



HRD memorial **2021 REPORT**



**THESE ARE THE NAMES OF THE 358 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, FROM
35 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES, WHO WERE KILLED IN 2021, AS REPORTED TO
THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS MEMORIAL.¹**

AFGHANISTAN

Bismillah Adel Aimaq
Adel Nang
Khalil-ur-Rahman Narmgo
Yusuf Khpolwak
Abdul Sabur Karimi
Haji Aminullah Rahimi
Samad Paktin
Sayed Murtaza Sadat
Khalil Ahmad Khair Khar
Naser Abdul Rahman
Fani Saifiullah
Fawad
Abdul Rahmad Mawin
Zhowanday Helamand
Frozen Safi
Hijratullah Khogyani
Eng. Mohammad Naweed
Imdadullah Hamdard
Naik Amal

ARGENTINA

Elías Garay

BANGLADESH

Mushtaq Ahmed
Mohib Ullah

BRAZIL

Lucas dos Santos
Fernando dos Santos Araújo
Elo Sandro Cerqueira Armini
Isac Tembé
Gerusa Reis
Márcio Velloso da Silva
Madalena Leite
Emmanuely Carolina Barbosa Fragoso
Lindolfo Kosmaski
Maria da Luz Benício
Reginaldo Alves Barros
Antonio Gonçalves Diniz
José Francisco de Souza Araújo
José Carlos Adriano
Wagner Romão da Silva
Amarildo Aparecido Rodrigues
Amaral José Stoco
Kevin Fernando Holanda de Souza
Edvaldo Santos Cordeiro
Alex Barros Santos da Silva
Geovanne Rodrigues Xavier
Leuvius Manuel Olivero Ramos
Roberto Muniz Campista
Carlos Alberto Pereira Esteves
Rafael Gasparini Tedesco
Gedeon José Duque
Rogério Diego dos Santos /
Julya Madsan

BURKINA FASO

Rory Young

CHILE

Dennise Cortes
Javiera Rojas

CHINA

Kunchok Jinpa
Guo Hongwei

COLOMBIA

Gerardo León
Edwin Antonio Indaburu
Luis Alfredo García Chavarría
Gonzalo Cardona Molina
José Grasisquier Toro Ledesma
José Robinson Quino Bonilla
Fredman Hérizo Padilla
William Antonio Rodríguez Martínez
Linda Díaz Romero
José Abadía Parra
Janeth Zapata
Julian Sneider Muñoz
Carlos Erlid González Cortés
Fermiliano Meneses
Yobani Carranza Castillo

Arcenio Quinayas Ruiz
José Miguel Barrientos Uribe
Remberto Arrieta Bohórquez
Samuel Alfonso Moreno Macualo
Yordan Eduardo Guetio Medina
Orlando Manuel Chimá
Alejandro Manugama Cheche
Marcos Paí
John Albeiro Paí Pascal
Jaime Enrique Basilio Basilio
Carmen Ofelia Cumbalaza
María Bernardina Juajibioy
José Santos López
Carlos Alberto Vidal
Aura Esther García Peñalver
Arlex Albeiro Hoyos Zapata
Rafael Domicó Carupia
Yarley Margarito Salas
Horacio Andrés Moreno
José Riascos
Juan Carlos Aguirre
Luis Octavio Gutiérrez Montes
Francisco Giacometto Gómez
Justiniano Torres García
Sandra Liliana Peña Chocué
Wilson de Jesús López Cifuentes
Duver Yovani Laguna
Juan David García Naranjo
Beatriz Moreno Mosquera
Mauricio Valencia Sánchez
Lucas Villa
Mauricio Valencia Sánchez
Lucas Villa
Felipe Andrés Pérez
Geovanny Cabezas Cruz
Wilber Torres Cifuentes

