



## BRAVE Campaign: Calling for Recognition & Protection of Human Rights Defenders

### ASK TO UK GOVERNMENT

**Amnesty is calling on the UK Government to develop a coherent strategy to counter the unprecedented surge and global scale of attacks against human rights defenders (HRDs).**

This strategy needs to have:

1. Ministerial leadership
2. Prioritisation in-country, through UK Embassies and High Commissions
3. Significant funding
4. A focus on women human rights defenders (WHRD's)

Such action would build on the UK Government's existing work in this area, of which there are excellent examples. There are also public EU guidelines on HRDs and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's internal HRD toolkit, both of which suggest practical ways for UK officials to support human rights defenders.

However, the UK's efforts remain inconsistent. While some good work is undoubtedly done by some embassies, it is not enough to counter the widespread repression and shrinking of civil society space Amnesty has documented. Amnesty considers this to be a global crisis, and the UK must respond with renewed efforts in order to ensure HRDs all over the world receive support consistently from the UK.

It is Amnesty's assessment that the UK's efforts in this area are variable and not strategic, in part due to: a lack of awareness or leadership on the issue, including in many embassies; inadequate consultation with human rights defenders; limited prioritisation by other UK government departments which operate abroad; and insufficient funding for HRDs.

A new, public and strategic approach to working with HRDs would help resolve such concerns. It would also help to assure HRDs of the UK's continued commitment to them, ahead its intended withdrawal from the European Union, through which it currently channels significant political and financial support. The announcement of such a strategy in 2018 would aptly mark 70 years since the adoption by the UK and other UN member states of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and 20 years since the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

### BACKGROUND

A review of the global human rights situation reveals an alarming increase in attacks against the many brave individuals around the world who peacefully defend and promote human rights.

Human rights defenders come from all walks of life and may include journalists, teachers, farmers, lawyers, student and community leaders, politicians, health professionals and whistle-blowers. They are harassed, tortured, smeared, jailed and even killed, for daring to challenge abuse of power by

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Amnesty International UK  
The Human Rights Action Centre  
17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A 3EA  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7033 1500  
Fax: +44 (0)20 7033 1503  
[parliament@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:parliament@amnesty.org.uk)  
[www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk)

governments and corporations, protecting the environments, defending minorities, opposing traditional barriers to the rights of women and LGBTI people, or standing up against abusive labour conditions.

Authorities worldwide are targeting HRDs and their organisations through law, policy and practice. This includes restrictions on funding, the freezing of assets; travel bans, reprisals against their families, surveillance and smear campaigns. Furthermore, the space in which they operate is being closed down: with over 249 restrictive legal initiatives recorded since 2012. Government officials often seek to justify such actions in the name of protecting national security; defending national sovereignty from the perceived malign influence of foreign funders, organisations and states; upholding traditional values and norms that do not allow for equality; or promoting economic development through public and private corporations that exploit natural resources.

Amnesty International's December 2017 report, '*Deadly but Preventable Attacks: Killings and Enforced Disappearances of Those who Defend Human Rights*', reveals that at least 3,500 human rights defenders have been killed since 1998 – an average of 180 deaths a year with 2017 being the deadliest year yet with over 300 killings of HRDs being recorded by the organisation Frontline Defenders. These numbers alone provide a clear indication of the unparalleled global assault we are witnessing.

More specifically, women human rights defenders (WHRDs) face gender-based violence in addition to the attacks other HRDs might face, including sexual violence, and threats, harassment and defamation campaigns linked to their status as women. Frequently, WHRDs are targeted not only because of their activism, but also because of their gender, and their activities are repeatedly delegitimised and denigrated. Those who challenge gender stereotypes and who work on issues like sexual and reproductive health and rights, or defend more widely the human rights of women and girls, are often especially at risk of gender-based threats and attacks.

The work of HRDs contributes directly to the realisation of human rights, the strengthening of the rule of law, and fostering sustainable development. Defending and promoting their rights and the space in which they live and operate is one of the most important ways to ensure human rights for everyone.

It is against this backdrop, that Amnesty International has launched BRAVE, a global campaign including in the UK, to increase recognition and protection of HRDs. The campaign focuses on women human rights defenders (WHRDs), the misuse and regressive use of laws, smear campaigns, and online and off-line surveillance, and calls for HRDs to be recognised, protected and able to operate in a safer environment. More at: [www.amnesty.org.uk/brave](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/brave)

## **CASES**

The campaign highlights many cases. Here are two priorities for our parliamentary work:

*Azza Soliman, Egypt*

Azza Soliman, a lawyer and long-standing WHRD, who is the founder of an Egyptian NGO that works to prevent violence against women, was arrested at her home in Cairo in December 2016.

