

Effect report 2017

Civil Rights Defenders was founded as the Swedish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in 1982 with the purpose of monitoring compliance with the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Final Act. Our aim is to defend human rights, in particular people's civil and political rights, and to support and empower human rights defenders at risk.

1. What does your organisation want to achieve?

Civil Rights Defenders is a non-profit expert human rights organisation with over 30 years' experience of supporting civil society and strengthening human rights defenders in repressive countries. We defend people's civil and political rights, and empower human rights defenders at risk in Sweden and globally. We believe a strong civil society is crucial for an independent scrutiny of government and authorities to ensure a positive development. Therefore, we combine human rights lobbying and advocacy with empowerment of our partners.

Together with partners, we monitor human rights developments, demand reform, justice and accountability. We support human rights defenders at risk by providing trainings, technical and financial assistance, networking platforms and peer support.

Vision and long-term targets

Civil Rights Defenders' overall goal is to improve people's access to freedom and justice through greater respect for their civil and political rights. To achieve this, we work towards the following goals:

Goal 1: People are empowered to get their civil and political rights

- People get increased access to legal aid
- People get increased access to information

Goal 2: States take responsibility for the fulfilment of human rights

- The legislation concerning human rights is improved.
- The implementation of human rights is improved.

Goal 3: Local human rights defenders are empowered

- The protection of human rights defenders at risk is improved.
- The organisational capacities of local human rights defenders are strengthened.

We defend human rights in Sweden where we have our Head Office. In our international activities, our goal is to be active in countries and regions where the respect for the individual's civil and political rights is the weakest. We take a regional perspective in our operations since the problem we want to address often forms part of a regional problem.



2. In what organisational context appears your organisation?

Civil Rights Defenders' Head Office is located in Stockholm, Sweden. We have field offices with local staff in Asia, Belgrade, Bogotá, Pristina, Sarajevo, and Tirana. We have local partner organisations in Eastern Europe, Western Balkans, South East Asia, Latin America and East and Horn of Africa.

International context

Civil Rights Defenders is seeking to highlight the central role, needs and vulnerabilities of human rights defenders globally. We keep close contacts with organisations and other actors that provide support and protection to human rights defenders, including those at risk.

Local context

We work with organisations and individual human rights defenders. We only work with non-governmental, religiously and politically independent organisations that do not use or advocate violence. Generally, our partners are local non-governmental organisations. However, in countries where such are not permitted, we may collaborate with individuals and loose networks with the aim of building an organisational structure. Most of our partners work on a non-profit basis. Exceptions exist for independent media companies, which need support to be able to operate at all in highly repressive regimes. Our approach takes a long-term perspective and is based on an active field presence, regional expertise, and close collaboration with local partners. We strive to strengthen civil society and empower human rights defenders, including those at risk.

Sweden

Human rights work in Sweden has been part of our mandate. While the focus has been international, substantial work has been done to defend people's civil and political rights also in Sweden. It is important to acknowledge that the work to ensure full implementation of human rights needs to continue also in stable democracies.

Civil Rights Defenders takes on the role of a watchdog that exposes human rights abuses and demands accountability through the agency of the law. We conduct activities to ensure respect for human rights, in collaborations with other civil society actors or alone. We demand accountability and ensuring that duty-bearers take adequate action in line with international standards, and by empowering groups that are vulnerable to human rights violations.

3. What strategies do you have achieving your goals?

We believe that all countries need a strong civil society that scrutinises those in power in order to continue to develop in a positive direction. People who defend the rights of others in dictatorships and authoritarian countries are often persecuted themselves. Police, military or public officials threaten, harass, jail, ill-treat them – or worse. Many human rights defenders risk their lives in the course of their work. This is why we combine our human rights work with the empowerment of our partners. We primarily use the following three working methods:

Public Opinion and Advocacy

Civil Rights Defenders affects change and influences states, decision makers, and public opinion. We engage in opinion-forming and advocacy work, independently or together with local human rights defenders and other organisations to increase the capacity for national and international impact. The organisation drives debate, runs campaigns, and highlights key issues



in the media, through seminars, and reports. In totalitarian states, we communicate independent information through alternative media outlets and other forums for discussion and debate.

Investigation and Accountability Mechanisms

Civil Rights Defenders investigates and holds the state and other decision makers accountable when legislation or its application goes against civil and political rights. We carry out this work independently, or in collaboration with local human rights defenders. We scrutinise laws, draft legislation, and regulatory activities, and litigate against states and those in power who violate human rights. We pursue cases in national and international courts, committees, and tribunals.