José Manuel Caballero

Sir Armando Álvarez
Yefer Edison Oliveros Daza
Sebastián Jacanamijoy
Jair Adán Roldán Morales
Luis Fernando del Castillo
Jordany Rosero Estrella
Beatriz Helena Cano Uribe
Juan David Guegue Trochez
José Alonso Valencia
Danilo Galindo
Argenis Yatacúe
Luciana Moscoso
Harold Ángulo Vencé
José William Mayoral Castillo
Dagoberto Bayona Santiago
Ángel Miro Cartagena
Diana María Jaramillo Henao
Danilo Torres
Yoni Alejandro Chala Hueje
Luis Picasio Carampaima
José Gregorio Luguez
Fernando Vela
Nelson Galván Ascanio
Higinio Bailarín
Derly Pastrana Yari
Gertrudis Hernández Leal
Alexander Enrique Escobar Molina
Yeisi Campo
Oscar Iván Suárez Riascos
Luis Hernando Castrillón Molina
José Vianey Gaviria Hoyos
Jean Carlos Rodríguez Díaz
Oswaldo de Jesús Pérez Navarro
Elias Paí Guanga
Miguel Muchaviso Agreda
Francisco Javier Posada Posada
Carlos Freddy Londoño Bautista
Nerio Fernando Rodríguez
Eliécer Sánchez Cáceres
Jhon Jairo Chocué
Esteban Mosquera Iglesias
Mairon Javier Chaverra Mosquera
Jesús Albeiro Gutiérrez
María Dorfenis López Cordón
Juan Daniel Quintero Lizcano
Marco Tulio Gutiérrez Mendoza
Efrén Antonio BAILARÍN Carupia
Marcos Efraín Montalvo Escobar
Dilio BAILARÍN
Martin Bayona
Ilia Pilcué Yule
Apolinar Rivero
Henry Perea Montaño
Jaime Cuadrado
John Alberto Pascal Pascal
Hilde Guitierrez Gómez
Jorge Antonio Loaiza
Osvaldo Enrique Hernández Zuñiga
Víctor Orlando Mosquera
Winny Geraldine Luisa Forero Gómez
Omar Cárdenas Lozano
Efrén Antonio España

Luis Alfonso Narváez Escobar

Rogelio López Figueroa
Luis Efraín Sánchez Balaguera
Nazaria Calabás Tunubalá
Santiago Guarín
Noel Corsini Zúñiga
Edinson Valenzuela Cúama
Víctor López Gómez
Luis Alberto Ramos Bertel
Robinson Jiménez Bautista
Willington Hernández
Hermer Antonio Monsalve
Marcos Camayo Guetio
Nancy Yaneth Mejía Araque
John Alexander Sierra
Juana Panesso Dumasá
Albert Mejía Portillo
Jhon Mario García Guanga
Cristina Isabel Cantillo
Freddy Pestana Herrera
Huber Velásquez
Arnubia Yunda Cuetia
Wilmar Ascanio Angarita
Gustavo Orozco Ramírez
Javier Esnraider Castillo Ortiz
María del Carmen Molina Imbachí

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Kubali Bushiri
Sefu Shadari
Barthelemy Kubanabandu
Rodríguez Haramba
Matsongani Fannuel Kambale
Joël Mumbere Musavuli
Pascasie Soda
Cabral Yombo
Edison Kambale

