

FRONT LINE DEFENDERS **STRATEGIC PLAN** 2023 - 2027

(SUMMARY VERSION)

JANUARY 2023



INTRODUCTION FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It is a measure of the continued effectiveness of human rights defenders (HRDs) around the world that autocrats and bigots continue to invest significant resources to try and silence them or disrupt their work. Sophisticated surveillance, brutal violence, expensive smear campaigns, significant security service and police time and energy, endless judicial proceedings, new restrictive laws; the efforts of the oppressors pay a kind of tribute to the courage, tenacity and creativity of human rights defenders. As Berta Cáceres said before she was murdered in Honduras, “They are afraid of us because we are not afraid of them”.

The human rights defenders we work with every day are an inspiration to all of us in Front Line Defenders.

This new strategy builds on 21 years of experience of working with and learning from human rights defenders. It draws on the input of human rights defenders, our dedicated staff, partners and key stakeholders. It builds on the achievements of the last four years during which we have sustained and expanded our support to the protection of human rights defenders in spite of the Covid-19 pandemic and a variety of human rights crises.

Through this strategic plan we have set out our vision to strengthen our ability to meet the needs and demands of human rights defenders. We are committed to the struggle. We stand with human rights defenders and will provide support in every way that we can. We will challenge ourselves to be more effective and innovative to strengthen the protection of human rights defenders.



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS
ATTEND A
CANDLELIGHT
VIGIL AT THE
HRD MEMORIAL
IN DUBLIN TO
COMMEMORATE
COMRADES
KILLED FOR THEIR
PEACEFUL WORK,
OCTOBER 2022

Many developments in this Strategic Plan are focused more on strengthening what we do and how we do it rather than introducing new areas of work. We are aiming to deepen our approach and provide more effective support. In particular, we will strengthen our intersectional approach, with a focus on gender, race and disability to ensure we reach and are accessible to those most at risk. We will adapt our programmes and support to further strengthen our focus on collective protection as well as individual protection. We will continue to find ways to provide fast and effective protection support in the most challenging contexts, and we will advance our planning for and learning from various crisis contexts.

Some of the key areas we will aim to develop or strengthen in this Strategic Plan include:

- **Increasing our focus on supporting HRDs to strengthen resilience and diversifying and expanding ways to deal with stress and trauma.** This will include developing a strategy that more clearly outlines how we provide well-being for HRDs.
- Increasing our focus on **strengthening local protection capacity.** This will include building on the support we provide through training of trainers, support to local Digital Protection Champions, and support to local civil society protection mechanisms, initiatives and organisations. We will provide strategic funding to strengthen local protection eco-systems.
- Initiating more **cross-regional learning opportunities for HRDs.** This will include co-creating and convening more spaces at regional level for HRDs to exchange ideas and facilitate cross-regional learning opportunities for HRDs focused on specific threats, contexts and protection issues.
- Developing further our **advocacy and policy work** – at EU/UN/US, at regional levels, and on specific thematic areas – gender, business and human rights, killings of HRDs, digital protection and securitisation/counter-terrorism.
- **Developing further visibility and communications strategies** that contribute towards countering negative narratives of HRDs. We will also focus more on **research as a strategy for protection of HRDs**, including a focus on investigations into attacks on specific groups, using research to visibilise the protection needs of marginalised groups and evidence-based advocacy.

We will continue to invest in developing Front Line Defenders as an effective, sustainable, people-focused, and accountable organisation.

EXTERNAL CONTEXT

This Strategic Plan will be delivered in the next five years in a way that can be adapted to an ever-evolving and changing external context faced by human rights defenders. **Key trends** identified that will shape our work and support to HRDs during the course of this Strategic Plan include:

- **Continued rise of corrupt, populist authoritarianism which specifically targets the rule of law and human rights defenders.**
- **Conflict, economic and ecological crises**
- **Increased restrictions on human rights work**
- **Role of non-state actors (including businesses, tech companies and financial institutions)**
- **Growing threat of surveillance**
- **The profile of HRDs is expanding and evolving**
- **Increased threat from far right and anti-rights movements**
- **Expanded ecosystem of support for protection work**

WHO WE ARE

ABOUT FRONT LINE DEFENDERS

Front Line Defenders was founded in 2001 with the aim of protecting human rights defenders at risk, people who work, non-violently, for any or all of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and subsequent covenants and treaties addressing and specifying rights.

Front Line Defenders is an international organisation with a global reach. We have a regional presence to support HRDs at risk across all regions. We recognise and value the importance of contextualising our support.

Front Line Defenders was founded and has its head office based in Ireland. We also have an office focused on global advocacy in Brussels.



