



PRE-CONFERENCE INSTITUTE
**SECURITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS:
SUPPORTING GRANTEE SAFETY**
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DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Human Rights Defender

There are several commonly used definitions of who is or can be a human rights defender (HRD). The [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) defines HRDs as “people who, individually or with others, act to promote or protect human rights.” An individual’s actions and the contexts in which they work identifies them as HRDs. HRDs advocate for civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. In addition to NGO staff, government officials, civil servants or members of the private sector could be HRDs.

Similarly, [Frontline Defenders](#) defines HRDs as: “people who, individually or collectively, work peacefully on behalf of others to promote and defend internationally recognized human rights. They are defined by their actions rather than by their profession, job title or organization.”

The **Declaration on Human Rights Defenders**¹ states that “Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels”. The [European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders](#) uses this definition and notes that individuals or groups who commit or propagate violence cannot qualify as HRDs.

[Amnesty International](#) explains that HRDs could include: journalists exposing human rights violations; community workers teaching human rights education, trade unionists defending workers' rights, women promoting reproductive rights or environmentalists defending indigenous peoples' land rights. “The important thing is not who they are, but what they do. Human rights defenders take peaceful action and believe everybody has equal rights.”

The debate and why the definition is important

The way we define HRDs determines who qualifies and has access to emergency support, advocacy, and training and how we assess the levels of threats/ attacks faced by activists. Any definition inevitably excludes some people and this is necessary, in part, due to the limited resources available to support HRDs; trade-offs must be made. For example, should a finance director at an organization being attacked by the government have access to the same protection as the legal director? What about the wife of the advocate, or her cousin? At times, environmental and labor or union leaders are excluded. What about an individual in a community affected by a dam project who attends only one meeting but is nonetheless threatened? Are they all treated as HRDs? Who determines the risk?

¹ The full name is the “**Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.**”

The definitions above also fail to recognize the risks that individuals take by simply being *who* they are and identifying with a particular community or minority group. The sharpest example of this has been individuals who identify as LGBTI. As Amnesty notes, “There remain many instances where an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity can lead them to face execution, imprisonment, torture, violence or discrimination.” Other minorities, such as indigenous peoples and people with disabilities, may experience similar violations due to their identity. Should they not receive the same support and protections as other HRDS?

Advocacy and lobbying (in the context of protecting the security of human rights defenders)

- **Advocacy** is a process to influence policies, laws, and practices of influential political, economic, and social systems and institutions. Advocacy encompasses any activity to promote government actions or policies to protect the security of rights defenders and generate public pressure for these steps to be taken. In contrast, **lobbying** generally only includes activities that urge policymakers to enact, modify, or repeal a specific piece of legislation.

Digital security

- A type of information security affecting all aspects of digital communication, including computers and the internet, telecommunications, financial transactions, transportation, healthcare, and secure access.

Integrated security**

- An integrated security strategy is based on a broader conceptual framework of security that in addition to physical safety considers the following:
 - *Freedom from constant threats*: The absence of war, living without fear and violence, freedom of movement, stability, security, smiling children, homes, going for a walk at night unimpeded, etc.
 - *Economic security*: Employment, food, social justice, the absence of oppression, etc.
 - *Political security*: Democracy, freedom of thought, freedom of choice, legitimacy, the rule of law, solidarity, the United Nations, etc.
 - *Environmental security*: Eco-friendliness, environmentalism, unpolluted air and water, etc.
 - *Health security*: Health protection, accessible medical treatment, etc.

**From *Insiste Resiste Persiste Existe: Women Human Rights Defenders' Security Strategies*, by Jane Barry with Vahida Nainar for Urgent Action Fund

Protective accompaniment

- According to Peace Brigades International, accompaniment is a strategy for protecting human rights defenders and communities whose lives and work are threatened by political violence by sending teams of unarmed volunteers backed by an international support network to accompany HRDs and communities in areas of conflict.

Risk

- The potential that a chosen action or activity (including the choice of inaction) will undermine physical or information security.

Security assessment and security plan

- Security Assessment
 - A process by which an organization can assess its risks and vulnerabilities and create steps to improve its security
- Security Plan
 - A written document that describes how your organization or you can best protect yourself from various threats, including a list of steps to be taken should certain security-related events take place

Threat

- Indications that someone will harm somebody else's physical or moral integrity or property through purposeful and often violent action.

Threat modeling

- A procedure for optimizing security by identifying objectives and vulnerabilities, and then defining countermeasures to prevent or mitigate the effects of threats to the system. The key to threat modeling is to determine where the most effort should be applied to keep a system secure. Threat modeling is an interactive process.

Urgent action alerts

- Calls to action, often facilitated by an international human rights advocacy organization on behalf of a human rights defender in danger, that generate public demands to ensure the HRD's safety. Actions include tweeting, sending letters to government officials based on templates, signing petitions or joining a protest.

Vulnerabilities

- Weaknesses that could be exploited to attack an individual or organization.
- The level of risk facing a group increases in accordance with threats that have been received and their vulnerability to those threats, as presented in this equation:
$$\text{RISK} = \text{THREATS} \times \text{VULNERABILITIES}$$