



**PROTECTION OF WOMEN
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**
HOW DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS CAN SUPPORT

PROTECTION OF WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS: HOW CAN DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS SUPPORT?

Human rights defenders (HRDs) around the globe face social, political, and economic restrictions, violence, and other kinds of pushback. They are being harassed and attacked, not seen as legitimate counterparts in decision-making processes, structurally monitored and underfunded. Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) face additional challenges, that intersect with the above regular challenges. Unlike their male counterparts, WHRDs are often also the main caretakers of their families and (young) children. They are therefore less independent or mobile to get themselves to safety. Moreover, most WHRDs, volunteers and professionals, do not see their activism as programmatic work that they can stop at any time. For (young) WHRDs, their activism is a life mission. They fight for who they are: non-traditional, sometimes non-cis, independent and/or critical young people and women. Characteristics that in themselves can be sufficient for those in power to feel threatened.

Feminist (grassroots) WHRDs are often automatically seen as opponents (to conservative regimes, to powerholders) as they challenge the status quo, by advocating for equal division of power and by addressing violations of (young) women's rights. Conservative fundamentalists and violent extremists not seldomly target WHRDs as part of their political agendas. These attacks often are early warning signs of wider violations of human rights. Indigenous WHRDs face challenges as their culture, religion and territory are not recognized nor protected. They have limited access to public life. When indigenous WHRDs address human rights violations of authorities and the private sector, their work is often criminalized.

Also, the types and amount of pushback, threat and harassment differ for WHRDs from the pushback male HRDs face. Reports show and WHRDs signal an increasing and extreme amount of sexual violence, (cyber) harassment, restrictive laws and other forms of physical, mental and economical harassment and attacks. In that light, WHRDs require support and protection that integrates a gender and intersectional lens and is specifically tailored to their challenges and circumstances. In any support for WHRDs, the agency of WHRDs and women's rights organizations, as well as attention for the intersectional diversity amongst women, is key.

The problem and needs assessment displayed in this paper is collected during a rich (online) dialogue meeting and additional input rounds between WHRDs from Afghanistan, Burundi, Uganda, Guatemala, Libya and Kenya and heads of different Dutch missions, facilitated by WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform, Peace Brigades International & Cordaid. WHRDs and other experts shared a variety of recommendations to diplomatic missions to bridge the needs gap. Altogether they underline the importance of understanding and considering WHRDs' experiences in specific circumstances or environments, while at the same time recognizing the comparability of obstacles and challenges that WHRDs face across countries and regions.

The Hague, October 2021

SUPPORT HUMANITARIAN VISAS

MONITOR LAWSUITS

ONLINE & OFFLINE SAFETY



monitor attacks & restrictions

safe houses & relocation



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, NOT CRIMINALS



rapid response training

our voices are diverse

SAFE TRAVEL OPTIONS

WOMEN IN POLITICS

victim-centric justice

ACCESS TO EMERGENCY FUNDING



document attacks

invest in feminist social movements

ACCOUNTABILITY

CRIMINALIZE VIOLATIONS

INTERSECTIONALITY

inclusive peace process

PHYSICAL MENTAL ECONOMIC SAFETY

STRENGTHEN WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS' OPERATIONAL SPACE & RESILIENCE



WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?	WHAT DO WHRDS NEED?	WHAT CURRENT ACTIONS DO DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS UNDERTAKE?	HOW CAN MISSIONS BRIDGE THE NEEDS GAP?
<p>1 Lack of physical, mental, and economic safety of individual WHRDs</p>	<p>Supporting physical, mental, and economic safety of individual WHRDs</p>	<p>Supporting physical, mental, and economic safety of individual WHRDs</p>	<p>Supporting physical, mental, and economic safety of individual WHRDs</p>
<p>1.1 Limited/restricted travel/mobility options (as needed to stay out of the hands of opponents), exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and/or additional identification requirements</p>	<p>Safe travel facilitations, support to not have to use public transport</p> <p>Short- and mid-term safe houses/ shelters (incl for WHRDs' children / immediate family members under threat) & support of relocation both in and outside the country or region</p>	<p>Provision of temporary shelter through the Shelter City Program, as well as accompaniment of international organizations such as PBI</p>	<p>Strengthen cooperation between EU countries to support (humanitarian) visas for relocation and/or to provide temporary shelter in the region</p> <p>Collaborate with and assess lessons identified/learned from the Journalists in Distress Network and Protect Defenders</p>
<p>1.2 Psychological stress and trauma</p>	<p>Providing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) services</p>	<p>Advocating for a victim-centered justice and WHRDs led approach.</p> <p>Partner with (I)NGOs providing gender sensitive MHPSS for WHRDs</p>	<p>√</p>
<p>1.3 Culture of (territorial) femicide, (online and offline) physical and psychological misogyny, harassment and threats, individual financial restrictions, (sexual and gender based) physical and psychological violence, attacks and data intrusion of offices and individuals</p>	<p>Advocate for establishing legal frameworks to criminalize violations against WHRDs</p> <p>Rapid response funding</p> <p>Support and training for digital and offline safety</p> <p>(Online and offline) safe spaces for sharing and meeting</p> <p>Support for data management and digital safety</p>	<p>Monitoring of attacks and restrictions</p> <p>Speak up and speak out if WHRDs offices and meetings are restricted or attacked</p> <p>Provision of courses on physical mental and online safety and security</p>	<p>Advocate for establishing legal frameworks to criminalize violations against WHRDs</p> <p>Allocate a rapid response fund and periodically train staff how to respond in emergency cases, incl for WHRDs in exile</p> <p>Set up and fund 24/7 emergency and support systems such as phone numbers, accessible for (young) WHRDs (example of EU missions in Uganda)</p> <p>Provide offline and online meeting rooms and/or online meetings</p> <p>Support in access to (online) data</p>

