

ADVOCACY IN RESTRICTED SPACES: A TOOLKIT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS



FOR EMBATTLED CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS



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The Lifeline Embattled CSO Assistance Fund provides emergency financial assistance to civil society organizations (CSOs) under threat or attack and rapid response advocacy and resiliency grants to support CSOs in responding to broader threats against civic space. For more information, please visit <https://www.csolifeline.org> or contact info@CSOLifeline.org.

The Lifeline Fund for Embattled CSOs is a consortium led by **Freedom House** including six other international organizations: **CIVICUS**, Front Line Defenders, **FORUM-ASIA**, the **International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL)**; **People in Need (PIN)**, and the **Swedish International Liberal Centre (SILC)**.

Above photo: A demonstrator protests China's treatment of ethnic Uighur Muslims, in front of the Chinese consulate in Istanbul

Photo: OZAN KOSE/AFP via Getty Images

Cover photo: Tunisia's youth movement 'Fech Nestannev' (What are we waiting for?) protests high cost of living






Photo: Yassine Gaidi/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

■ INTRODUCTION



FOR EMBATTLED CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

The **Lifeline Fund for Embattled CSOs** was established in 2011¹ to provide support to groups targeted because of their human rights work. Since that time, there are more restrictions on civil society in many countries. Freedom House’s Freedom in the World report has documented a ten year decline in democracy and fundamental freedoms globally. Governments, powerful individuals, and other groups are increasingly targeting civil society organizations (CSOs) and individuals who advocate for fundamental freedoms. Restrictions on civic space include:

-  legislation restricting foreign funding
-  registration regulations
-  misuse of terrorism laws
-  travel bans, and
-  online harassment and smear campaigns.

These are just a few of the tactics used to silence and intimidate CSOs and human rights defenders who seek to challenge the status quo. This guide is for them – activists, CSOs and social movements who want to explore tactics and strategies to push back against these restrictions in hostile contexts around the world.

If you can’t meet publicly because the government has imposed a prohibition on gatherings of more than five people, how do you engage in advocacy inside your country? Is it even possible? We want to help you find a way to say “yes” to this question!

Based on real experiences of Lifeline consortium partners and other CSOs, this guide aims to provide a “menu of options” of various tactics that can be used in a difficult or restrictive context. This guide provides inspiring case studies and concrete examples to demonstrate that advocacy is possible, and there are ways to do it without exposing yourself to a high degree of risk.

What this guide IS: a menu of options to encourage new ideas about conducting advocacy in difficult contexts.

What this guide IS NOT: a one-size-fits-all approach to advocacy that can be applied anywhere.





WHAT IS LIFELINE?

The **Lifeline Embattled CSO Assistance Fund** was established in 2011 as a multi-donor response to closing civic space and a global decline in fundamental freedoms. The fund is now supported by 19 governments: Australia, Benin, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mongolia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States, and Uruguay. The Lifeline Fund is administered by a consortium of seven international NGOs that provide short-term grants to civil society organizations (CSOs) facing threats due to their human rights work and working in restrictive spaces. To date, Lifeline has provided more than 12 million dollars in support to more than 2000 CSOs in 107 countries.

¹ Please note that the projects highlighted in this toolkit describe advocacy projects that are often broader than the types of initiatives that Lifeline can support. Lifeline’s advocacy mandate is limited to initiatives that defend or promote freedom of association and assembly (FOAA) for civil society organizations.

DEFINITIONS

This guide uses a broad definition of “**restrictive**” civil society space: **situations where the ability of CSOs to freely assemble, associate, and express themselves is significantly limited.** These restrictions can take many different forms.

-  Governments may enact repressive legislation to limit or criminalize civil society activity such as restrictions on receiving foreign funds, restrictive association laws, or anti-terror laws that are misused against peaceful groups with no links to terrorism.
-  Governments may use legal or administrative harassment against CSOs as a way to stop them by taking their time, motivation, and resources.
-  In more direct attacks on civil society, police or security forces may use violence, detention, and imprisonment.
-  Non-state groups—such as criminal gangs, corrupt business interests, and drug traffickers—can restrict civil society organizations through use of false legal charges, intimidation, surveillance, and direct violence.

Since the kind of restrictions CSOs face will vary widely, the kind of advocacy approach that will be most effective will differ from place to place.

Many of our partners stressed the **importance of intersectionality** in understanding these issues in an advocacy context. An intersectional approach means understanding how the intersection of different identities (e.g. race, gender or sexual identity, age, ability, etc.) affects the vulnerability of activists and advocacy campaigns. In many cases, when social movements have adopted an intersectional approach, it has helped build energy and protection through diversity and numbers. Further, there are countries that may have permissive operating environments for civil society broadly speaking, but then create obstacles for minority and marginalized groups. Intersectional advocacy can help achieve policy goals that include these minority or marginalized groups to access their full rights in such contexts.