Support and Education

Civil Rights Defenders' founding principle is the importance of strong local human rights actors. We focus on partnering with and empowering local actors. This means that the organisation works with security training, emergency support, education, professional development, and financial support. Based on local needs, we support developments to increase the ability and capacity for work that affects change locally. It is also a question of human rights defenders' methods as well as access to tools and systems for reporting and performance management. We also create conditions for local human rights defenders to safely meet and exchange experiences to strengthen and inspire each other.

4. What capacity and what knowledge do you have to enable you to achieve your objectives?

Organisation

The Annual Meeting and occasional Extraordinary Meetings are the organisation's supreme decision-making bodies. The Board is responsible for the implementation of the decisions made by the Annual Meeting and Extraordinary Meetings, and for the activities and the finances of the organisation. The organisation has a secretariat led by the Executive Director, whose task it is to implement the decisions of the Board and to handle the day-to-day operation of the organisation.

Board

Civil Rights Defenders has an independent, non-profit board of nationally and internationally recognised human rights experts. The Board's work is governed by a separate instruction, and the members are elected during the Annual Meetings, where the formal decision-making takes place. The Board oversees the work of the organisation and participate in the decisions about the organisation's operations and direction.

Staff

Civil Rights Defenders has experience from over 30 years of working with human rights in repressive regimes, with a team of experts active in the field. We also have specialised staff with competence in administration, fundraising, digital security, human resources, communication, economy and methodology. The number of employees at the end of 2017 was 52.

Interns

Civil Rights Defenders offers internships for students or recent university or college graduates. In 2017 we hosted 15 interns at our Head Office in Stockholm.



Partners

We cooperate with nearly 200 local human rights organisations and independent media outlets across East and Horn of Africa, Europe, Eurasia, Latin America, Southeast Asia and Sweden. The state has the prime responsibility to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms and all countries need a vibrant civil society as an independent watchdog and a counter-weight to the power of the state. We believe that local forces are best placed to be driving human rights work thanks to their permanent presence and closeness to those whose rights are violated.

Funding

To ensure continued financial strength and long-term stability, the organisation will continue to prioritise increasing funds raised from government and private funders. We will also strengthen our work with philanthropists and develop fundraising activities internationally.

Public Grants

The most important grant-awarding bodies are Sida, Swedish Institute, the Foreign Ministry, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. Grants from state actors are important for maintaining long-term engagement, in Sweden and in the world.

Private Foundations

Private foundations are becoming an increasingly important source of funding for the organisation. The biggest contributions came from OAK Foundation, the National Endowment for Democracy, Open Society Foundations, and the Gerald and Monica Nagler Foundation.

Funds Raised from the General Public

Both private donors, who donated individual amounts, and approximately 1,260 regular monthly donors supported our work in 2017. Monthly donations allow for long-term planning and stability and reduce administration costs. The support from monthly donors is very important for our continued work and will be given priority in the coming years.

Companies

Companies contributed to Civil Rights Defenders, either through long-term partnerships, by giving a donation through the Christmas campaign, or by awarding earmarked grants. Donations and grants from companies are of great importance for our ability to meet the challenges ahead, and the organisation will focus on strengthening its partnerships with companies. We are since 2013 a beneficiary of Swedish Postcode Lottery and receive an annual distribution. In 2017, the Swedish Postcode Lottery also approved two special project applications which will stretch over 2-3 years. Major corporate donors were Millicom and Weekday.

5. How do you know if your organisation is making progress?

The context in the countries we are active in is often characterised by a lack of respect for human rights and true democratic governance. Actively promoting human rights work is associated with risks and persecution. Human rights defenders in civil society have a limited ability to influence and impact, and limited access to international support, both financially and technically. Initiatives to promote human rights and democracy and accountability from those in power usually takes place on a small scale and have seldom extensive or long-lasting effects. Human action spaces are limited, as well as their access to independent information – and therefore awareness of their rights.



Civil Rights Defenders intends to carry out activities that strengthen the capacity of human rights defenders and identify them as agents of change. We see the potential of human rights defenders, civil society, but realise that they need knowledge, practical tools, networks, and financial and other resources, in order to work effectively and safely.

Strategy

The global strategy presents the overall objectives for the time period. These objectives are operationalised in the regional and thematic strategies and plans of actions, stating sub-objectives, priorities, activities and where indicators used to measure progress in our work are identified and evaluated regularly.

Evaluation

Civil Rights Defenders has developed an annual planning cycle with a Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation system (PME), including a Results Assessment Framework (RAF), as our main tool for our planning, follow-up, evaluation and adjustment. PME puts the focus on changes in behaviour, relationships, activities or actions of the people, groups and organisations. PME is our quality insurance tool that serves to collect and analyse information in order to measure progress towards goals, inform decision-making and lead to continuous improvements and change. Civil Rights Defenders management makes a full assessment of the achievements against the objectives twice a year. The results are reported to the board.

