



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

ASK TO UK GOVERNMENT

Amnesty is calling on the UK Government to prioritise its work to support human rights defenders in response to the unprecedented surge and global scale of attacks. This would include developing a coherent strategy. The prioritisation and 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, poets, 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 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.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL UK ADVOCACY OFFICE

For more information on any of the issues contained in this briefing, please contact parliament@amnesty.org.uk or call **020 7033 1557**

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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 may 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. If anything the situation is getting worse – in 2017 alone, more than 300 human rights defenders were killed. 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/defenders

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. 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

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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.

Marielle Franco, Brazil



On the 14th of March 2018 Women Rights Defender Marielle Franco was killed with no one to this date held to account for the assassination.

Marielle Franco was a black bisexual woman and young mother living in favelas of Rio de Janeiro. She worked and campaigned tirelessly for the rights of LGBTI and young people in the favelas and other marginalized communities in Rio de Janeiro. Marielle also stood up for exposing and denouncing violations committed by security forces, including extrajudicial executions in Brazil.

The killing of Marielle Franco is part of a wider pattern in the country where in Brazil, dozens of human rights defenders

(HRDs) are killed every year.

In 2017, at least 67 HRDs were killed in the country, an increase from previous year were 61 killings were recorded. There is also a continued pattern of lack of investigation of killings of HRDs in the country and when perpetrators face trial it is often the shooters and not the intellectual authors of the crime.

Amnesty International calls on the Brazilian authorities to ensure an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the assassination of Marielle Franco and that those responsible are brought to justice in a fair trial. Amnesty further calls for protection measures to be implemented to support Marielle's family and the witnesses of the crime.

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