ADVOCACY is the sum of strategy and tactics to:

- Achieve a desired change in policy or practice,
- Influence the decision-making process at a local, regional, or international level, or
- Challenge and change citizens' or community leaders' perception on core issues.

INTERSECTIONALITY

- Intersectionality is both a lens for seeing the world of oppression and a tool for eradicating it.
- Intersectionality takes into consideration the overlapping impact of multiple forms of discrimination, including those based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and ability.



Peasant women lead 100,000-strong march in Brasília, Brazil

Photo: Andressa Zumpano via Midia Ninja/
Collaborative Media Coverage

■ USING THIS GUIDE

There are many valuable resources on how to conduct advocacy that provide a detailed, step-by-step approach. These approaches include best practices for identifying stakeholders, developing a message, or planning a timeline. We will not go deeply into these topics (for more information, see [Annex E](#)), but we do want to provide an introductory framework to help CSOs think about how to develop an advocacy action plan.

To provide this planning framework, we draw extensively on the 2018 publication by PACT, “Politically Smart Advocacy: A guide to Effective civil Society Advocacy for Sustainable Development”. The

PACT guide provides a more detailed explanation of each of the following steps: <https://www.pactworld.org/library/politically-smart-advocacy-manual>. Our heartfelt gratitude to PACT for developing this great resource.

In [Part 1](#), we present the framework for advocacy planning. In [Part 2](#), the guide provides a tactics toolbox that can be used in restrictive contexts where civil society is under threat. In [Part 3](#), we provide additional resources to assist with your planning. The primary focus of this toolkit is found in [Part 2](#) with detailed case studies illustrating 10 key tactics that can be used in a range of contexts.



Bahraini anti-government protesters flash victory signs at Pearl Square in Manama

Photo: JOSEPH EID/AFP via Getty Images

PART 1

ADVOCACY PLANNING

Implement and evaluate. Follow the plan. Then assess what has been done and what might need to change to be more effective moving forward.

Select advocacy tactics. How can you approach your selected targets with the appropriate messages to ensure your outreach is most effective?

Identify your goal and objectives. What is the change that you are seeking? What intermediate objectives help advance the overall goal?



Define stakeholders, targets, and “asks”. Are there existing champions and allies? Who should be the target of your advocacy? What exactly are you asking people to do?

Assess risk and develop your advocacy strategy. What strategies are most appropriate, given the level of risk, available resources, goals, and intermediate objectives? This is your Advocacy Action Plan.

Develop the message. How can you talk about your proposed change and create a message that will motivate people to act?

STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Carefully diagnose the problem and set realistic, achievable goals over a concrete period of time. Goal-setting that is **clear** and **focused** is essential for any advocacy initiative to be successful, particularly when the restrictions on CSOs are severe.

This section explores setting goals in restrictive civil society contexts. While it is important to think about the big picture, the most successful advocacy efforts start by narrowing down a broad goal to something more focused and achievable. In narrowing down broad goals, you can identify short-term objectives and map the steps to reach your longer-term goals. This is particularly

important if you are operating in a restrictive setting where problems will happen, and it might be easy to feel defeated or unmotivated.

Narrow down the goal based on opportunities

Example: Instead of an advocacy initiative that calls to get rid of all repressive NGO legislation, an organization could focus on finding allies in the government organization that administers NGO registration. Bureaucratic allies might be able to help change the registration requirements.

Goals must be focused and achievable

Example: Instead of asking to get rid of restrictive anti-terrorism legislation to guarantee freedom of expression online, organizations

could push for the adoption of a separate regulatory framework that provides safeguards for online expression.

Identify small steps

Example: In an effort to change the reputation of civil society and combat negative stereotypes of CSOs as “foreign agents”, a campaign could start by building relationships with one or two key media outlets to build trust and credibility.

For example, imagine a country where environmental activists are in danger because private companies want to silence them. A local environmental CSO might have the long-term goal that rights’ violators will be held accountable and that indigenous land rights will be respected. However, this might be too ambitious in their context. What might they do to narrow the goal based on opportunities?

If this is a relatively decentralized government, an achievable goal might be building provincial-level support for the protection of human rights defenders. Organizations could approach elected or appointed officials to ask for commitments on a local or regional level to protect these indigenous defenders. If successful, the next small step in the campaign could be to gain support among parliamentarians for a national-level framework. Only after the CSO and its partners have small successes and develop political allies would they try to hold violators accountable.

STEP 2: DEFINE STAKEHOLDERS, TARGETS, AND “ASKS”

Narrowing down your goal and defining objectives will help you identify **WHO** you need to target in your advocacy initiative. In some cases, advocacy initiatives may target elected or appointed officials. Other cases may target political party leadership, traditional community leaders, religious leaders, church institutions, academia, the media, or other influencers. Defining a very specific goal is the first step in your strategy and helps you decide who or which institutions to target for change.