Three weeks after her arrest, the authorities - without a court hearing - froze her personal and organisational assets and prevented her from travelling to Jordan to participate in a training session on women's rights and Islam.

The asset freezes were ordered by judges overseeing a criminal investigation into the activities and funding of Egyptian human rights organisations, in a case officially known as Case 173 of 2011.

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The assets of seven HRDs were frozen and at least 12 HRDs have been barred from travelling abroad. The moves have raised fears that the authorities are preparing to try human rights defenders on charges such as operating unregistered organisations, accepting funding without government permission and damaging Egypt's 'national interests' – an offence which carries a lengthy prison sentence.

Amnesty International calls on Egyptian authorities to drop the charges and lift the travel ban and asset freeze ordered against Azza Soliman immediately and unconditionally.

### *Istanbul 10 and Taner Kılıç, Turkey*

On 6 June 2017, Taner Kılıç, Chair of Amnesty International Turkey, was arrested and imprisoned on the baseless allegation that he was a “member of the Fethullah Gülen Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) and acted on its behalf”. A prominent figure in Turkey’s civil society, Taner’s imprisonment sent shock waves across the country and beyond.

The state has not presented any credible evidence to support the allegation that Taner allegedly downloaded and used the encrypted messaging app ByLock, which the authorities allege was used by the Gülen movement. Taner remains in pre-trial detention, despite an initial ruling in January 2018 that he be released. The same court overturned its own ruling the next day, without any explanation or further justification, a volte-face that raises serious questions of political interference in the court’s decision making.

The group of HRDs known as the Istanbul 10 were arrested on 5 July 2017 at a human rights workshop on Büyükada, an island close to Istanbul. They included İdil Eser, Director of Amnesty International Turkey; co-ordinator of the Women’s Coalition İlknur Üstün, Turkey’s foremost International Criminal Court expert; Özlem Dalkıran, founding member of Amnesty International Turkey; and Nejat Taştan, co-ordinator of the Equal Rights Monitoring Association.

All ten arrested on Büyükada have now been conditionally released, while their trial continues. On 25 October 2017, their case was fully merged with the case of Taner Kılıç and the next hearing is scheduled for 21 June 2018. The targeting of İdil Eser and Taner Kılıç is the first time in Amnesty International’s history that two of its leaders in a country have been detained and prosecuted at the same time. The state’s actions against a well-known human rights organization with such seemingly politically motivated and baseless allegations intends to send a clear message to human rights defenders in Turkey: criticism of rights violations will not be tolerated.

### **WHAT ARE WE ASKING THE UK GOVERNMENT TO DO?**

Given the urgency and scale of the situation which HRDs are facing, Amnesty International is calling on the Foreign Secretary to launch a coherent strategy to support HRDs, globally. This strategy needs to have;

1. Ministerial leadership
2. Prioritisation in-country, through UK Embassies and High Commissions.
3. Significant funding

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#### 4. A focus on women HRDs

Such action would build on the UK Government's existing work in this area, of which there are excellent examples. There are also EU guidelines on HRDs and the Foreign Office's internal HRD toolkit, both of which recommend practical ways to support human rights defenders. However, the UK's efforts remain inconsistent, in part because of: more awareness and/or leadership needed on the issue, including at post; inadequate consultation with human rights defenders; limited prioritisation by other UK government departments which operate abroad; and insufficient funding for HRDs.

A new and public plan of HRD work could help resolve such concerns. It would also demonstrate the UK's continued commitment in this area ahead its intended withdrawal from the European Union, through which it currently channels significant political and financial support. And the launch of such a plan could mark next year's 70th anniversary of the UDHR and 20th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

#### **WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR MP**

- 1) Introduce them to the BRAVE campaign – why have we launched this campaign – and to the two cases, Azza Soliman (Egypt) and Istanbul 10 and Taner Kilic (Turkey).
- 2) Impress upon them the unprecedented nature and scale of the current threats facing human rights defenders. Amnesty sees this as a global crisis which requires a renewed response from the UK government.
- 3) Ask them to raise concern in Parliament about the global crackdown on HRDs and to urge the Foreign Secretary to launch a coherent strategy to address this– this could be through;
  - Your MP writing to the Foreign Secretary (Boris Johnson) or Human Rights Minister (Lord Ahmad)
  - Your MP tabling parliamentary questions or putting in for a debate on the issue

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