ECUADOR

Andrés Durazno
Víctor Enrique Guaillas Gutama

ETHIOPIA

María Hernández
Yohannes Halefom Reda
Tedros Gebremariam Gebremichael

GEORGIA

Alexander Lashkarava

GHANA

Ibrahim "Kaaka" Mohammed

GREECE

Giorgios Karaivaz

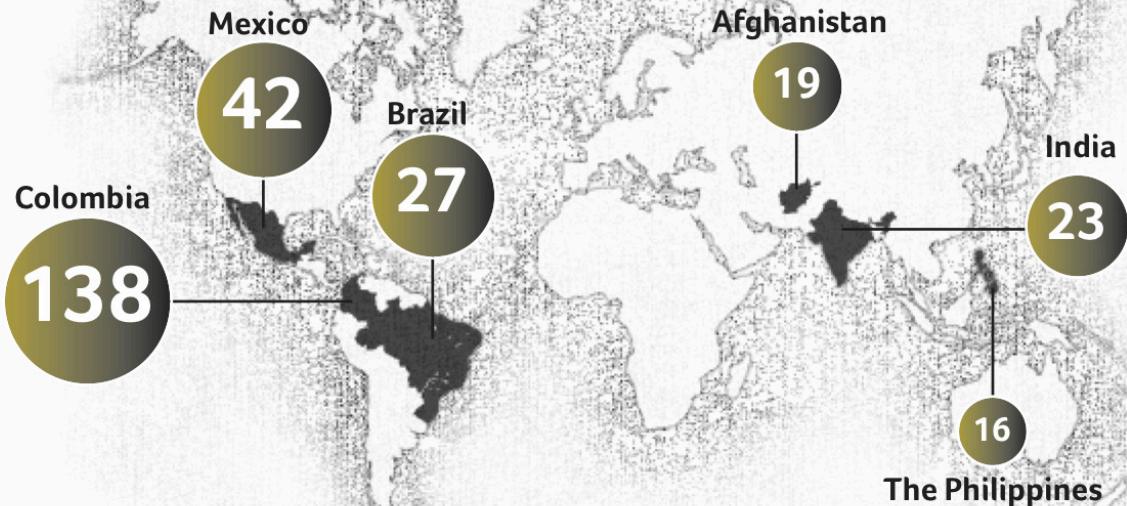
GUATEMALA

Jesús Choc Yat
Emilio Aguilar Jiménez
David Girardot Pazmiño
Cecy Caricia Ipata
Andrea González
Alberto Tec Caal

Regilson Choc Cac	IRAN	Domingo Sántiz Jiménez	Estela Casanto Mauricio
Pedro Alfonso Guadrón Hernández	Behnam Mahjoubi	Jacinto Romero Flores	Mario Marco López Huanca
Octavila Sánchez Vázquez		Rodrigo Morales Vázquez	Lucio Pascual Yumanga
Ramón López Jiménez	IRAQ	Manuel Cartas Pérez	PHILIPPINES (THE)
Feliciano Apolinario Quiróz	Ihab Jawad Al-Wazni	Devanny Cardiel	Antonio Baluarte Arellano
HAITI	KENYA	Alejandro García Zagal	Romeo Loyola Torres
Marie Antoinette Duclaire	Joanna Stutchbury	Marisol Cuadras	Julie Catamin
Diego Charles		Marcelino Álvarez González	Emanuel Asucion
HONDURAS	LEBANON	MYANMAR	Melvin Dasigao
David Fernando Padilla	Lockman Slim	Chan Thar Swe / K Za Win	Mark Lee Coros Bacasno
Martin Abad Pandy		Myint Myint Zin	Ana Mariz Lemita-Evangelista
Victor Martinez	MEXICO	Ah Khu	Ariel Evangelista
Juan Carlos Cerros Escalante	Gala Ocampo Figueroa	Thinzar Hein	Dandy Miguel
Vanessa Zuniga	Vicente Guzmán Reyes	Khet Thi	John Heredia
Juan Moncada	Ambrosio Guzmán Reyes	Ko Soe Naing	Joseph Canlas
Tatiana García	José Luis Chávez Mondragón	Anonymous	Jaymar Palero
Wilmer Joel Funez Ochoa	Naomi Alonso	Anonymous	Marlon Napire
Oscar Javier Pérez	Fidel Heras Cruz	NICARAGUA ²	Veneranda Ginanao
Celenia Bonilla	Manuel Carmona Esquivel	Armando Pérez Medina	Gerald Ral
Nelson Garcia	Ramiro Rodríguez Sántiz	Albert Jairo Hernández Palacios	Juan Macababbad
INDIA	Gerardo Mendoza Reyes	Dolvin Acosta	SOMALIA
Amrabhai Boricha	Raymundo Robles Riaño	Víctor Manuel Matamoros Morales	Farah Jamal Adan
Maidul Islam Midya	Noé Robles Cruz	Armando Suarez Matamoros	Abdiaziz Mohamud Guled
Kawasi Waga	Jairme Jiménez Ruiz	Borlan Gutiérrez Empra	SUDAN
Bheema Ursam	Carlos Marqués Oyorzábal	Sixto Gutiérrez Empra	Faisal Yousef Mohamed
Uiqa Pandu	José Santos Isaac Chaves	Kedelin Jarquín Gutiérrez	Sit Alnfor Ahmed Bakar
Stan Swamy	José de Jesús Robledo Cruz	Ody James Waldan Salgado	TANZANIA
Shridhar T	Maria de Jesús Gómez Vega	J.L.P. / J.R.B.	Paschal Raymond
Vengatesh Nr	Mario Alberto Vázquez Aguilar	PAKISTAN	THAILAND
Roopa P	Efraín Espinoza Pérez	Naheed Bibi	Somsak Onchuenjit
Sushil Kajal	Homero Terán Vanoye	Irshad Bibi	TONGA
Waseem Akram	Marco Antonio Arcos Fuentes	Ayesha Bibi	Polikalepo Kefu
Rai Singh Gurjar	Francisco Javier Barajas Piña	Javeria Bibi	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Athuan Abonmai	José Ascensión Carrillo Vázquez	Noor Islan Dawar	Jahaira DeAlto
Shekh Farid	Luis Urbano Domínguez Mendoza	Sheeba Gul	
Moinul Haque	Leobardo Hernández Regino	Nazim Jokhiyo	
Saddam Husain	Julio César Coctecón Rendón	Muhammad Zada Agra	
Vipin Agarwal	Tomás Rojo Valencia	PANAMA	
Gurvinder	Federico de Jesús Gutierrez	Edgar Omar Williams	
Lavepreet Singh	Oliverio Martínez Merino	PERU	
Daljeet Singh	Flor de Jesús Hernández	Yenes Ríos Bonsano	
Nakshatra Singh	David Díaz Valdez	Herasmo García Grau	
Tamilaruvan	Simón Pedro Pérez López		
Buddhinath Jha	Gladys Aranza Ramos Gurrola		
	Aline Sánchez		
	Lea Juárez Valenzuela		