Markiyan Matsekh plays the piano in Kiev, Ukraine

Photo: © Andrew Meakovsky, Oleg Matsekh and Marikiyan Matsekh

Defining Stakeholders and Targets. A stakeholder analysis will help you understand who might be positively or negatively impacted by the issue and who might support your campaign beyond your inner circle. There are a variety of different methods and tools available for identifying and examining stakeholders. A simple and straightforward analysis begins by making a list of those stakeholders with clear or obvious connections to the issue. Try to think of groups positively or negatively affected by the issue or those who have influence over the policy. Write each stakeholder down into columns that roughly correspond to their position (see example table below). For a more detailed stakeholder mapping template, see [Annex E](#). For example, the following might be a mapping for an effort to adopt a new human rights defenders bill.






Supportive	Unclear	Opposed
Community members	Regional governor	Traditional religious leaders
Women’s rights groups	Minister of Local Government	Ruling party members of parliament
Labor unions	Business leaders	

Once you have completed the mapping, you can identify your key targets and asks.

Targets are specific individuals or group of people with direct influence over the advocacy goal or objective.

Asks are what the campaign wants each target to do to help achieve the objective. Some asks may be simple, such as requesting a legislator to please vote “no” on upcoming legislation. Other asks may be more complex, such as asking an existing coalition to adopt your policy platform.

Consider the following questions:






-  Who do you want to influence?
-  Who will want to work with you?
-  What partnerships would provide protection?
-  Who will be opposed to your efforts?
-  Will the public support your campaign?

Identifying targets and defining asks is not a one-time process. This review should be repeated several times throughout the life of an advocacy campaign as objectives change and unexpected problems and opportunities arise.

STEP 3: ASSESS RISK AND DEVELOP YOUR ADVOCACY STRATEGY

Once you have identified your specific goal and identified your targets, you need to think carefully about risk and how it informs your strategy. A strategy is the path you will follow to achieve your goal. The most important message in this section is: for CSOs operating in restrictive contexts, a **strategy must be adaptive and flexible** because of the risks. Having an adaptive strategy means you should plan opportunities to stop and re-think what is working and what isn't – and then have the flexibility to change the path to your goal when necessary.

When you develop a strategy, keep these questions in mind:

-  What are we trying to change?
-  Who do we need to convince to make that change?
-  How do we reach these decision-makers or influencers?
-  Do we need intermediaries or other connections to reach them?
-  What is the most effective (and safe) way to communicate our message?

The advocacy strategy's purpose is to create a fundamental framework for making decisions about a campaign's goals, objectives, targets, asks, and messaging. The framework will account for the local political context and help minimize risks. A clearly articulated strategy will help will help a campaign respond to unpredicted challenges that can come up in restrictive and frequently changing political contexts.



Villagers in Siem Reap, Cambodia wait for a court decision involving 12 land rights activists

Photo: © Witness

Below is an example of Team 29, an organization in Russia that used this approach to adapt its strategy based on the changing risk environment:

CASE 1: TEAM 29 AND RISK MITIGATION

*In 2015, an informal association of Russian lawyers and journalists known as **Team 29** formed in order to respond to Russia's worsening civic space. In particular, they wanted to find ways to ensure Russian citizens had access to information on sensitive issues like corruption and abuse of power. One of the founders said that when Team 29 was formed, they recognized that the kind of work they were able to do 10 years ago was now a "waste of time" because "the bodies they could engage with a decade ago no longer have any impact on the political environment". By setting an achievable goal and using an adaptive strategy, they have become one of the most effective civil society organizations in Russia.*



GOAL: To **expose and reduce corruption** in government agencies and **ensure access to information** for the Russian public on corruption and the abuse of power.



STRATEGY: Team 29 made a deliberate decision to shift away from trying to influence politicians or bureaucrats and instead focused their work on **increasing public knowledge and scrutiny** of the judicial system and **challenging the erosion of the rule of law**. Team 29 works carefully to ensure their own safety and protection in a very risky environment. Given the sensitivity of the information they use, Team 29 members have a **strict communication protocol about how and what to communicate** and keep their documents stored outside the country. Learning from past experience, they **decided not to register officially as an NGO** because they wanted to avoid being repressed under the foreign agent law.



TACTICS: To implement their strategy, Team 29 used **strategic litigation** and **innovative digital technology**. Team 29 has been successful in defending sensitive political cases involving people the state has wrongfully charged and demonized as traitors. At the same time, they launched a joint project with MediaZona called **The Eivazov Blackbox**, where court employees can anonymously speak about legal and right abuses in courts. The project created a secure platform that collects information from court clerks when they see that citizen's rights are violated or when they are pressured to do something against the law. In a place where corruption is widespread and rule of law is weakening, this kind of information is extremely sensitive and powerful; Team 29 has used **secure digital platforms** to collect such data for advocacy purposes that can increase public scrutiny and pressure.



