



**CIVIL  
RIGHTS  
DEFENDERS**

**STRATEGY  
2023-2030**

# CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS

## 2023-2030

*Civil Rights Defenders' vision, mission, core values, and brand, together with our strategic goals, define the strategic direction of our organisation 2023-2030.*

### VISION

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

### MISSION

To defend civil and political rights together with human rights defenders, and 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.

### CORE VALUES

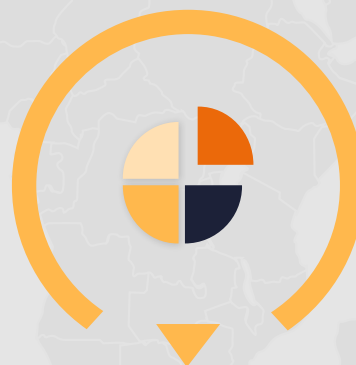


### STRATEGIC GOALS



#### SECURITY

Human rights defenders are secure.



#### CAPACITY

Human rights defenders have the capacity to defend human rights and democracy.



#### ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholders in society take action for human rights and democracy.



#### ACCOUNTABILITY

Duty bearers are held accountable.

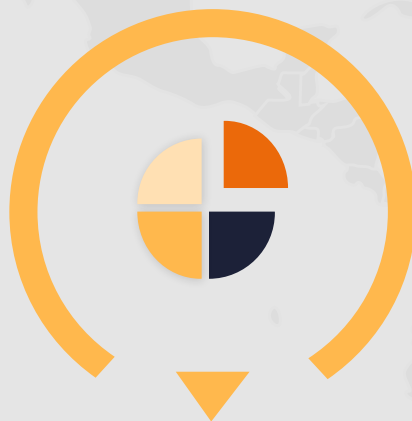
# STRATEGIC GOALS

## 2023-2030



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### CAPACITY

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### ENGAGEMENT

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### ACCOUNTABILITY

Duty bearers are held accountable.

# STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

## 2023-2030



### SECURITY

Human rights defenders are secure.

#### OBJECTIVES

Civil Rights Defenders has the capacity and resources to minimise security risks and mitigate the effects of human rights violations.

Partners have the capacity and resources to minimise security risks and mitigate the effects of human rights violations.



### CAPACITY

Human rights defenders have the capacity to defend human rights and democracy.

#### OBJECTIVES

Civil Rights Defenders provides innovative, flexible, and defender centric partner support.

Civil Rights Defenders is a resilient and sustainable organisation fit for purpose.

Civil Rights Defenders is focused on using tools, methods, and technologies that are innovative, cutting edge, or data driven.



### ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholders in society take action for human rights and democracy.

#### OBJECTIVES

Civil Rights Defenders and partners expand decision makers' narrative in favour of human rights and democracy.

Civil Rights Defenders has engagement driven working methods and creates clear pathways to action for stakeholders to get involved.

Civil Rights Defenders is highly respected as a defender centric human rights organisation, specifically for our work in the areas of security, capacity, and accountability.



### ACCOUNTABILITY

Duty bearers are held accountable.

#### OBJECTIVES

Civil Rights Defenders develops clear and efficient tools and methods to hold duty bearers to account.

Duty bearers responsible for human rights are held accountable by Civil Rights Defenders or our partners.

There is a strong international/ regional framework for the advancement of human rights.

Those affected by human rights violations have access to justice.

# STATEMENT OF DIRECTION

## 2023-2030

**Civil Rights Defenders is an independent human rights organisation. We defend people's civil and political rights and partner with human rights defenders worldwide.**

### BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Democracy and human rights are in decline, and human rights defenders in all parts of the world face a panorama of challenges. Some are more present in one country, but less in another. Some are more relevant to defenders of indigenous rights, LGBTI+ rights, or environmental rights, while others are more relevant to urban human rights lawyers. The challenges we face come in many different shapes and form.

A defining feature of the future is uncertainty. But in preparation for the development of our strategy for 2023-2030, Civil Rights Defenders conducted a future trends analysis in 2022 of the various contexts in which we operate and on where we see the global situation for democracy and human rights heading.

Our key conclusion is that the current decline of democracy and human rights that we have witnessed will continue and likely accelerate. Civil society and human rights defenders will be under increasing and varying types of pressure in many countries. This includes for example, increasing regulatory and legal pressure, discrimination based on gender and the intersection of diverse identities, violence, imprisonment, and public

ostracism, alongside other new methods for repression. Further, human rights defenders must contend with changing funding patterns and a rapidly evolving digital environment.