1. The HRD Memorial data shown here is a presentation of the cases of verified killings of HRDs that have taken place between 1 January 2021 – 31 December 2021. It is likely that this dataset is incomplete as partners continue to gather and verify cases. Challenges include: killings in remote areas having gone unreported; self-censorship by communities for fear of reprisals; reduced movement and access to remote areas for data collection and verification as a result of COVID 19; and suppression of information by vested state and non-state interest groups.

2. A violent attack understood to be directly related to the Miskito and Mayangna peoples' struggle for indigenous peoples' rights saw more than 10 indigenous persons killed in Bosawas nature reserve on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast on 23 August 2021. At time of publication, only 10 names are available.

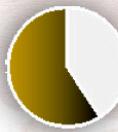


In 2021, the Human Rights Defenders Memorial (HRD Memorial) investigated and verified the killings of 358 human rights defenders (HRDs) in 35 countries.

The HRD Memorial is a global initiative led by 14 national and international human rights organisations to gather and verify data about HRDs who are killed for their human rights work. HRD Memorial partners gather real-time data on the killing of HRDs and historic data on killings dating back to 1998, when the UN Declaration on human rights defenders came into effect. Launched in 2016, the HRD Memorial presents a unique, verified dataset that highlights the scale of the killings of defenders worldwide, and provides a basis for effective advocacy and campaigning to stop the killings. The HRD Memorial keeps alive the memory of defenders who have been killed, celebrates their courage and achievements, and offers solidarity with their families, friends and colleagues.

Afghanistan	19	Ghana	1	Nicaragua	10
Argentina	1	Greece	1	Pakistan	8
Bangladesh	2	Guatemala	11	Panama	1
Brazil	27	Haiti	2	Peru	5
Burkina Faso	1	Honduras	11	Philippines (the)	16
Chile	2	India	23	Somalia	2
China	2	Iran	1	Sudan	2
Colombia	138	Iraq	1	Tanzania	1
DRC	9	Kenya	1	Thailand	1
Ecuador	2	Lebanon	1	Tonga	1
Ethiopia	3	Mexico	42	United States of America	1
Georgia	1	Myanmar	8		

Issue



59% of HRDs killed worked on defending land, environmental and indigenous peoples' rights

Identity



26% of HRDs killed were indigenous persons



18% of HRDs killed identified as women (including trans-women)

Partners in the HRD Memorial include: ACI-Participa (Honduras); ASAS-e-Fekr Social & Legal Research Service Consultancy (Afghanistan), Amnesty International; Comité Cerezo (Mexico); FIDH; Front Line Defenders; Global Witness; Human Rights Defenders' Alert – India; Karapatan (the Philippines); OMCT; El Programa Somos Defensores (Colombia); Red TDT (Mexico); Social Association of Afghan Justice Seekers (SAAJS) (Afghanistan); and UDEFEGUA (Guatemala).

In 2021, the HRD Memorial recorded the killings of 358 HRDs, including 211 land, environment and indigenous peoples' rights defenders. Accounting for 59% of the overall figure, land, environment and indigenous peoples' rights defence is by far and away the most dangerous sector in which to be a human rights defender. A further breakdown of the data reveals 93 (26%) were specifically working on indigenous peoples' rights; a particularly stark figure given that indigenous peoples are estimated to make up just 6% of the global population.