IMPACT: By 2019, the team is taking on about 60 strategic litigation cases per year; about 15-20 cases are fairly high-profile and attract significant media attention to expose corruption and the abuse of power by government officials to the general public. Among these cases was the success in defending Svetlana Davydova, whom the authorities tried to accuse of espionage, and as a result of Team 29's efforts, the case against her was terminated. More than 30,000 people read their publications each month, and their most popular texts collect more than 100,000 views. The politicization of the judicial process is being called to account due to Team 29's strategic litigation. ■

Risk Mitigation Strategies

Be smart in planning for risk. Engaging in advocacy in a restrictive or hostile environment means that you need **to assess risk** on a constant basis and **build resiliency** for your organization and staff. For more details, see the annexes of this document. In the course of your campaign, it is likely you will discover that a certain approach has brought unwanted attention or exposed new vulnerabilities. Here are some ways to plan for that day before it happens.

Holistic risk assessment: Your risk assessment is a systematic process of exploring the possible risks that may happen as a result of your advocacy campaign. It helps you understand the risks surrounding you, your organization, your family, and those with whom you work. It is an extremely important step where you gain insight into the risk factors that might make it difficult to continue to do advocacy work. *More detailed resources on how to conduct a risk assessment are provided in [Annex A](#).*

Physical and Digital Security: One of the most important areas to explore in a risk assessment is your physical and digital security. This could include improving the security at your home or office or using more secure modes of transportation. Since an advocacy effort might make you and your staff more publicly visible, it could also include self-defense training. If you use any sort of digital technology, digital security is essential for keeping safe both communication with your audiences and your own information. Improvements could include using secure passwords to prevent hacking, protecting sensitive files, and using encrypted messaging.

Holistic security training for your staff may be needed before any initiative begins to ensure the team is well prepared and can lessen risk. *More detailed resources on best practices for digital and physical security can be found in the [Annexes A, B, C and D](#).*

Well-Being and Psycho-Social Support: Working under difficult conditions with high risk can put stress on an organization and its staff. Addressing staff burnout, chronic stress, and exposure to trauma is essential for resiliency and sustainability. Rather than thinking about well-being as an afterthought, CSOs are now starting to create space where burnout and trauma can be discussed openly

TIPS TO MITIGATE RISK

Be visible – Public visibility in your human rights work can play a role in resiliency. Protection can come from the support of your community. It also helps counter the idea that CSOs are secretly doing the work of foreigners.

Fit with local culture – Where visibility is not an option, activists can push the boundaries of permitted dissent by using acceptable social or religious customs to share advocacy materials or messages. For example, public funerals or religious festivals can be used as opportunities to share a message or organize.

Share the threat – Coordinate among several CSOs to launch a campaign or publish a sensitive report in order to move the attention away from one organization.

Face the threat – If it is safe and practical, develop a dialogue with the perpetrators of rights violations, but avoid being coopted or compromised.

Avoid the threat – Temporarily stop doing the work that is receiving negative attention (or pretend to stop doing it). Temporarily move to a safer place.

Be Highly Transparent – Authoritarian governments are increasingly targeting CSOs on financial/fraud charges. Some CSOs use radical transparency of all funding sources, as well as careful compliance with CSO regulations as a form of protection.

MARGINALIZED GROUPS FACE GREATER RISKS

Authorities work to isolate, threaten, and attack human rights defenders from or representing marginalized groups, including women, LGBTI*, and minority rights defenders in response both to their identities and their human rights work. Family and community members can add to this stigmatization, leading to greater risks for these defenders. Bearing these factors in mind when crafting a resiliency plan is essential. Many of these groups may have developed sophisticated protection mechanisms that can serve as an example to other HRDs regarding how to respond to risk.

and support can be provided. In some cases, individual counseling might be appropriate, whereas in others, peer-to-peer support groups can be effective. More detailed resources on best practices psychosocial support and well-being can be found in the Annex.

STEP 4: DEVELOP THE MESSAGE

Effective advocacy campaigns speak in a clear way to multiple audiences: public messages aim to reach the larger community or general public, while targeted messages deliver “asks” to specific stakeholders. To achieve results with your messaging, **you must know what you want to say (objectives and asks) and who you want to say it to (targets).**

To be effective, an advocacy message must be directly relevant to your audience. Regardless of whether the audience includes government officials, the public, or the media, the audience will be more inclined to respond if there is a direct connection. For example, an agriculture minister might be more open to an advocacy message about local water access rights if the issue is framed within the context of a new initiative started by his ministry. Similarly, the public often is more responsive to stories that describe people like them or issues they face. The more than you can creatively translate the advocacy message for your specific audience, the greater likelihood of success.