OUR VISION: Human rights defenders are recognised and supported as essential actors in defending and advancing human rights, and bringing about positive change in society.



OUR MISSION: To support and enable the protection of human rights defenders who are at risk as a result of their human rights work.



OUR VALUES AND PRINCIPLES: Front Line Defenders was founded with a clear and ambitious mandate to provide practical support to HRDs who are most at risk..

- **We are focused**
- **We demonstrate respect**
- **We demonstrate perseverance**



To achieve this Strategic Plan we need to build, strengthen and invest in our **organisational culture** rooted in these values. We will respect each other as colleagues and value the expertise, experience and background that all colleagues bring to the organisation as well as the specific responsibilities that they undertake. We recognise the importance of diversity in the organisation and commit to addressing barriers to inclusion and participation. We know that to achieve impact we need to strengthen our collaboration, be accountable to each other, and communicate effectively. We will build a culture of reflection and encourage creativity. We will celebrate our achievements, and learn and adapt when things don't go well. We acknowledge that doing this work is challenging and to pursue our vision we need to strengthen our support and empathy for each other.

WHO WE SUPPORT

We will continue to focus on supporting HRDs who are most at risk and we will remain responsive to HRDs facing risks globally. HRDs work in diverse contexts and on diverse issues – we intentionally take a broad and context-sensitive perspective of who is a human rights defender. Providing protection support and legitimacy to new and emerging groups of HRDs is an important added value of our work.

We know that the risks HRDs face are impacted by many factors including: governance; elections; conflict; corruption; geography; issues they are working on; gender; race; class; disability; religion etc. At an organisational level we will aim to strengthen our support to a number of groups of HRDs that we are conscious face specific risks. These include:

- **WHRDs**
- **LGBTQI+ HRDs**
- **Land/Environmental/Indigenous Peoples' rights defenders**
- **HRDs with disability**
- **HRDs in the context of social movements**
- **HRDs on the move**



WHAT WE WANT TO **ACHIEVE**

■ **Impact: Human Right Defenders (HRDs) at the local and national level enjoy the freedom and security to undertake their legitimate activities**

We believe that HRDs working at the local and national level play the most important role in protecting human rights and bringing about positive change for their societies and communities. HRDs in many contexts face significant risks as a result of their work.

We believe international support can add value through providing fast, flexible and needs-based support to strengthen the capacity of HRDs and their communities to manage the risks they face as a result of their work and enable them to continue their work.

We believe that achieving impact requires strategies that respond to immediate risks in an urgent way, strategies that build longer-term capacities for HRDs, organisations, communities/networks and civil society, and strategies that change policy and practice to strengthen the protection of HRDs.

We will remain focused on supporting HRDs that face immediate risk. However we know that in many cases eliminating risk is not possible and in this strategic plan we will put greater emphasis on strengthening resilience and capacity to manage risks.



OUR APPROACH

HRD-led: A central part of our approach is enabling HRDs to assess the risks that they face and define their own needs. We aim to do no harm to HRDs, their families and communities through our work, and we aim for our support to be global in reach.

Holistic Protection: HRDs face multifaceted risks and threats, and we often need to address multiple layers of risk to strengthen security, bring about change, and have a long-term impact on HRD protection. Elements of personal security, physical security, legal security, digital security, well-being and stress management, visibility, solidarity, advocacy and organisational security are core elements of the support that we provide.

Individual and Collective Protection: While individual protection remains at the core of our support to HRDs, we recognise that we need to better adapt and strengthen our support to HRDs working in the context of collective protest movements. We recognise that collective protection is particularly important for HRDs working within social movements, as well as for indigenous peoples' rights defenders, LGBTQI+ HRDs, WHRDs and HRDs working on labour rights.

Intersectional Approach: To provide effective support and protection we need to analyse the intersection of risk with the various and multiple identities of HRDs – including gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, disability, religion, class, economic status, immigration status and age. We will sharpen our 'lens' and provide tailored protection support by increasing our outreach to particular groups of HRDs, making our support more accessible, communicating from an intersectional perspective, and building internal knowledge and capacity.

Eco-system Approach: Our work fits within an ecosystem of protection support at a local, national, regional and international level. We will strive to learn from, strengthen and add value to this ecosystem. We are also conscious that there are limits to our mandate and where it has added value we need to build and maintain bigger alliances of support for HRDs, including through our participation and leadership in consortia with other civil society actors.



GOAL 1

HRDs working at local/national level have increased protection through the provision of rapid, practical and intersectional support.

