

## **EFFECT REPORT 2015**

Civil Rights Defenders is an independent expert organisation founded in Stockholm, Sweden in 1982, with the aim of defending human rights, and 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 (HRDs) in repressive countries. We defend people's civil and political rights, and empower HRDs 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 HRDs at risk by providing trainings, technical and financial assistance, networking platforms and peer support.

#### *Vision and long-term targets*

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

#### *People are empowered to claim their human rights.*

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

#### *States take responsibility for the fulfilment of human rights.*

- The legislation in regard to human rights is improved.
- The implementation of human rights is improved.

#### *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 organizational context appears your organization?**

Civil Rights Defenders' Head Office is located in Stockholm, Sweden. We have five field offices with local staff in Belgrade, Sarajevo, Pristina, Tirana and Chisinau as well as a presence in South East Asia. 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 partners*

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 NGOs. 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 in order to be able to operate at all in highly repressive regimes.

Within our partnerships, Civil Rights Defenders provides a combination of long-term financial assistance, capacity building, lobbying and advocacy support, emergency assistance and preventive security support. Together with our partner organisations we have a presence in the field that allows us to closely follow developments in the country and in relation to the problems targeted by our projects. Our collaborations aim to empower our partners and ourselves, in order for us to be able to achieve as big an impact as possible for our joint efforts. We take part in the development as well as implement and follow up joint actions. We strive to be a reliable partner with a long-term and regional perspective.

### *Sweden*

Since the Civil Rights Defenders was established in 1982 (with the name Swedish Helsinki Committee), human rights work in Sweden has been part of the mandate of the organisation. While the main focus has been international, substantial work has been done to defend people's civil and political rights also in Sweden. As a human rights organisation based in Sweden it is key to also address human rights concerns in our back yard. 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.

Our work in Sweden aims at the full implementation of civil and political rights. This will be achieved by demanding 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. We have a clear legal focus that can be characterized as legal activism, where the law and judicial mechanisms are used as tools to influence policy and achieve change.

## **3. What strategies do you have achieving your goals?**

We believe that all countries need a strong civil society that scrutinizes 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:

*Support to human rights defenders:*

We use our international network of human rights defenders to empower our partner organisations and networks. We seek to draw attention to the situation for human rights defenders in the countries where we work. We support them with training, resources and expertise to protect the space in which they act and to help strengthen their performance.

*Monitoring and accountability:*

Together with our partners we monitor the state authorities and demand accountability when the legislation, or the way it is applied, is in conflict with international human rights standards. We pursue legal proceedings against the states and those in power that violate human rights.

*Lobbying and advocacy:*

We conduct lobbying and advocacy work aimed at national and international decision makers. In countries with authoritarian regimes, we reach out with independent information to people through alternative media.

#### **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 recognized 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 organization and participate in the decisions about the organization'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 specialized staff with competence in administration, fundraising, communication, economy and methodology in the Head Office is in Stockholm, Sweden. We have field offices with local staff in Belgrade, Sarajevo, Pristina, Tirana and Chisinau. In 2015, we established a presence in South East Asia. The number of employees at the end of 2015 was 44.

*Partners*

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.

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. We work with organisations and individual human rights defenders globally in order to achieve our goals. We only work with non-governmental, religiously and politically independent organisations that do not use or advocate violence.

#### *Funding*

Sida, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, is the main donor for our international work. We are since 2013 beneficiaries of Swedish Postcode Lottery and receive project funding from National Endowment for Democracy, Open Society Foundations, the Oak Foundation, Swedish Institute, the Foreign Ministry and the Stieg Larsson Foundation. We have Swedish 90-accounts and are a member of Swedish Fundraising Council, FRIL. Our accounting is supervised by Svensk Insamlingskontroll.

#### *Private donors*

In addition to the support from institutional donors, we receive invaluable donations from members, individuals and, several people, companies and organisations contribute to our work by offering their services and expertise free of charge or at a reduced cost.

Civil Rights Defenders has a number of corporate partners; RBK Communications, EU Advokatbyrå Landvall, Time Advokatbyrå, White & Case, Faggot Apparel, Afonso Wilson, Djurönäset Hotel & Conference, EricEricson-Hallen. Civil Rights Defenders also has a three-year partnership agreement with H&M, operated since January 2014, and Millicom, which began in 2015. The donations and the reduced costs allow us to fund our ongoing human rights work and in particular to ensure assistance is available for vulnerable human rights defenders who operate in some of the world's most repressive states.