With its small administration, its deep expertise and regular field visits, Civil Rights Defenders has the ability to work closely with local partners. With our regular presence on the field we are able to follow developments in the country and in relation to the problems targeted by our projects

Expanding organisation

We believe that an active presence in the field is a key to success. In 2016 we strengthened our work in Latin America by establishing a presence in Colombia. In 2015 we established a presence in Southeast Asia which allows us to work more closely with our partners and achieve good results in the region. In 2017 we expanded the programme to cover broader parts of Asia and with that we changed the name for the programme to be Asia Programme.

Developments within the EU, such as rising populism and increasing discrimination against minorities, worry us. These tendencies are evident in countries such as Poland and Hungary. This negative development has meant that we at Civil Rights Defenders have had to extend and reprioritise our operations in 2017. The number of employees increased, as did the number of human rights defenders and organisations that we partner with. Now, we also cover Turkey, which is a new country in the context of our work. And we continue to develop our operations within the EU.

6. What have you accomplished so far?

During 2017, Civil Rights Defenders continued its work to support human rights defenders in Eurasia, Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Europe. Here are some examples of the results achieved in 2017 in relation to the goals.

Goal 1: People are empowered to get their civil and political rights

In Europe, Civil Rights Defenders has continued to organise lobbying visits for our partners to Brussels, while OSCE and Council of Europe often request our expertise. As a part of these efforts, we have published seven comprehensive reports on the situation of the Roma in six Western Balkans countries in order to improve advocacy work on Roma community both in Sweden and internationally.

In 2017, Civil Rights Defenders has worked to highlight the critical developments in Chechen Republic, where the group and journalists reported a surge of illegal detentions, mass-scale torture and extrajudicial killings. Civil Rights Defenders raised awareness about anti-gay purges in the republic that were exposed in early 2017. Together with our partners in Russia we provided legal aid to hundreds of LGBT+ individuals, who had been exposed to discrimination, harassment and violence. With our support the Queer Culture Festival in Saint Petersburg was organised. The Festival aims to increase awareness of LGBT rights and empower the LGBT community. For the second year in a row, it did not face any serious harassments and threats, which is a great achievement given the many obstacles the festival has been facing in the past nine years' history.

In Belarus, we released a report on Belarus to mark the anniversary of the lifting of EU sanctions against the country. The report is based on 20 interviews with human rights activists and a comprehensive survey covering 30 activists conducted by Civil Rights Defenders between September and December 2016. In the report, Civil Rights Defenders notes that it was a mistake to lift the sanctions, as Belarus has failed to meet all the requirements set by the EU.

In Asia, Civil Rights Defenders engaged in advocacy activities targeting policy makers in Sweden, the EU, and UN bodies, together with local partner organisations in 2017, to highlight the serious situation in the region. Through our partner organisations, we collect important information that we use to influence politicians and policy makers in order to strengthen respect for human rights in the region going forward.

In Sweden, Civil Rights Defenders highlighted the fact that Nazism is gaining a foothold and the human rights violations it brings. We pursued litigation against the Nazi organisation the Nordic Resistance Movement, whose ideology is anti-democratic and calls for violence against ethnic minorities.

In addition, we conducted a large-scale survey to map human rights compliance within compulsory care. It is aimed at people who are, or have been, admitted for compulsory care during the last five years. With the help of the survey, we can identify shortcomings and work to ensure respect for human rights going forward.

In 2017, we started a collaboration with the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation and Sami representatives, in which we work for Sami rights and increased respect for indigenous rights. This work constitutes one of our focus areas in Sweden for the coming years.

Goal 2: States take responsibility for the fulfilment of human rights

In the light of the difficult situation in Venezuela and Cuba, Civil Rights Defenders has worked intensively with advocacy activities vis-à-vis politicians and businesses during 2017. Through the established and social media, we have carried out two campaigns targeting consumers and businesses. The campaign in Cuba has focused on the tourism industry, where big companies are owned and operated by the Cuban military's holding company, GAESA. This means that tourism is making the oppressors stronger.

The Venezuela campaign is aimed at the Finnish partly state-owned company Neste, which, together with the fully state-owned Venezuelan oil company PDVSA, owns the Swedish company Nynas AB. PDVSA's oil exports account for more than 90 per cent of all Venezuelan exports. The company's CEO serves in the government as minister of oil, and thus carries some of the responsibility for the dismantling of democracy and human rights violations. The Finnish government's co-ownership of a company with PDVSA through Neste goes against both the Finnish government's and Neste's very strict policies regarding corruption and human rights.