Against the backdrop of climate change and its disparate impact, there is also a new global rivalry emerging between autocratic and democratic states. We see a clear risk of a shift away from multilateralism and the international system built on international law towards a stronger emphasis on geopolitical interests. On top of already existing crises, this creates fertile ground for more wars, conflict, refugees, migration, and instability, which will impact the work of human rights defenders.

Stopping and reversing the decline of human rights and democracy globally is possible. But doing so requires that Civil Rights Defenders and our partners around the world become stronger and more innovative than ever in the years to come. Authoritarianism is contagious and authoritarian regimes listen and learn from each other, sharing information and tactics. Human rights defenders and democratic forces must do the same by working together to build a global human rights movement that is powerful and resilient.

We have developed our strategy for 2023-2030 to meet these challenges. It is based on input from our global network of partners, and builds on our vision, mission, core values, and theory of change. It describes our contribution to strengthening the global movement for democracy and human rights through delivering on our four strategic goals: security, capacity, engagement, and accountability.



### OUR VISION

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

### OUR MISSION

Our mission is to defend civil and political rights together with human rights defenders and 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.

### OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

Our theory of change is the stable foundation on which we have developed our strategic goals for the 2023-2030 strategy period. It describes Civil Rights Defenders' contribution to the pursuit of our vision and the outcomes we see as necessary for achieving that vision, which in turn connect to our outputs, activities, and inputs. Our theory of change is described in detail [here](#).

### OUR CORE VALUES

Our core values guide how we act internally towards each other as well as externally in collaborations with partners and other stakeholders. Our core values are described in detail [here](#).

## OUR STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Building on our theory of change, our strategic goals are our ambitions for the duration of the 2023-2030 strategy period. Each of the four strategic goals reflect the four output areas in our theory of change, which are security, capacity, engagement, and accountability.

Each goal also contains objectives which describe more specifically what we aim to have achieved by the end of the strategy period. The objectives will be measured using key results and will be followed up on a quarterly basis. The objectives and key results will be reviewed yearly to make sure they are still relevant and in line with the organisation's ambitions and current status.

### **Security: Human rights defenders are secure**

- Civil Rights Defenders has the capacity and resources to minimise security risks and mitigate the effects of human rights violations.
- Partners have the capacity and resources to minimise security risks and mitigate the effects of human rights violations.

### **Capacity: Human rights defenders have the capacity to defend human rights and democracy**

- Civil Rights Defenders provides innovative, flexible, and defender centric partner support.
- Civil Rights Defenders is a resilient and sustainable organisation fit for purpose.
- Civil Rights Defenders is focused on using tools, methods, and technologies that are innovative, cutting edge, or data driven.

### **Engagement: Stakeholders in society take action for human rights and democracy**

- Civil Rights Defenders and partners expand decision makers' narrative in favour of human rights and democracy.
- Civil Rights Defenders has engagement driven working methods and creates clear pathways to action for stakeholders to get involved.
- Civil Rights Defenders is highly respected as a defender centric human rights organisation, specifically for our work in the areas of security, capacity, and accountability.

### **Accountability: Duty bearers are held accountable**

- Civil Rights Defenders develops clear and efficient tools and methods to hold duty bearers to account.
- Duty bearers responsible for human rights are held accountable by Civil Rights Defenders or our partners.
- There is a strong international/regional framework for the advancement of human rights.
- Those affected by human rights violations have access to justice.

## **DEVELOPING OUR ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITIES**

To effectively deliver on our strategic goals and objectives, Civil Rights Defenders needs to develop our organisational capabilities. In this we aim to take a balanced approach that ensures we can develop the organisation at the same time as we deliver on our commitments, including our action plans on gender and the environment. This will be reflected in "focus areas" which we will apply as a tool to address specific areas in which we need to develop as an organisation.

We aim to have no more than three to five focus areas at any given time during the strategy period – all different in scope and duration – and will develop a road map for each focus area describing in detail the path from where we are to where we want to be.

Progress on our focus areas will be tracked on a quarterly basis and, as we complete them, new focus areas will be developed in line with our strategy as needed.

## **OUR COMMITMENT**

Our strategy for 2023-2030 is our commitment to stay true to the values that have been in our DNA ever since Gerald and Monica Nagler founded us as an independent organisation 40 years ago at their kitchen table in Stockholm as part of the global Helsinki Movement.

Through ups and downs, Civil Rights Defenders has always worked to advance civil and political rights together with human rights defenders around the world, because we believe that strong civil societies are a vital component of democratic societies, and that human rights defenders play a central role in the struggle for democracy and human rights.

Today, we stand before a historic choice. We can act to defend democracy, human rights, justice, and the rule of law or we can stand aside and allow authoritarianism to advance further and further, subjugating ever more people.