What the numbers do not tell us however, is who these human rights defenders were, what courageous work they did, and what their loss means to their families, their colleagues, their communities and the international human rights community as a whole.

The following profiles are just some of the lives lost in 2021.

Tomás Rojo Valencia

Yaqui indigenous rights defender

Mexico

Yaqui indigenous rights defender Tomás Rojo Valencia went missing on the morning of 27 May 2021 in the northwestern state of Sonora, Mexico.

His half-buried body was found almost 3 weeks later with signs that he had been killed with a hammer.

Rojo Valencia was a defender of the rights of the Yaqui tribe, an indigenous people who have endured over a century of struggle with the Mexican state, dating back to a brutal campaign to eliminate the tribe in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In more recent times, the Yaqui indigenous peoples in Sonora have been in conflict with state authorities as they defend the natural resources of their lands. In 2010, the state government announced the construction of the Independencia aqueduct; Yaqui indigenous communities contend the project would negatively impact the social, political and economic development of their communities. Rojo Valencia, was a prominent spokesperson for the community in this struggle, and over the years he and other prominent indigenous rights defenders endured considerable reprisals, including being accused of various crimes, which saw Rojo Valencia go into hiding in the territories and others spend time in prison.

In 2016, tensions were reignited when, in the context of the construction of the Aguapieta gas pipeline, inhabitants of one of a number of Yaqui tribal towns, Loma de Bácum, opposed the construction of the pipeline through their territory. By way of protest, indigenous authorities set up periodic blockades along highways to disrupt the flow of natural resources out of the territories and charge tolls to ensure the Yaqui communities would benefit from the extraction. Businesses and truckers maintained that the Yaqui roadblocks seriously affected the movement of raw materials and export goods and that blockaders could be abusive. On 16 February 2021, a trucker drove straight through a Yaqui roadblock, hitting and killing a member of the community. A similar incident took place on 11 April 2021, when a second community member was struck by a truck. Over the following months, Rojo Valencia sought to construct a more official toll booth on the highway to formalise the toll system and ensure that the proceeds were more regulated; an initiative that is believed to have attracted the attention of criminal gangs in the area looking to extort the scheme.



Rojo Valencia is one of 21 indigenous peoples' rights defenders killed in Mexico in 2021.

Colombia – The People Behind the Numbers

The Colombian government is quick to dismiss the killings of HRDs as occurring in the context of drug trafficking and illegal mining – a rationale that aims to obscure the complexity of the situation and downplay the role of paramilitary groups, while shifting focus from the extraordinary failures by the State to implement the 2016 Peace Agreement and protect HRDs. For the fifth year in a row, since the HRD Memorial began its documentation, Colombia leads the world in the number of HRDs killed, with HRD Memorial partners El Programa Somos Defensores reporting the killings of 138 HRDs; 39% of the global total in 2021. The following are emblematic cases from 2021.

Gonzalo Cardona Molina

In the department of Tolima, environmental rights defender and community leader Gonzalo Cardona Molina dedicated a 23-year career to the conservation of the yellow-eared parrot, educating local communities on the importance of caring for the bird and its habitat, the wax palm; a rare tree that is often harvested for its fruit, which is fed to livestock. This work repeatedly brought him into conflict with groups competing to control the land in Tolima; they often made death threats against him. Despite this, Gonzalo persevered in his work and his conservation efforts are credited with having brought the yellow-eared parrot back from the brink of extinction. A census carried out by Cardona Molina in December 2020 recorded 2,895 parrots, while in 1998 there were just 81. On 8 January 2021 he was reported missing; his body was found three days later with two bullets in his chest. Cardona Molina leaves behind a wife and four children.



Sandra Liliana Peña Chocué

In the department of Cauca, Nasa indigenous peoples' rights defender Sandra Liliana Peña Chocué was governor of the La Laguna indigenous reserve. She was also a mother to two young daughters. In her role as governor she opposed the cultivation of illicit crops on the reserve and not long before her murder she had launched a campaign to manually eradicate illicit coca crops; she immediately began receiving threats from illegal groups that sought to control the territory. On 20 April 2021, while travelling by motorcycle to meet with officials from the Colombian government in the city of Popayán, and accompanied by indigenous guard, Avelino Ull, they were ambushed by four armed men who shot at them. Peña Chocué died instantly, and Ull was wounded.



