DEFENDEFENDERS**
East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

SCAN HERE FOR FULL REPORT



HIGH LEVEL PANEL

Across Africa and beyond, human rights defenders continue to operate in increasingly restrictive environments marked by repression, surveillance, and shrinking civic space. Two decades since the landmark 2004 study that inspired the creation of DefendDefenders, many of its findings remain relevant—limited collaboration, resource constraints, and capacity gaps persist. This panel will reflect on the effectiveness of current protection mechanisms, identify emerging challenges, and explore innovative, future-oriented strategies to safeguard defenders. It will also highlight the importance of intergenerational dialogue and cross-sectoral collaboration to strengthen the resilience of the human rights movement.



MARY LAWLOR

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders.

Mary monitors and reports on the challenges and threats faced by human rights defenders globally. Her mandate focuses on raising awareness, advocating for stronger protection frameworks, and engaging with states to ensure the safety and recognition of human rights defenders. Ms Mary Lawlor took up the mandate of Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders on 1 May 2020, following the Human Rights Council decision 43/115. Ms Lawlor is currently an Adjunct Professor of Business and Human Rights in the Centre for Social Innovation (CSI), School of Business, Trinity College Dublin. She is a member of the Advisory Board of the School of Business. She has worked extensively with and on the situation of human rights defenders. In 2001, she founded Front Line Defenders - the International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders to concentrate on human rights defenders at risk. As Executive Director from 2001-2016, Ms Lawlor represented Front Line Defenders and had a key role in its development. Ms Lawlor was previously the Director of the Irish Section of Amnesty International from 1988 to 2000, became a Board member in 1975 and was elected Chair from 1983 to 1987.

GINA ROMERO

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association.



Gina leads global efforts to promote and protect the rights to peaceful assembly and association, enabling rights that underpin freedom of expression, participation, protest, and organisation. Her mandate seeks to address restrictions on civic space and strengthen accountability worldwide. Prior to her appointment, Ms. Romero led several initiatives for the promotion and defense of democracy and rule of law. She is one of the founders and served for nearly 10 years as Executive Director of the Latin American and Caribbean Network for Democracy (Redlad). In this position, she also served as Secretariat of the Civil Society Pillar of the Community of Democracies. In these capacities, she has had direct relation with multiple stakeholders (including governments, civil society, academia and private sector representatives) in 19 countries in the American Continent, and at least 35 in Europe, Africa and Asia.



MR. MARCEL C. AKPOVO

UN OHCHR Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa & Representative to the African Union

Mr Marcel Akpovo, is a Benin national with over 32 years of international experience as a Human Rights Lawyer, Rule of Law, Conflict, Peace and Security specialist. Prior to his current appointment, Marcel worked with the African Union - United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) where he served as Director of Human Rights, Child Protection and Protection of Civilian & Representative of the UN High Commission for Human Rights in Sudan. He also served as Head of Human Rights Operations in South Darfur, Head of the Khartoum Human Rights Liaison Office and Chair of the Commission on Rule of Law, Voluntary Return, and Compensation of IDPs & Refugees in the Doha Peace Process on Darfur (Doha, Qatar). Mr Akpovo was also Representative in Mauritania of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Director of Human Rights, Justice and Protection in United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and OHCHR Representative in Liberia. Before joining the UN, Mr Akpovo held several national regional and international portfolios that included, among others Africa Coordinator for Pax-Romana- IMCS (Kenya), Amnesty International as Researcher on Armed Conflicts in Africa, (Uganda), Amnesty International's Coordinator of the Africa Human Rights Defenders Programme (UK) as well as Director of the Editorial Board of "Courrier d'Afrique" Magazine in France. He has been reporter for several News Agencies and Newspapers, covering conflicts and post conflict situations. He has also taught Law and International Organisations at University of Grenoble in France. Mr. Akpovo is a graduate and postgraduate in Communication, Law and International Security & Defence from Universities of (1) Benin, (2) Nantes and (3) Grenoble in France. He has authored several academic publications and human rights public reports.

RINU ODUALA

Executive Director of the Marigold RO Foundation



Rinu Oduala is the Executive Director of the Marigold RO Foundation, a civic organization that engages with both domestic and foreign partners to promote and implement citizen capacity development programs. Notably, she was a Hurford Youth Fellow 2023 at the National Endowment for Democracy, Washington, DC., and has spoken at over 100 events and universities globally, including the John F. Kennedy Forum, Harvard University, Boston, and American University School of International Service, Washington, DC. She has been nominated for Future Awards Africa for Advocacy and Activism, Forbes WOMAN AFRICA Young Achiever Award 2024, and is the recipient of 100+ honors and awards, including Woman of the Year, Advocacy, HerEconomy 2022. Spurred by police brutality in Nigeria and beyond, Rinu has become a key player in the work to confront the systems and structures that have led to mass incarceration and police killings of Nigerians. Her work spans social justice, human rights, global health, and democracy. She's passionate about lifting voices and stories of young people across the globe.

MODERATOR



HASSAN SHIRE

Executive Director of DefendDefenders and Chairperson of AfricanDefenders

Hassan Shire is a human rights defender with about 30 years of experience. He founded DefendDefenders in 2005 after working with the Centre for Refugee Studies at York University and Amnesty International Canada to establish the African Human Rights Defenders Project. Under his leadership, DefendDefenders has grown into a leading regional organisation, building strong national coalitions and protection networks for human rights defenders across the East and Horn of Africa and beyond. Hassan actively engages regional and international human rights mechanisms such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights; the UN Human Rights Council; and World movement for Democracy to advance protection for HRDs. He serves on several regional and international boards and has been recognised globally for his leadership, receiving the U.S. State Department's Human Rights Defender Award (2011), the Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network Leadership Award (2015), and the Richard C. Holbrooke Leadership Award from Refugees International (2017).