**We choose to act, and the time to act is now.**

# CORE VALUES

Our core values guide how we act internally towards each other as well as externally in collaborations with partners and other stakeholders.



## COMMITMENT

**We count on you – you can count on us.**

C

We are dedicated to our vision and mission rooted in universal human rights. Building lasting relationships with brave human rights defenders and supporters of our cause, we are in it for the long-haul. We do not give up and we never give in.

## INTEGRITY

**We stand our ground.**

I

We are independent, and we resist undue pressure. We get our facts straight, always anchored in first-hand experiences and informed analysis provided by our partners. We uphold high ethical standards and use our position with care.

## TOGETHER

**We empower each other.**

T

We seek partnerships and collaborations. With mutual understanding and respect for each other, we work in a participatory and inclusive way, guided by a spirit of equality. We are only as strong as our colleagues and partners.

## INNOVATION

**We find new solutions to old problems.**

I

Our way of working is innovative to the core. We are proactive and bold in exploring new ways to support human rights defenders. With flexibility and creativity, we respond efficiently to emerging needs. Challenges are opportunities to learn, we make every effort to improve and be one step ahead.

# THEORY OF CHANGE

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

IMPACT

OUTCOMES

OUTPUTS

ACTIVITIES

INPUTS

**THE GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT IS POWERFUL AND RESILIENT**

Human rights defenders are safe when working, have the capacity they need, get support, and have impact.

**DECISION MAKERS TAKE ACTION TO IMPROVE RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

Human rights defenders shift the power balance from autocrats to democratic actors so that decision makers, including political, corporate, legal, and in international organisations, take action for human rights.

**HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATORS ARE HELD ACCOUNTABLE**

Duty bearers on all levels and in all sectors, including international, state, regional, local, public and private, are held to account in relation to their human rights commitments. Those affected get redress.

**SECURITY**

- Human rights defenders manage security effectively.
- Human rights defenders feel we have their back.

**CAPACITY**

- Human rights defenders manage human rights work effectively.
- Human rights defenders have broad organisational capacity.

**ENGAGEMENT**

- Individuals, civil society, decision makers, and corporations engage to promote and demand human rights and challenge oppressive practices.

**ACCOUNTABILITY**

- Human rights defenders influence legal decisions, legislation, and practices that improve the respect for human rights.
- Individuals have access to justice.

**WE PROVIDE SECURITY AND CAPACITY BUILDING TO MEET FUTURE DEMANDS**

- **Tools:** documentation, risk, security, and crisis management.
- **Support:** moral, legal, psychosocial, networks, and grants.
- **Trainings:** human rights, security, legal, digitalisation, gender, building efficient organisations, grant raising, strategy development, good governance, and coaching.

**WE ADVOCATE THE RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND WE MOBILISE SUPPORT**

- **Legal advocacy:** strategic litigation, lawsuits, court cases, hearings, legal advice and support, together with partners and on our own.
- **Political advocacy:** campaigns, media presence, reports, meetings, and partnerships.
- **Public advocacy:** campaigns, shaping opinions, mobilisation, fundraising, and partnerships.

**PEOPLE**

- Staff presence in the regions where we work
- Staff development processes
- Internal staff community
- Staff members with diverse experiences and backgrounds

**CORE VALUES**

- Commitment
- Integrity
- Together
- Innovation

**EXPERTISE**

- Civil and political rights
- Legal expertise
- Human rights contexts
- Organisation building, HR, IT, and finance
- Communication, advocacy, and fundraising
- Gender equality and transformative approaches

**RESOURCES**

- Sustainable and diversified income streams
- Partner network
- IT-systems and technology
- Working environment
- Working routines
- Quality assurance processes

**BRAND**

- Respected brand, well-known for our:
  - Defender centric approach
  - Human rights expertise
  - Bold and engaging work





# THEORY OF CHANGE EXPLAINED



**Civil Rights Defenders' theory of change describes how we contribute to the pursuit of our vision by changing the human rights situation in the regions where we work.**

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## CHANGE

Our vision is a world of democratic societies in which we all enjoy our civil and political rights, and we believe that strong civil societies are a vital component for achieving democratic societies. Human rights defenders play a central role in the struggle for human rights and democracy and building strong civil societies. To achieve our desired impact and positive change in relation to human rights, the security and capacity of human rights defenders is therefore crucial.

In the short-term, operating within a safe personal, psychosocial, and digital space is key for ensuring that human rights defenders can do their work. Human rights defenders who know how to analyse and mitigate security risks are better equipped to conduct their work in a safe way and are better positioned to develop the capacity necessary to effect change. Capacities to engage stakeholder and mobilise communities are particularly important, because these enable people to collectively advocate for respect for human rights, demand accountability, and spur democratisation.