GOAL 1 STRATEGIES

- Proactive identification and outreach to HRDs most at risk
- Initial/rapid risk assessment
- Holistic support and advice
- Protection Grants - focused on legal support, medical, relocation, personal and organisational security and digital protection
- Urgent Advocacy
- Visibility support through social media and media outreach on urgent cases
- Urgent digital assessment and support
- Solidarity actions and support



GOAL 2

HRDs, their communities, and civil society have strengthened resilience and capacity to manage their protection in the longer-term.

GOAL 2 STRATEGIES

- Capacity Strengthening for HRDs
- Developing practical tools and resources for HRDs
- Accompaniment and support to strengthen local protection capacity
- Training of Trainers, developing local champions
- Strategic support for local protection initiatives
- Providing diverse support to strengthen HRDs' well-being and resilience
- Co-creating visibility materials
- Visibilising HRDs through events, regional events and developing local media support



GOAL 3

There are stronger policies and political/practical action at national, regional and international levels to protect human rights defenders at risk.

GOAL 3 STRATEGIES

- Targeted case work advocacy
- Advocacy for policy change including more focused thematic work
- Broadening and strengthening our advocacy and visibility targets
- Research for Protection
- Trend analysis and context-sharing
- Alliance building

FRONT LINE DEFENDERS AS AN ORGANISATION



Effective



Sustainable



People-focused



Accountable

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

GOAL 1

- Strengthening accessibility and outreach
- Developing our approach to emergency support for and 'triage'/urgent risk assessment
- Continuing to develop and grow our Protection Grants Programme as a key flagship programme for the organisation
- Strengthening further our case work including continuing to explore advocacy targetting non-state actors. Where feasible provide more follow-up on ongoing cases.
- Developing/strengthening strategies to respond to specific trends and threats highlighted through our data and analysis. Mapping effective strategies to respond to criminalisation, death threats/killings, business-related retaliation, and defamation as increasing threats for HRDs.
- Strengthening our planning for and learning from crisis contexts

GOAL 2

- Develop more tailored capacity strengthening support for HRDs
- Increasing our focus on supporting HRDs to strengthen resilience and diversifying and expanding ways to deal with stress and trauma
- Expand and strengthen our support to local ecosystems for protection
- Initiate more cross-regional learning opportunities for HRDs
- Develop further visibility for protection strategies for HRDs

GOAL 3

- Maintain our focus on HRDs at risk in our advocacy work. Continue to put HRDs at risk at the core of all of our advocacy work and ensure regular follow up at both the national and international levels. Continue to strengthen our advocacy and campaigning work on emblematic long-term HRD cases.
- Broaden and strengthen our advocacy targets and outreach at the national, regional and international levels with governments, inter-governmental organisations and other relevant stakeholders
- Continue to build on our advocacy work focused on corporate accountability
- Maintain focus on pressing for effective implementation of policies in support of HRDs at risk, including stronger policy, protection and funding mechanisms
- Build longer-term, more focused thematic advocacy work on gender, business and human rights, killings, digital protection, and securitisation/counter-terrorism.
- Develop more focused advocacy strategies for specific country contexts
- Communicate the needs of HRDs and influence donors
- Develop a more focused communications strategy on the positive role of HRDs
- Utilise further research as a strategy for protection of HRDs

DEVELOPING FRONT LINE DEFENDERS AS AN ORGANISATION

We will continue to develop Front Line Defenders by focusing on organisational effectiveness, sustainability, and ensuring that we are a diverse, inclusive and people-centred organisation. We also recognise and appreciate the huge trust that is placed in us by human rights defenders, donors, supporters and the wider human rights sector, and we will demonstrate the highest standards of governance, accountability and transparency.



TO STRENGTHEN OUR **EFFECTIVENESS** WE WILL:

- Further develop our regional approach
- Strengthen internal communications
- Enhance organisational leadership
- Invest in effective data management
- Develop a more comprehensive and systematic approach to monitoring and learning



TO BE MORE **SUSTAINABLE** WE WILL:

- Invest in systems, processes and relationships
- Continue to resource and support staff to strengthen resilience and well-being
- Deepen and expand our relationship and engagement with donors and partners
- Assess the environmental impact of the organisation
- Continue to review, update and develop our internal security capacity



TO BE A MORE **DIVERSE, INCLUSIVE AND PEOPLE-FOCUSED** ORGANISATION WE WILL:

- Nurture our organisational culture
- Strengthen our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion
- Invest in our staff



TO STRENGTHEN OUR **ACCOUNTABILITY** WE WILL:

- Strengthen how we communicate externally
- Strengthen our approach to accountability to HRDs
- Continue to implement safeguarding policies and procedures based on international best practice
- Commit to highest standards of governance

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