MEMORY BANDERA RWAMPWANYI

*Director, Programs and Administration at
DefendDefenders/AfricanDefenders*

Memory is a seasoned International Development Expert with two decades of experience leading complex, multi-country programs that advance human rights, governance, and social justice across Africa. Her leadership has been instrumental in strengthening institutional systems, building resilient networks, and delivering transformative impact for human rights defenders across the continent. Beyond her managerial acumen, she is deeply engaged with key human rights mechanisms such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the UN Human Rights Council, and ProtectDefenders.eu. A passionate advocate for women and girls, she founded the Girl Child Network Uganda and co-founded several pioneering initiatives for girls and women, leaving a lasting legacy of leadership, vision, and empowerment in the human rights movement. Memory's contributions have been recognised internationally through numerous honours, including the Vital Voices Lead Fellowship (2013–2015), Women4Africa International African Woman Award Finalist (2014), and multiple leadership and academic awards from institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe.

JOSEPH BIKANDA

Coordinator AfricanDefenders



Joseph Bikanda is a Cameroonian human rights advocate with nearly two decades of experience advancing justice, civic freedoms, and human rights across Africa. Since 2011, he has served as the Coordinator of the Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network (AfricanDefenders), where he leads continental efforts to protect and empower human rights defenders. Over the years, Joseph has strengthened regional HRD networks, expanded protection and relocation mechanisms such as the Ubuntu Hub Cities initiative, and driven strategic advocacy at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the United Nations Human Rights Council. Before joining AfricanDefenders, he worked with national human rights organisations in Cameroon and served as a Legal Officer at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. A passionate Pan-Africanist with deep expertise in international law and African geopolitics, Joseph defines himself as a "travelling advocate who speaks truth to power," reflecting his unwavering commitment to justice, solidarity, and human dignity across the continent.

SOCIAL MEDIA KIT

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TWITTER (X) HANDLE ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

@DEFENDDEFENDERS	DEFENDDEFENDERS
@AFRICADEFENDERS	AFRICANDEFENDERS
@SSHRDNETWORK	SOUTH SUDAN HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK
@DEFENDERSKE	DEFENDERS COALITION KENYA
@DEFENDERSSOMALI	NATIONAL COALITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS — SOMALIA (NCHRD-S)
@SUDANDEFENDERS	SUDAN DEFENDERS
@THRDCOALITION	TANZANIA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS COALITION (THRDC)
@NCHRD_UG	NATIONAL COALITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS — UGANDA (NCHRD-U)
@HRDBURUNDI	COALITION BURUNDAISE DES DÉFENSEURS DES DROITS DE L'HOMME (CBDDH)
@ACHPR_CADHP	AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS (ACHPR)
@EUIUG	EUROPEAN UNION IN UGANDA
@PROTECTHRD_EU	PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU
@SWEDENINUG	EMBASSY OF SWEDEN IN UGANDA
@NLINUGANDA	EMBASSY OF THE NETHERLANDS IN UGANDA
@BELGIUMINUGANDA	EMBASSY OF BELGIUM IN UGANDA
@IRLEMBUGANDA	EMBASSY OF IRELAND IN UGANDA
@DUTCHMFA	DUTCH MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
@NORWAYMFA	NORWAY MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
@SIDA	SIDA

DAY 1: OPENING REMARKS

@HASSAN_SHIRE	MR. HASSAN SHIRE
@MEMORYBANDERA	MEMORY BANDERA
@SKYGSPH	MS. SOPHIE KYAGULANYI
@CHAIRPERSONUHRC	HON. MARIAM WANGADYA

HIGH LEVEL PANEL

@MARYLAWLORHRDS	MARY LAWLOR
@GINITASTAR	GINA ROMERO
@SAVVYRINU	RINU ODUALA
@OHCHR_EARO	UN HUMAN RIGHTS EARO

SPEECHES

@JANSADEK	H.E. JAN SADEK (EU AMBASSADOR)
@MARYLAWLORHRDS	MARY LAWLOR
@HASSAN_SHIRE	MR. HASSAN SHIRE

DAY 2: 5 NOVEMBER 2025

@HASSAN_SHIRE	MR. HASSAN SHIRE
@MEMORYBANDERA	MEMORY BANDERA
@KAKA_ESTELLA	ESTELLA KANSIIME
@BIKJO	JOSEPH BIKANDA
@GINITASTAR	GINA ROMERO
@TABITHADO	TABITHA NETUWA

DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS



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Speke Resort



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DefendDefenders (the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project) seeks to strengthen the work of HRDs throughout the subregion by reducing their vulnerability to risks of persecution and by enhancing their capacity to effeciently defend human rights.

DefendDefenders is the secretariat of the East and Horn of African Human Rights Defenders Network, which represents thousands of members consisting of individual HRDs human rights organisations, and national coalitions that envision a sub-region in which the human rights of every individual as stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are respected and upheld.

AfricanDefenders (Pan African Human Rights Defenders Network) is a network of five sub-regional organizations dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights defenders across Africa. Established in 2009, AfricanDefenders serves as the central coordinating body enhancing the advocacy and protection efforts of these sub-regional networks. The network's secretariat is hosted by DefendDefenders in Kampala, Uganda.

AfricanDefenders plays a pivotal role in strengthening collaboration among human rights (HRDs) at regional and international levels, enabling them to effectively engage with global human rights mechanisms.

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