We discuss evidence-based advocacy later in this guide under tactics. It’s important to remember that sometimes an audience may not be moved by hard facts and figures. This does not mean you should give up your evidence-based rationale for change, but the evidence may need to be delivered within an emotional approach, such as a personal story.

STEP 5: SELECT ADVOCACY TACTICS

Once you have identified your goal and selected a strategy, you are ready to start designing a campaign’s tactics. Your **tactics** should change according to the risks in your environment.

Defining your **strategy** gives you the roadmap to reach your goal. The **tactics** you select should reflect the opportunities, challenges, and risks in your particular context. These are the actions you will take in order to implement your strategy and achieve results.

Selecting advocacy tactics is often a balancing act and there is no right answer. It is up to you and the campaign to use your best judgement in choosing the best possible tactic given your current understanding of the context, available resources, and risks.

Keep reading and you will learn about a lot of different tactics. Some of these ideas may not be practical in your situation, but others might be the right fit. Successful advocacy strategies will use more than one tactic, and tactics may need to be changed if the context or risk changes, or if the tactic just isn’t working the way you thought it would.

In **Part 2** of this guide, we will provide an explanation and present successful case studies illustrating the following 10 tactics:

- Tactic A.** Using an Alternative Entry Point for Influence
- Tactic B.** Identifying a Less Sensitive Issue
- Tactic C.** Finding Unlikely Allies
- Tactic D.** Using International or Regional Tools to Increase Pressure on National Institutions
- Tactic E.** Dealing with Slander and Stigma
- Tactic F.** Working with the Diaspora
- Tactic G.** Innovative Use of Digital Technologies
- Tactic H.** Evidence-Based Advocacy
- Tactic I.** Strategic Litigation in Restrictive Environments
- Tactic J.** Creative Cultural Resistance

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT AND EVALUATE

Successful advocacy efforts require ongoing planning, evaluation, and revision in order to address new things that come up over the course of the campaign. Taking an active approach to advocacy opens up new opportunities and exposes new weaknesses within the campaign. Since advocacy impact is usually cumulative, which means each step builds upon the previous one, building in intentional moments to assess what is working and what isn't working is very important.

At the same time, documenting what you are doing will help to guide a process of review. Information on past activities will help inform and direct future actions. The key is understanding what

type of information is relevant and how much should be collected. Gathering and organizing data can be a time and resource-consuming effort, so it's good to know from the outset what you need to collect and why.

It is important to distinguish between **outputs** and **outcomes**. Outcomes are the effect of an activity that brings the campaign toward its goals. This could be a mix of quantitative and qualitative information. For example, the distribution of X number of leaflets to the public is not in-and-of-itself an outcome. The quantity of leaflets shared is an output, which is important to record, but it doesn't tell us anything about whether that activity was effective in getting you closer to your objectives. Finding indicators that tell you about effectiveness is very important to guide your process.



Ethiopians wave national flags and celebrate in the streets of Addis Ababa the return of exiled leader of opposition group Berhanu Nega
Photo: YONAS TADESSE/AFP via Getty Images

PART 2

TACTICS FOR RESTRICTIVE SPACES

In this section we will go into more depth regarding the 10 tactics for advocacy in restrictive spaces. These tactics can be used across a variety of contexts and should be selected based on your assessment of the context, available resources, reducing risk, and reaching your intended targets.



The placard reads "In Democracy Expression Is Free", Venezuela
Photo: Juan Barreto/AFP via Getty Images

TACTIC A: USING AN ALTERNATIVE ENTRY POINT FOR INFLUENCE

In restrictive contexts, advocacy looks different from the typical legal and legislative campaign that you might see in a democracy. Think about alternative “entry points,” for your advocacy: organizations or individuals who might be willing to listen or even take action. For example, instead of an advocacy campaign targeting members of parliament, an alternative entry point might be to build a relationship with a mid-level ministry official sympathetic to your issue. Another alternative entry point might be to generate support from traditional authorities such as elders and religious leaders. These people ultimately have influence on decision-makers and the public. This strategy focuses on **who you need to target to affect change** and achieve your goal.

Civil society organizations in restrictive contexts often want to change national level policy, hoping to remove obstacles and threats to their operations, staff, and beneficiaries. However, when national level advocacy is either difficult to achieve or too dangerous, advocacy may be possible at other levels. Local, provincial, and regional authorities may be easier to access and influence. They may have a degree of authority that can help you.

THIS TACTIC HELPS CSOS TO:

- Get support from different levels of the decision making process
- Build credibility among constituents through grassroots engagement at local levels.
- Create positive results which could later influence national level decision making.
- In a decentralized system, access to local or regional authorities that may open more opportunities for civil society organizations to work.