Lucas Villa

Beginning on 28 April 2021, demonstrations were organised across Colombia opposed to unpopular tax and healthcare reforms, as well as the rampant corruption in the country. The ensuing excessive and unlawful use of force by police and members of the ESMAD (Mobile Anti-Riot Squad) against protestors, as well as the role of vigilante groups in violently attacking protestors, has been widely documented and criticised. In the city of Pereira, Lucas Villa was a well-known protest leader and HRD, who engaged crowds with his charismatic personality and vibrant dancing and chanting.

Video footage from the first days of the protests show him dancing among protesters, leading protest chants, shaking hands with riot police, encouraging other protestors to be peaceful, and explaining the negative impacts of the proposed reforms. On 5 May he was participating in a small, peaceful sit-in at the César Gaviria Tújillo viaduct when two assassins riding tandem on a motorcycle circled the group. One of the hitmen disembarked the motorcycle, walked straight to Villa and shot him three times at close range in the head. Two other protestors were injured in the attack. In the moments before he was shot he was heard chanting "The ignorant, the stubborn, those who are asleep. Wake up!"

On 11 May Villa succumbed to his injuries in hospital.

Cristina Isabel Cantilla

Trans woman human rights defender Cristina Isabel Cantilla was the Director of the NGO Fundacion Calidad Humana (Human Quality Foundation) and a leading voice in the community of Santa Maria, Magdalena. She championed LGBTIQ+ rights, sex workers rights and land restitution rights; human rights work for which she suffered two attempts on her life in 2020. Although she was assigned protection measures under the National Protection Unit (UNP), she consistently took to her Facebook account to denounce the measures as insufficient, not least because the guards assigned were only available to her during work hours and the vehicle made available had no additional security features. She also denounced the inaction of the police when presented with the threats against her.



They [body guards] watch over me from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm and from 2:00 pm to 6:00 pm. This means that at any moment they [criminal groups] can kill me. Either before 8:00 am, at lunch time or after 6:00 pm when the escorts leave.

This is a conventional car. For this I hold the authorities responsible for my life. Anything that might happen to me is their fault. That is why I am not going to leave my city. I am going to stay here.

On 7 December 2021, a day of celebration in the Colombian calendar (Día de las Velitas), Cantilla was shot by two assassins while she celebrated the festival with family members on the terrace of her home.

Relatives contend that in the days prior to the incident, the police accompaniment scheme she relied on for her

A critical ruling by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights

The case of Cristina Isabel Cantilla (Colombia, above) is one of 15 killings of transgender women human rights defenders (trans WHRDs) recorded by the HRD Memorial in 2021, with 14 of these murders occurring in the Americas: Brazil (3); Colombia (2); Guatemala (2); Honduras (2); Mexico (4); and the U.S. (1). Transgender HRDs are known to experience a shocking level of violence in the course of their human rights work, and can even face considerable discrimination within the human rights community itself. In addition to experiencing high rates of domestic and sexual violence, trans W/HRDs are often the targets of transphobic hate crimes and state violence.

On 28 June 2021, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) issued a landmark ruling in the case of a trans WHRD murdered in 2009: Vicky Hernández el al v. Honduras.

Vicky Hernández was a 26-year-old trans woman, sex worker rights defender, and WHRD with Unidad Color Rosa, a collective defending transgender rights in Honduras. She also led health and human rights trainings for sex workers in her community. On the night of 28 June 2009 she met with two other trans women and went to the spot where they usually worked. It was the first night of a curfew decreed by a government that came to power in a coup that day. When a police patrol approached them, attempting to arrest them, they fled in different directions. The following day Hernández body was found – she had been shot in the head; her death was never properly investigated by the authorities and nobody was ever arrested for her murder.



Twelve years later, following sustained advocacy by a host of LGBTIQ+ HRDs including Red Lésbica 'CATTRACHAS', the IACtHR determined that the State of Honduras had violated Hernández's rights to life and personal integrity. The ruling was based on evidence that police had harassed Hernández on the night that she died; that due to the coup, the military and police had effective control of the streets that night; and that the authorities did not comply with their obligation to effectively investigate her death. Importantly, a key factor in the ruling was that Hernández did not have the opportunity to display her chosen name and gender identity on her identification card, and that this had a significant impact on the investigation – in fact, Hernández body was initially registered as male. The court contended that this lack of formal recognition of her gender identity may have promoted discrimination and social exclusion, and ordered Honduras to implement a process that will allow people to change the gender listed on their documents to match their self-identifying gender identity within a two year period.