In Russia, Civil Rights Defenders and Memorial's efforts to strengthen legal work in Dagestan bore fruit: the local authorities announced about abandoning abusive preventive lists of "religious extremists", the practice that prompted of mass abuses in the republic. After years of struggling through lobbying and strategic litigation together with partners in Russia, a first case of violence against an LGBT+ individual, was recognised as a hate crime.

In Europe, Civil Rights Defenders organised many well-known activities. Moot Court Competition; Rule of Law Forum; Belgrade, Pristina and Tirana Pride; Regional Roma Summit and Human Rights Defenders School were the most successful initiatives in terms of quality, results and number of participants. For example, more than 160 judges, prosecutors and human rights lawyers participated in the Fourth Rule of Law Forum in Tirana. Conference on Hate Crime and Hate Speech during Belgrade Pride was opened by Prime Minister and Minister of Justice in premises of the Government of Serbia. It was the first LGBT-related event organised in the Governments' building.

In Ethiopia, Civil Rights Defenders supported a local partner to publish an assessment report on the impact of the 2016 State of Emergency on human rights and human rights defenders. The report, which is distributed online both in Amharic and English, provided instructive information on the consequence of the State of Emergency for local and international actors to substantiate their advocacy work. Our partner was also able to monitor the trials of prominent politicians and activists who were arrested under the same Emergency law.

In Burma, our partners' successful advocacy resulted in prisoners of conscience being released and charges against human rights defenders, for example Eang Vuthy of Equitable Cambodia, being dropped. Their efforts to stop land grabbing is now influencing the agenda at a critical juncture for the future of Cambodia-EU trade relations.

In Sweden, Civil Rights Defenders won a historic victory in the Svea Court of appeal. The court ruled that the police authority's former register of Roma individuals, which received wide media coverage when it was revealed to the public in 2013, was illegal and that the Swedish state had been guilty of ethnic discrimination. It was a major victory for Civil Rights Defenders, who had pursued the case for several years, but even more so for the roughly 4,700 Roma who were included in the register and who finally received justice.



Goal 3: Local human rights defenders are empowered

Civil Rights Defenders supported human rights defenders with trainings, technical and financial assistance, networking platforms and peer support and strengthened the capacities of our partners. Our global security system, Natalia Project – a personal alarm and positioning system for human rights defenders who are threatened or attacked – is gaining more and more users. Since its launch in 2013, the number of participants has steadily grown, and in 2017 Natalia Project went from just over 90 to 115 participants from four continents.

In Azerbaijan we were able to quickly react to a crackdown on LGBT people, both in working with local partners to provide emergency support and necessary social and medical services, as well as successfully raising the alarm and bringing international attention to the issue. We developed our programme to expand into new areas and directly empower human rights defenders and activists.

In 2017 we launched the Defenders' Database in Latin America in order to report human rights violations. In the database, evidence and other important information is stored on the cloud instead of in paper archives. This reduces the risk that valuable material is destroyed in the case of an attack.

Since 2013 Civil Rights Defenders has annually awarded a person who, despite the risk to his or her own safety, continues to strive to ensure that other people's civil and political rights are recognised and protected. The winner of the Civil Rights Defender of the Year Award 2017 was South Sudanese human rights lawyer Edmund Yakani. The award brought the human rights situation in South Sudan into the spotlight.

Through the Civil Rights Defenders Emergency Fund, we support human rights defenders at risk who need help fast. 357 people received support from the Emergency Fund in 2017. We also provided security trainings as well as capacity building workshops for over 1,500 human rights defenders in the same year.

Our first innovation competition – the 2017 Innovation Challenge - was launched in 2017. The aim of the competition is to find smart solutions that help and reduce the risks for those who work with human rights. Two winners were chosen. One of the winning ideas tackles the issue of mental health for human rights defenders. The other focuses on increasing accountability among the police in one of the countries where we operate.

Civil Rights Defenders empowered human rights defenders advancing LGBT rights from Russia and other countries by inviting them to Stockholm Pride, where they could network with peers, recharge batteries, take part in meetings and seminars and march in the Pride parade.



About Civil Rights Defenders

CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS is an international human rights organisation that is politically and religiously independent. The organisation defends people's civil and political rights and empowers human rights defenders at risk. Civil Rights Defenders operates in Sweden and in the countries in the world where respect for human rights is at its weakest. We engage in advocacy activities and legal processes, and provide information on the situation with regard to human rights globally.

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