CASE 2: REACHING LOCAL OFFICIALS IN THE KURDISH REGION IN NORTHEAST SYRIA

Since 2011, Syrian civil society organizations have faced attacks from both the Syrian government and other armed groups that feel threatened by advocacy on human rights issues. Even in the relatively more permissive context of the Kurdish region in northeast Syria in 2017, civil society organizations face restrictions and interference. In November 2017, local Kurdish authorities used a new NGO law to withdraw licenses of more than 50 civil society organizations without explanation.



GOAL: To generate greater acceptance for human rights work among local government and the local community and to allow CSOs to work without obstruction.



STRATEGY: In 2018, a Kurdish-Syrian human rights organization working on this issue developed a strategy in which they would influence government officials overseeing the application of the law to end the authorities' arbitrary harassment of civil society organizations.



TACTICS: The organization recognized they would not make progress with senior members of the ministry, so they identified **alternative points of entry at the local level**. They developed relationships with local government officials tasked with oversight of the NGO sector and local council members. Through a series of workshops with both CSOs and these officials, the partner was able to inform ministry officials about how they had overstepped their authority, with reference to local regulations. By working towards a non-confrontational conversation, based on international human rights norms (laws and standard practice), the partner was able to open a path for change.



IMPACT: Following this strategic engagement and relationship-building, the relevant local authority reversed its decision in cases of five CSOs. The licenses of the five organizations were reinstated, and they were able to continue their operations. ■



Advocacy training in Hassekeh,
Kurdish region of Syria

Photo: Fraternity Foundation for Human Rights

CASE 3: CHALLENGING RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION IN DRC

Since 2017, the situation for CSOs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been deteriorating with police and security services assaulting CSOs and activists suffering from intimidation, arbitrary arrest, and even targeted assassination. The government was increasingly cracking down on criticism, and in 2017, proposed legislation that would impose further restrictions on civil society.

GOAL: To create an enabling environment for civil society to function without facing intimidation, violence, or government interference.

STRATEGY: A local CSO launched an initiative to defeat legislation that would have restricted civil society and build community support for civil society.

TACTICS: Due to the difficulty in influencing national-level politics, the CSO decided to **target parliamentarians at the local level** to gain their support to suspend the draft law. The CSO decided to focus on the two most volatile provinces, North and South Kivu, where the threats against CSOs were greatest. From May to September 2017, the CSO assisted in **the creation of two provincial platforms for 48 CSOs** to coordinate their advocacy against the legislation. They conducted six focus groups to compile information from activists who had been targeted by the state. The results from the focus groups were used in media campaigns and in meetings with local and provincial decision-makers.

IMPACT: Within a relatively short period of time, the CSO was surprised to see a **change in the behavior of police officers** who began to peacefully supervise CSO meetings, instead of shutting them down. Public support for civil society also increased as a result of the media campaign, and many citizens closed their shops and offices in **solidarity with non-violent marches that the CSO organized**. By focusing at the local level and keeping targeted goals, the CSO was able to achieve real results. The threat of restrictive NGO legislation remains, but the CSO managed to ward off this initial attempt. ■



Civil society press conference in the Democratic Republic of Congo
Photo: MONUSCO Photos

TACTIC B: IDENTIFYING A LESS SENSITIVE ISSUE

IN RESTRICTIVE CONTEXTS, THIS TACTIC HELPS CSOS:

- Engage on human rights issues in ways that don't challenge authorities directly
- Build relationships with decision-makers that can be used later to discuss more sensitive issues
- Establish credibility and support among local communities on issues that affect their daily lives

In some contexts, addressing a sensitive political issue within a campaign more related to social or economic needs can be an effective way to open the door for advocacy. Many communities around the world have been successful in integrating demands

for basic civil and political rights (such as the right to peaceful assembly and association) with advocacy on “softer” issues such as access to social services like healthcare and education.

In highly restrictive spaces, economic or social issues may be a less difficult way to enter wider debates about citizen participation, transparency, and accountability. This tactic is especially useful in building relationships with officials, decision-makers, and community leaders that can become important in reaching other advocacy goals over time. In addition, with so many of citizens' basic needs left unfulfilled, economic and social rights are a concrete way for rights-based organizations to connect with local communities and build credibility.



Mass protests in Brazil about public transportation

Photo: Tânia Rêgo

CASE 4: “OCCUPY RESTROOM” FOR WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN CHINA

The feminist movement in China has had an uphill battle; women’s rights groups working on confrontational issues are often criticized as being Western-oriented and have struggled to find credibility. The rise of social media has provided an enormous platform to advance demands for equality and to challenge authoritarian patriarchy, but feminist groups have also struggled to find a way to connect with larger numbers of women outside of elite circles and to translate the demands for equal treatment into something tangible and practical. At the same time, in a context where challenging the state to raise a human rights issue is extremely dangerous, it is critically important to find opportunities for activism that would not place campaigners at risk. In recent years, a number of Chinese feminist activists — most of them outspoken, social media-savvy women in their 20s — have used creative campaigns to protest strains of male chauvinism that run through contemporary Chinese society.