Vicky Hernández's mother, Rosa, declared the ruling "historic, because justice was served for all".

Frozan Safi

Women's rights defender

Afghanistan

Woman human rights defender and economics lecturer Frozan Safi was a well-known feminist activist in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan. Fearing a return to the days of deep repression for women in the country, she courageously took to the streets to protest following the Taliban takeover in August 2021. Like many defenders in Afghanistan, she was desperate to leave the country knowing that her human rights record would render her a target. According to her sister, Safi received a telephone call from a person on an anonymous number who claimed that they could facilitate her evacuation from the country. They instructed her to gather proof of her work as a WHRD and leave for a safe house immediately.



Believing her request for asylum to be underway in Germany, she gathered some personal items and left her family home on 20 October. Two weeks later her body was discovered together with the bodies of three other women. All four had been active in the demonstrations, and had been lured to their deaths with the false promise of evacuation to safety.

Myanmar – a war on words

With its potential to ask uncomfortable questions, ignite ideas, and build worlds of possibility, poetry as a form of activism has deep roots in Myanmar. Poets have consistently and courageously used verse to resist and inspire when confronting brutal military regimes and colonial rule.

In response to a military coup on 1 February 2021, pro-democracy activists in Myanmar took to the streets and led large public demonstrations across the country. The energy and the conviction of the protestors was quickly captured by the country's poets; their words ringing out as declarations of resistance on the frontlines. Words which motivated the demonstrators and exposed the human rights abuses of the military junta, and swiftly led to them being sought out and targeted. On 3 March 2021, poet and HRD Ko Chan Thar Swe (pen name K Za Win) was shot in the head while shielding others, including children, during a mass protest in Monywa. Once a Buddhist monk, he left the monkhood to pursue poetry over a decade prior to his death. In 2015 he was arrested and imprisoned after he took part in a rally for educational reform. On 6 February 2021, he penned the poem "Revolution," Less than 4 weeks later, he was killed.

*"Dark nights
They linger too long."*

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*"It will be dawn  
For it is the duty of those who dare  
To conquer the dark and usher in the light."*

At K Za Win's funeral, revolutionary poet and HRD, Khet Thi, recited a poem in honour of his friend.

*"They shoot in the head,  
but they dont know the revolution is in the heart"*

The poem was widely shared on social media afterwards.



Two months later, on 8 May 2021, Khet Thi, was forcibly taken from his home by soldiers for interrogation.

The following morning his wife, Chaw Su, was told to go to Monywa Hospital where she learned that her husband had died during interrogation. According to Chaw Su, his body bore marks of torture, including severe bruising.

## **Unjustly Imprisoned HRDs & COVID-19**

The second year of the COVID-19 pandemic saw countless unjustly imprisoned human rights defenders exposed to the virus in overcrowded prison facilities, notable for poor ventilation and sanitation facilities, and with limited or no access to personal protective equipment and adequate and timely medical care. In 2021, a number of human rights defenders died in this context, including Joseph Canlas in the Philippines and Fr. Stan Swamy in India.