2 Limited women's rights organizations' operational space and challenges to resilience	Strengthening women's rights organizations' operational space and their resilience	Strengthening women's rights organizations' operational space and their resilience	Strengthening women's rights organizations' operational space and their resilience
2.1 Financial and donor restrictions, resulting also in limited access to funding, difficulties to transfer money and frozen bank accounts	Access to flexible core funding and other sustainable financial resources (such as funds) for women's rights/led organizations	Project funding of women's rights/led organizations	Strengthen access to reliable and sustainable financial infrastructures
2.2 Lack of resources to support human rights work in a sustainable manner, including donors during the COVID-19 pandemic shifting from funding (grassroots) human rights work to humanitarian and development programming	Financial skills training Holistic approach and coherent policies: all human rights (including social and economic rights), with a specific gender focus, structural part of the development/aid/trade agenda		Long-term investment in WHRDs and feminist social movements, including small initiatives and WHRDs support networks Allocate flexible core funding for WHRDs work, including for protection measures
2.3 Inconsistent policies, narrow definition of human rights and hierarchy in priorities of donor and receiving governments: women's human rights obscured by concerns for development and trade			Include a specific focus in human rights policies and in mission's country level implementation plans Apply a holistic approach and monitor inconsistency of policies and interventions, also on the development/aid/trade agenda Advocate for and support implementation of economic and social rights as part of host countries' human rights agendas
2.4 Self-restriction of movement and freedom of expression (amidst deteriorating security circumstances), also as a result of WHRDs being systematically and automatically seen as opposition	Strengthening a middle ground/ strengthening support for women's rights across political factions (strong delineation between being on the side of the government or on the side of the opposition can be problematic)	Positive labelling of human rights work and strengthening public profile of WHRDs (e.g. through awarding the Human Rights Tulip, or support documentaries, (online) meetings, conferences and webinars)	and data collection, also via providing digital devices and set up trainings in offline and digital safety and safe data management for WHRDs Public statements of concerns (including in Human Rights Council and Security Council, in political dialogues with governments, via social media, etc)

2.5	Diverse range of actors obstruct women's rights and WHRDs groups/ organizations' work, incl military, drugs traffickers and private sector (like oil, mining and logging companies)	Make use of 'donor/ cash leverage' to ensure national legislation and policies are in place to support and protect WHRDs	
2.6	Arrest of WHRDs, as a result of restrictive laws (exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic)	Presence of mission staff during hearings	√
2.7	Lack of reporting and documentation of attacks on WHRDs and on Women Rights and Women Led Organisations, impunity of perpetrators	Documentation of attacks	Stress compliance with Special Procedures' mandates and EU sets of guidelines Advocate for laws and regulations supporting WHRDs work Support accountability institutions/ mechanisms led by local CSOs or international bodies
3 Lack of understanding of, familiarization with, and support for a diversity of women's voices			
3.1	Lack of understanding of specific intersecting challenges of Indigenous women and LGBTIQ+ HRDs	Instructions on a feminist and intersectional approach to address the specific needs of ao indigenous women and LGBTIQ+ HRDs	Mandatory and structural human rights and gender trainings for diplomatic staff in embassies at all levels (incl management level)
3.2	Lack of common understanding and clarity about who WHRDs are, the pushback they face, incl the diversity among WHRDs in mobility opportunities and power positions (e.g. high class national organized vs rural grassroots WHRDs)	Reaching ao indigenous women, not only via human rights programs, but also via climate change programs	Information sheet and staff trainings on various support and safety needs of WHRDs, incl indigenous women, young WHRDs and LGBTIQ+ HRDs, and on various types of activism Instruction sheet and workshop on integrating a gender lens in and an intersectional approach to support and protecting WHRDs

<p>Lack of understanding the difference between grassroots and mainstream activism (incl how traditional gender norms and cultural, religious, territorial, and political backgrounds can intersect with other challenges grassroots WHRDs face)</p>			
<p>Political and juridical systems are gender-blind</p>	<p>Better representation of women in politics: missions should push for 30% quota for women's participation in peace and political processes</p>	<p>Advocate for inclusive peace processes. Use 'donor/ cash leverage'.</p>	<p>Advocate for implementation of globally agreed conclusions on women's and girls' status (CSW), access to justice (SDGs) and participation and protection (WPS agenda)</p>
<p>Embassies not present in-country or only in capital and unclarity around available services (especially for WHRDs or grassroots organizations outside of mission's networks)</p>	<p>Stronger networks and information on support by embassies (f.e. by providing information in different languages)</p>	<p>Go beyond the capitals and support social and grassroots women groups in rural areas.</p>	<p>Make an effort to engage (young) WHRDS who are not part of mainstream HRD networks</p> <p>Extend online services, if in country presence is no option</p> <p>Build support networks in cooperation with like-minded heads of missions, ao through local women's organizations</p>



This is a publication of WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform, Peace Brigades International - the Netherlands and Cordaid

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