GOAL: Raise awareness about the impact of patriarchy and motivate action to support women’s rights.



STRATEGY: To connect with Chinese citizens and build popular support at a grassroots level for women’s empowerment.



TACTIC: In 2012, a group of young feminists decided to identify a non-controversial issue and use humor to build solidarity among ordinary people who could relate to the demand for equal rights for women. 20 women led by well-known feminist activist Li Tingting decided to take over male restrooms as a way to highlight the need for more women’s restrooms in public spaces. The first “occupation” occurred in Guangzhou on February 19, 2012 and another was staged in Beijing a week later. This campaign reflected Li’s use of playful “performance art” demonstrations to raise awareness of feminist causes.²



IMPACT: The movement went viral on Weibo, the Twitter-like platform in China, and gathered massive media attention from domestic and international media outlets. In the end, local media reported after the protest that provincial officials in Guangzhou had responded by agreeing to increase the number of women’s toilets by 50 percent. While such creative advocacy may achieve results, it is also not without risk — Li was harassed and detained later in 2015, but ultimately continued her activism. ■



Li Tingting speaking to reporters

Photo: China File

² <https://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/li-maizi-chinas-feminist-five-speaks-out-about-detention>

TACTIC C: USING AN INTERNATIONAL OR REGIONAL MECHANISM TO INCREASE PRESSURE ON NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

THIS TACTIC HELPS CSOS:

- Put pressure on national governments to uphold their human rights obligations
- Attract international and national media attention to human rights or civic space issues

In many cases, government authorities violate rights and freedoms even though they have signed international agreements to uphold such standards. When national governments don't uphold their obligations, civil society organizations and activists have often used international or regional processes to put international pressure on their government.



LOCAL

(municipalities, governors or regional authorities, religious or tribal leaders, community leaders)

NATIONAL

(central government, relevant ministry, the legislature or parliament)

INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

(mechanisms such as the Inter-American Court, African Union, ASEAN, the UN and others)

While this guide encourages CSOs to use domestic tactics and to target domestic actors, there are some times when going to an international or regional organization can have a big impact.

This tactic could include using the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), UN Treaty Bodies, or UN Special Procedures to put pressure on national governments. There are many ways to use the UNHRC, such as advocating for a resolution or statement that prompts action by member states, or by the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights at one of the three annual sessions. CSOs can also use the Universal Periodic Review process (UPR). The UPR reviews the human rights situation of all 193 UN members states once every five years, and provides specific recommendations for improvement. There is good information about how to engage in advocacy at the Human Rights Council from ISHR (www.ishr.ch) and UPR Info (www.upr-info.org).

Outside the UN system, there are a number of relevant regional organizations that can put pressure on a violating country. In particular, challenging a government's human rights record at the European Court of Human Rights, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) or the Africa Commission on Human and People's Rights can be a powerful method. In countries where the judicial system is not credible or impartial, using one of these regional courts can help and reinforce internationally accepted standards.

Engaging with diplomats and foreign embassies in your country is also an important piece of the advocacy process. U.S. and E.U. delegations have a specific person focused on human rights in each mission with whom you can discuss human rights concerns. They can discuss the issue with the national government as well as at the international level through the organizations mentioned above.

To be effective, you should use regional or international mechanisms in concert with your domestic-focused effort. If regional or international advocacy tactics are not coordinated within a broader strategy, it is likely that such efforts will be a valuable exchange among diplomats and civil society organizations but will not lead to real change. It is important that your strategy links the international action with your domestic advocacy goal.

CASE 5: AFRICAN COMMISSION AND HRD PROTECTION LAW IN MALI

After years of instability and violence in Mali, the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation was signed in 2015 between government authorities, a rebel alliance from the north, and a pro-government armed coalition. Despite the peace agreement, the UN found that more than 600 cases of human rights violations and abuses were committed in the 18 months that followed the signing. Within the context of Mali's ongoing conflict, human rights defenders were experiencing targeted attacks as well, and general instability endangered the work of human rights defenders who were struggling to operate within a climate of generalized fear, ongoing intimidation and violence, and impunity.



GOAL: To enhance the protection of human rights defenders by introducing a judicial framework recognizing their legitimacy and ensuring HRDs could work in a safe environment without fear of attacks or reprisals.



STRATEGY: Campaign for the adoption of a human rights defender bill in the Malian parliament to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights defenders.



