

## Effect Report 2018

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' vision**

*A world of democratic societies in which we all enjoy our civil and political rights.*

#### **Civil Rights Defenders' mission**

*Our mission is to defend civil and political rights together with local human rights defenders to increase their security, capacity, and access to justice.*

*We work as a part of a global movement of human rights defenders and partner with those at risk. Through legal means and public advocacy, we hold states, individuals and non-state actors accountable for human rights violations.*

*We advocate for the norms and values of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other relevant human rights standards, as we encourage people to use these rights to promote democratic societies.*

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.

### **Civil Rights Defenders' goals**

Civil Rights Defenders work is guided by three subsidiary goals. Civil Rights Defenders shall:

1. Support People Claiming Their Civil and Political Rights by:
  - Increasing access to legal aid
  - Increasing access to independent information
2. Demand That States Take Responsibility for, and Respect Human Rights by:
  - Advocating for better human rights laws
  - Improving the implementation of existing human rights laws
3. Strengthen Local Human Rights Defenders by:
  - Improving their ability and capacity to advocate for their rights and fight for change
  - Improving security for human rights defenders at risk

We defend human rights in Sweden where we have our Head Office. In our global work, 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, Brussels, Istanbul, 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 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 ensure 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 put our vision and mission into practice by:

#### **Holding Those in Power Accountable**

Civil Rights Defenders holds governments and those in power accountable and demands accountability when people's civil or political rights are violated. We do this ourselves, or together with local human rights defenders. We evaluate laws and proposed legislation, as well as how authorities implement these. We bring those in power to court when human rights are violated by engaging in cases at national and international courts, committees, and tribunals.

#### **Advocacy**

Civil Rights Defenders advocates for people's civil and political rights directly with governments and decision-makers, and through public campaigns. We work together with local human rights defenders and other international human rights organisations to maximise our impact. We shine a spotlight on important issues through the media,

seminars, and in public reports. In repressive countries, we provide independent information through alternative media sources and encourage discussion and debate.

### **Support and Expertise**

Civil Rights Defenders believes that that strong local civil society is the key to long-term progress. That's why we focus on partnering and supporting local human rights groups who are fighting for their rights in repressive countries. Starting with our partners' needs, we provide security training, emergency support, expertise, organisational development, and long-term financial support. We also bring together our partners so they can exchange experiences, as well as learn from and inspire each other.

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

### **Organisation**

The Annual Meeting is the organisation's supreme decision-making body. The Board is responsible for the implementation of the decisions made by the Annual Meeting, 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 members of the board are elected during the Annual Meetings. 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 2018 was 57.

### **Interns**

Civil Rights Defenders offers internships for students or recent university or college graduates. In 2018 we hosted 16 interns at our Head Office in Stockholm and our field offices.

### **Partners**

We cooperate with more than 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 counterweight 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.

### **Expanding organisation**

We believe that an active presence in the field is a key to success. In the past years we have strengthened our work in Latin America by establishing a presence in Colombia. In addition, we have established our presence in Southeast Asia, which allows us to work more closely with our partners. In 2018, we opened a new office in Brussels, in order to strengthen our ability to influence the EU. Our operations in the Horn of Africa was broadened in order to create an Africa Department with an employee periodically stationed in the region. By the end of 2018 we had field offices in Belgrade, Bogotá, Brussels, Istanbul, Pristina, Sarajevo and Tirana.

### **Funding**

Civil Rights Defenders' work is financed by governmental organisations and private funders, including foundations, corporate partnerships, and contributions from the public. Civil Rights Defenders is a registered Swedish non-profit that is religiously and politically unaffiliated.

#### *Public Grants*

The most important grant-awarding bodies are Sida, Swedish Institute, the Foreign Ministry, and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Grants from state actors are important in order to maintain 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 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 1,400 regular monthly donors supported our work in 2018. Monthly donations allow for long-term planning and stability and reduce administration costs. The support from monthly donors is important to our continued work and will be given priority in the coming years.

#### *Companies and organisations*

Companies contributed to Civil Rights Defenders, either through long-term partnerships, or by giving a one-off donation. We are since 2013 a beneficiary of Swedish Postcode Lottery and receive an annual distribution. In 2018, the Swedish Postcode Lottery supported three special projects, which makes the Postcode Lottery

one of our most important private funders.

During the year, a long-term collaboration with the Swedish Football Association (SvFF) was initiated, through which resources, training, and joint positions to draw attention to human rights had a major impact during the World Cup in Russia in particular.

The world is increasingly putting great demand on us to act quickly and provide flexible support when emergencies arise or when the security situation deteriorates for those standing up for human rights. Support from private individuals, businesses, and organisations is essential to ensure this flexibility and our ability to target actions where the need is greatest. It remains our focus to engage more individuals, organisations, and companies to take a stand for and support our work.

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

The context in the countries where we are active 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. Initiatives to promote human rights and democracy, and accountability from those in power, usually take place on a small scale and may not have extensive or long-lasting effects. In many cases a status quo or a non-worsening situation may be positive results.

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 and 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 and activities. This is also 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 field presence, we are able to follow developments in the country and in relation to the problems targeted by our projects.

## **6. What have you accomplished so far?**

During 2018, 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 2018 in relation to our three subsidiary goals.

### **Goal 1: Support People Claiming Their Civil and Political Rights**

Russia held presidential elections in March and hosted the World Cup in June 2018. Civil Rights Defenders worked closely with our partners to prepare for these events. Our media partners provided residents in the north-western and eastern regions of Russia with access to independently reported and sourced news on region-specific developments, including government corruption, human rights abuses and environmental problems. These are issues that government-controlled media strictly censor and distort.