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

The context in the countries we are active in is often characterized 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 realize 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 operationalized 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 organizations. 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 2015 we established a presence in South East Asia, which will strengthen our work in the region, as well as initiated a new programme covering the region East and Horn of Africa. During 2015 we also initiated the process of approaching U.S. donors and stakeholders in order to further reduce the dependency on funding from governmental sources.

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

Civil Rights Defenders have during the year worked together with long-term partners in Eastern Europe, Western Balkans, South East Asia and East and Horn of Africa, providing funding support, monitoring human rights developments, demanded reforms, justice and accountability. We have supported HRDs with trainings, technical and financial assistance, networking platforms and peer support and strengthened the capacities of our partners.

In 2015, we provided over 75 trainings for approximately 1200 human rights defenders. In addition to this over 160 HRDs took part of a comprehensive capacity building programme during the conference Defenders Days, arranged in Stockholm in April. We had over 30 human rights events, including public seminars, and released 4 reports and 13 op-eds.

In 2013 we launched two projects of particular significance, the Natalia project, the world's first personal assault alarm system for human rights defenders, and the capacity building conference Defenders Days – Empowering Human Rights Defenders at Risk. These two projects has, since launch, grown steadily and become two efficient and effective tools when it comes to our work empowering human rights defenders.

#### *Natalia Project*

In 2013, we launched the first personal assault alarm for human rights defenders at Risk – the Natalia project, named after Natalia Estemirova, who was abducted and murdered in 2009 in Chechnya. Those of high risk of being kidnapped wear the alarm on their wrists and in case of attack, activate the alarm by pulling the wristband and a distress signal goes off. Once activated, a signal contacting the exact GPS location is sent via mobile phone network to our headquarters as well as to people in the vicinity who can immediately come to rescue. The ability to act rapidly in situations like these can literally be the difference between life and death. Within minutes of attack, the signal is also sent out to global social media platforms, allowing people everywhere to get involved and put pressure on the regime in the event of an attack. This is an innovative mechanism in support of human rights, using the growing access to Internet and cell phones in support for human rights defenders at risk.

Apart from protecting human rights defenders through a personal alarm and a security plan relevant for the whole organisation, the Natalia project provides strong moral support as it makes our

partners connected to the world. In 2013 we developed the system, which includes a 24/7 on-call duty, and trainings connected to the alarm.

The first year we managed to include 13 human rights defenders (from Eastern Europe, South East Asia and West Africa) in the project. By the end of 2015, after having conducted security trainings for 27 new participants of the Natalia project (from Bosnia, Tajikistan, Myanmar, Serbia, Belarus and Kenya), there are now a total of 70 human rights defenders that has been included in the project since launch.

#### *Defenders' Days – Empowering Human Rights Defenders at Risk*

Defenders' Days - Empowering Human Rights Defenders at Risk is a capacity building conference with and for human rights defenders, arranged annually in Stockholm since 2013. The purpose of Defenders' Days is three folded: To strengthen HRDs at risk in their work; support cooperation, networking and exchange of knowledge among HRDs; and to strengthen the international recognition of human rights defenders at risk.

Human Rights Defenders must have the means to monitor, document, publish and advocate for human rights, and be as safe as possible when doing so. Empowering these actors can also help motivate other individuals – within civil society, and government – to challenge the authoritarian climate and advocate for change.

The event is marked by inspirational, educational and forward-looking elements. Our ambition is that the participating HRDs will leave Stockholm with enhanced knowledge in necessary topics as well as a feeling of strong moral support from the international community.

#### *Civil Rights Defender of the Year Award*

Since 2013 Civil Rights Defenders have 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. Their work is carried out without the use of violence and within an independent human rights organisation. Our hope is that the prize will bring light to the work of the courageous laureate and enable long-term strengthening of the organisations' important work for human rights.

The price is handed out during the conference Defenders' Days. In connection to the award ceremony Civil Rights Defenders release a report on the human rights situation in the country where the laureate is active. The report is distributed to Swedish and international press and is used in our communication material.

The winner of 2015's Civil Rights Defender of the Year Award was Ms. Nguyễn Ngọc Như Quỳnh, who is Coordinator for the Vietnamese Bloggers Network and well known for her use of social media to speak out against injustices and human rights abuses in Vietnam.