In the mid- to long-term, better security and improved capacity for human rights defenders

leads to a more resilient human rights movement which is effective in engaging and mobilising so that decision makers take action for human rights, and duty bearers and human rights violators are held to account.

Civil Rights Defenders contributes with various resources, expertise, values, our network of partners, and other key inputs, to support and organise activities that lead to both short- and long-term outcomes along these lines. We work together with human rights defenders around the world as part of a global human rights movement because the aggregation of our efforts strengthens our contribution to the achievement of these outcomes.

## OUR NETWORK OF PARTNERS

Civil Rights Defenders works with human rights defenders who face threats and attacks which affect their civil and political rights, or who have the potential to positively impact the human rights situation in their context.

Civil Rights Defenders adds value by organising partner support activities and by providing grants. In addition to these Activity Partners, Civil Rights Defenders cooperates regularly with Strategic Partners to amplify the impact of our own human rights work or to strengthen our work with Activity Partners.

The organisation also has Fundraising Partners who, via contractually formulated agreements, contribute financially or pro-bono to

our work. In our theory of change, all these partners contribute to delivering change together with us.

## OUR APPROACH TO GENDER AND INTERSECTIONALITY

People's experiences differ depending on who they are or are perceived as being. Unequal power relations and structures based on gender, ethnic identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or other, obstruct people's equal access to their rights. Human rights defenders face differentiated threats and violence depending on gender and the intersection of diverse identities. Civil Rights Defenders therefore considers and acts on these differences when supporting partner organisations to redefine and alter power balances.

## IMPACT

Civil Rights Defenders' overarching vision is "a world of democratic societies where we all enjoy our civil and political rights".

## OUTCOMES

Our contribution to the pursuit of our vision is dependent on achieving three major outcomes together with our partners: building "a global human rights movement that is powerful and resilient", contributing to settings where "decision makers take action to improve the respect for human rights", and ensuring that "human rights violators are held accountable".

## OUTPUTS

Achieving the three major outcomes requires that Civil Rights Defenders and our partners generate outputs that contribute to them. We do this by providing support for human rights defenders in the form of measures that increase their security and capacity. We also work together with our partners to engage stakeholders in support of human rights and to hold those responsible for human rights violations to account.

Therefore, our four main output areas are:

- **Security:** actions we take to ensure the security of our operations (internal) and protection for partners (external) which enables human rights defenders to defend their rights.
- **Capacity:** we support organisations in developing and strengthening their skills, expertise, administration, and advocacy work. Capacity is also about our internal capacity to deliver.
- **Engagement:** work we do to engage the public, civil society, corporations, decision makers, and media to take action for human rights based on their convictions and conscience.
- **Accountability:** actions we take to hold duty bearers to account for not fulfilling formal human rights commitments (under law, contractual agreements, or self-commitments) to respect, protect and promote human rights, or for violating human rights.

## ACTIVITIES

To generate these outputs, Civil Rights Defenders engages in activities that “provide security and capacity building to meet future demands” and that contribute to “advocating the respect for human rights and mobilise support” both within our organisation and for the human rights defenders we partner with.

## INPUTS

The inputs Civil Rights Defenders provides to deliver on our activities include people, values, expertise, financial and organisational resources, and a strong brand.

## THE ARROW

The arrow represents the scale between attribution and contribution, where results on the activities level can be directly attributed to the work of Civil Rights Defenders. Higher up on the scale, change is the result of our contribution as well as the contribution of other actors.



## CORE ASSUMPTIONS OF OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

Our theory of change makes some key assumptions. These include that:

- Ensuring individual and organisational security, capacity, and resilience of civil society actors conducting human rights work is a fundamental prerequisite for the construction of democratic societies.
- When human rights defenders and organisations work within a safe and enabling space and have access to organisational skills, they become resilient and able to engage other society actors in demanding power shifts in favour of human rights and democratisation.
- If capacities, attitudes, behaviours, and skills of many individuals working with human rights are transformed, human rights defenders are more effective in building a critical mass of people that contributes to positive change.
- If individuals and communities understand their rights, they are willing to participate in the development of policy and practices which affect their lives.
- Providing human rights defenders with increased organisational and advocacy capacities results in increased ability of communities to be effective in their human rights work.
- Engagement drives mobilisation and generates resources – when different societal actors are sufficiently engaged in demanding respect for human rights and democratisation, they play an active role in holding duty-bearers to account for the realisation of their responsibilities.
- Engaged social actors contribute to foster decision maker’s accountability for respecting and protecting democracy and human rights. Establishing effective accountability mechanisms therefore decisively deters human right violations.