We also campaigned for the release of Chechen activist Oyub Titiev who was arrested early in 2018, by partnering with the Swedish Football Association to push his case in media in the run up to the World Cup. We gathered meetings with civil society actors from across the continent and arranged seminars in the UK parliament and in Stockholm. Also, we covered his trial from Chechnya, and built international coalitions that would eventually lead to his conditional early release in 2019.

With our support, lawyers conducted trainings with 68 regional journalists in Central Russia and defended more than a dozen journalists in courts. They also offered close to 2 000 consultations to journalists, bloggers and others interested in the topic. In our anti-discrimination program, we provided legal aid to hundreds of victims of harassment, violence, and discrimination.

In Sweden, Civil Rights Defenders filed a complaint with the police for hate speech against several leading individuals in the Nazi organisation, the Nordic Resistance Movement (NMR). The complaint argues for an interpretation of the legislation that includes current expressions of Nazism and was made after NMR's demonstration in Gothenburg in 2017. Based on this complaint, the prosecutor indicted 16 members of NMR on hate crime charges in 2018. The trial is being held in 2019.

In addition, Civil Rights Defenders launched a handbook setting out the rights of people in psychiatric institutions according to national law and international standards. The handbook has been distributed widely and gained a lot of interest.

Together with Greenpeace we mobilised and trained over 300 young people from 13 European countries and provided them with continuous support to self-organise and act. As a result, numerous local actions, trainings and activist camps were organised for the purpose of protection of social and environmental justice, human rights and democracy.

## **Goal 2: Demand That States Take Responsibility for, and Respect Human Rights**

In Uganda and Ethiopia, training workshops focusing on the rights of people in closed institutions were facilitated. These were central in building capacity among local partners, journalists and human rights defenders. Victims of violations shared their stories, exposing brutality and illegal treatment of inmates in prisons, mental health institutions, detention and juvenile centres. One of the stories published from Ethiopia initiated a police investigation into the reported abuse.

In Russia, years of advocacy by us and our partners led to the first instance in Russian history when an individual was charged with a hate crime for an attack on an LGBTI+ person.

In 2018, Sweden's compliance with its obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racism was examined by the responsible UN oversight committee. Civil Rights Defenders submitted a shadow report and was present in Geneva at the hearing. Among other things, Civil Rights Defenders criticised Sweden for weak protection against discrimination, lack of respect for indigenous peoples' rights, and inadequate legislation against hate crime.

For several years, Civil Rights Defenders has raised concern about the inability of police officers to deal with persons with mental health issues in an adequate way and how this results in unnecessary force by the police. Civil Rights Defenders has highlighted several cases where this has led to people being killed in connection to police interventions. As a result of this work, decisions were taken by the Swedish Police Authority in 2018 to focus training efforts on building capacity among its staff to handle people with mental health issues in an adequate way.

## **Goal 3: Strengthen Local Human Rights Defenders**



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. In 2018, 39 individuals were equipped with the alarm and trained on how to use it. Today, the project includes more than 165 participants from different parts of the world.

The Defenders Database, introduced in Latin America in 2017, was launched in Kenya and Uganda in 2018. The database stores important information, such as evidence of human rights violations, and reduces the risk of valuable material being destroyed in the case of an attack.

Through Civil Rights Defenders' Emergency Fund we support human rights defenders at risk who need help quickly. During 2018, we supported a total of 127 human rights defenders from 18 countries. Civil Rights Defenders also offers training to human rights defenders through the Mobile Training Center. During the year, we supported close to 300 human rights defenders and trained 28 security educators. In 2018 we also offered courses on psychosocial aspects of security, a growing concern among human rights defenders.

One of the first security trainings for human rights defenders was held in Ethiopia after the political changes and widening space for civil society in 2018. The new opening enabled us to hold meetings with local partners, human rights defenders and donors.

In Latin America, we improved security routines among several groups of Venezuelan human rights defenders, through including them in the Natalia Project and organising security trainings. Among others we cooperated with a network of defenders in the state of Tachira on the border with Colombia, where the security situation is extremely difficult. We also held capacity building trainings for Cuban human rights defenders in Colombia.

With Civil Rights Defenders' support, Academics for Peace established a secretariat to coordinate their activities. Academics for Peace is a group of academicians who were dismissed and prosecuted after issuing a statement calling for peace in the Kurdish regions of Turkey. The secretariat, named Together, now functions as an umbrella structure for all Academics for Peace. It coordinates the work of Solidarity Academies, established in different cities by Academics for Peace, organises trainings, informal teaching activities, seminars and workshops, and informs members about funding opportunities. It also coordinates solidarity actions when a member of the group faces legal and/or other types of harassment.



WE EMPOWER PEOPLE

During the year, we continued our work to empower human rights defenders advancing LGBTI+ rights. In Serbia, we opened Pride Info Center in central Belgrade. This is the first public LGBTI+ space where people can get relevant information about LGBTI+ events, organisations and research. Since launching, Pride Info Center hosted over 200 events including community talks, exhibitions, performances, debates and discussions by LGBTI+ organisations in Serbia and the wider region. Over 15 000 people visited Pride Info Center during the first year of its work. In Russia, we marked the tenth anniversary of Queerfest in St. Petersburg and helped organise one of the first LGBTI+ cultural festivals in Moscow.

### **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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