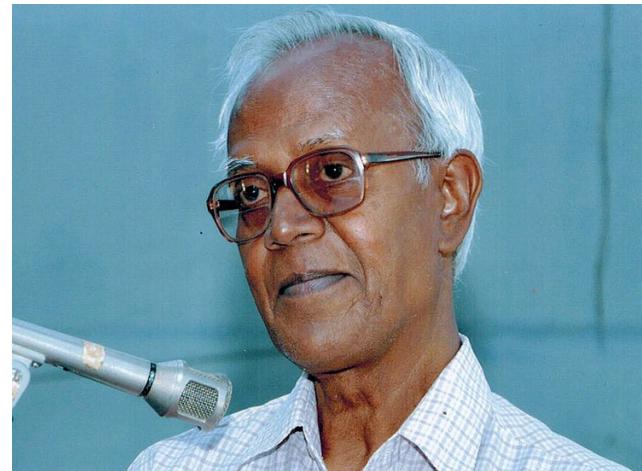


### **Joseph Canlas HRD & Peasant Leader The Philippines**

For decades, Joseph Canlas led campaigns against rural land grabbing from indigenous and peasant communities in Central Luzon, and he was instrumental in leading community initiatives against large-scale mining projects. Canlas was repeatedly “red-tagged” by authorities – used to mark activists as ‘terrorists’ or targets for the police and military. Canlas was arrested on 30 March 2021 following a highly questionable raid that allegedly turned up guns, ammunition and explosives; items he claimed were planted to bring a case against him. When detained he was in good health. Underlying conditions of hypertension and diabetes, however, meant that he would be more vulnerable were he to contract COVID-19. Despite these well-founded concerns, Canlas was held in an overcrowded quarantine facility with approximately 100 detainees for over two weeks before being transferred to prison. He was admitted to hospital on 7 May with respiratory difficulties and died from Covid 19 related complications on 11 May. Canlas’ children have filed a complaint with the authorities alleging reckless imprudence resulting in homicide, grave misconduct, and gross negligence by specific police and prison officials.

### **Fr. Stan Swamy 84 year-old Jesuit Priest & HRD India**

For over 40 years, human rights defender Fr. Stan Swamy fought to protect the rights of Adivasi minority indigenous peoples and the Dalit minority in Jharkhand State, India. He was a prominent advocate against the forced displacement of Adivasi communities, typically occurring in the context of development and the mining of mineral-rich lands. He faced constant persecution from the authorities, and was ultimately arrested on 8 October 2020 on fabricated terrorism charges. Suffering from Parkinson’s disease, significant loss of hearing in both ears, and other serious underlying health issues, he was already in a vulnerable state of health at the time of his arrest. Over the ensuing 8 months in prison his health deteriorated significantly, yet he was repeatedly denied bail on medical grounds and denied adequate, timely medical care. Even requests for warm clothing and a sippy cup were denied.



On 22 January 2021, he penned a letter to his supporters, thanking them for the solidarity they had shown him and his co-accused.

*“We 16 co-accused have not been able to meet each other, despite being in the same jail, But we will still sing in chorus. A caged bird can still sing.”*

Only when Swamy’s condition deteriorated to a critical state was he transferred to hospital where he tested positive for COVID-19. On 4 July 2021, he suffered cardiac arrest and died the following day. His death was met with an outpouring of grief around the world, and outrage at the Indian authorities.

## **HRD Memorial – Methodology**

The HRD Memorial brings partner-verified data together under the HRD Memorial umbrella and conducts additional open source research and case-specific verification.

Partners in the HRD Memorial include: ACI-Participa (Honduras); ASAS-e-Fekr Social & Legal Research Service Consultancy (Afghanistan), Amnesty International; Comité Cerezo (Mexico); FIDH; Front Line Defenders; Global Witness<sup>1</sup>; Human Rights Defenders' Alert – India; Karapatan (the Philippines); OMCT; El Programa Somos Defensores (Colombia); Red TDT (Mexico); Social Association of Afghan Justice Seekers (SAAJS) (Afghanistan); and UDEFEGUA (Guatemala).

Concerning 2021 cases, we are grateful to Justiça Global (Brazil), Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT) (Brazil), Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, Partenariat pour la Protection Intégrée (PPI) (DRC), Acción Ecológica (Ecuador), Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI) (Mexico), Amaru Ruiz, Fundación del Río (Nicaragua), Rabia Mehmood (independent journalist, Pakistan), and Earth Rights (Peru) for their support in providing additional case data and verification on some cases.

The HRD Memorial is a database of HRDs killed since 1998. The data presented here documents the killings that have taken place between 1 January 2021 – 31 December 2021 and is likely to be incomplete as partners continue to gather and verify cases. Challenges include: killings in remote areas having gone unreported; reduced movement and access to remote areas for data collection and verification as a result of COVID 19; self-censorship by communities for fear of reprisals; and suppression of information by state and non-state interest groups.

The HRD Memorial is committed to continuing to develop and refine the methodology and verification processes to ensure that these processes continue to be robust and relevant.

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<sup>1</sup> Global Witness will continue to gather and verify cases of environmental defenders killed in 2021. A complete list will be published later in 2022.



# HRD memorial

CELEBRATING THOSE WHO WERE KILLED  
DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