TACTICS: Malian civil society used international and regional mechanisms to pressure their national legislature to pass a human rights protection law. Civil society in sub-Saharan Africa worked with international human rights mechanisms to develop a set of standards for protection of human rights defenders that could be adopted by the African Commission and set a new regional precedent. The standards ensure the right of human rights defenders to engage with international bodies and receive funding, recognizes their homes and offices as inviolable, and makes special provisions for women human rights defenders and human rights defenders with disabilities.³ Once these standards were adopted by the African Commission – and building on the precedent set by Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso – it opened up the path for Malian CSOs to press for a similar framework in their country.

To ensure the bill's success, a coalition of local CSOs and international NGOs collaborated to raise public awareness on the pending law and to encourage constituents to push their MPs for passage. This included a radio campaign with a local station that had partnerships with 56 local radios and disseminated stories of HRDs in six languages. The coalition also facilitated meetings with MPs to highlight the challenges HRDS face – particularly those working on lands rights issues.



IMPACT: In December 2017, the parliament in Mali approved a bill to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights defenders. Such legislation would have been unthinkable just several years prior, but the law was modeled on a regional standard that civil society had advocated for within the context of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. Due to the advocacy of local and international CSOs, the Malian parliament strengthened the bill submitted by the government by including specific protection for women human rights defenders because of the specificity of the threats they are exposed to, including sexual violence, stigma and discrimination, as well as protection for HRDs with disabilities. ■



Network for human rights defenders in Mali holds an organizing workshop

Photo: Coalition Malienne des Défenseurs des Droits Humains du Mali (COMADDH)

³ <https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2018/socs-2018-year-in-review-dec-en.pdf>

CASE 6: ASEAN INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS (AICHR)

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) established an Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) in 2009 to serve as the overarching regional human rights institution in Asia. It seemed like a good initiative, but civil society organizations have been concerned about the independence of this body because the ASEAN member states select the 10 representatives of the AICHR. The ASEAN governments have been resistant to a consultative, transparent selection mechanism. As a result, AICHR representatives believe they are only accountable to the government who choose them, not to the people. To date, AICHR representatives have avoided addressing the most pressing human rights issues in the region, such as the Rohingya crisis and extra-judicial killings in the Philippines, by using the excuse that they cannot interfere in the sovereignty of another member state. This undercuts the effectiveness of the human rights commission since it is avoiding the most important human rights issues.



GOAL: Ensure human rights concerns in Asia are adequately addressed by its regional mechanism.



STRATEGY: Press ASEAN states to expand the independence of AICHR and to enable it to take on a more meaningful role in protecting human rights.



TACTICS: FORUM-ASIA, a membership-based human rights organization based in Bangkok, helped build a CSO coalition to develop a selection mechanism for AICHR representatives that includes concrete indicators to measure the independence of AICHR candidates. The CSO coalition then initiated a dialogue with the ASEAN Foreign Ministry, the ASEAN Secretariat, and AICHR. They followed up with country-specific outreach with relevant Ministries of Foreign Affairs, in addition to media outlets in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand to press these countries to support the call for an independent selection process.

FORUM-ASIA and its partners began an advocacy campaign that built upon FORUM-ASIA's annual performance evaluation of AICHR; this included a repeated recommendation for an open and independent selection process of AICHR representatives, which only Indonesia had implemented. ►



IMPACT: Taking advantage of the winds of reform in Malaysia, as well as media pressure in Thailand and Indonesia, FORUM-ASIA and its member organizations successfully pushed the ASEAN governments to commit to a more transparent and civil society-oriented selection process for the AICHR representatives. Their efforts achieved some tangible results. As of now, 30% of the AICHR representatives are selected through this more transparent process and are independently representing the concerns of CSOs. In 2019, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers commissioned the review of AICHR Terms of Reference (ToR) to strengthen its protection mechanism to address the Rohingya crisis. It took AICHR ten years to finally have a process to review its ToR. In addition, the AICHR representatives from Indonesia and Malaysia are consulting UN mechanisms to organize a regional dialogue on Freedom of Expression in 2019, a discussion that would have been impossible prior to this campaign. ■



High-Level Dialogue between AICHR and civil society representatives
Photo: FORUM-ASIA

TACTIC D: FINDING UNLIKELY ALLIES

THIS TACTIC HELPS CSOs:

- Build alliances with actors outside your “comfort zone” who may provide access to influencers
- Get political cover and wider public acceptance of advocacy efforts
- Work against a “divide-and-conquer” approach by government/ non-state actors

Building a diverse coalition is a best practice for advocacy anywhere in the world. But when you are working in a restrictive context, gaining the support of groups that do not usually support the human rights community can be very important for an advocacy campaign. Having the support of a group or sector that has close relationships with the government may help you be more effective

and provide some protection. We often consider an ally to be an individual or an institution that is likely to provide support to your cause. The tactic explored below encourages you to seek the unlikely supporters with whom you can identify a common interest or concern. This could be a business association, a religious institution, a political party, a tribal confederation, or a prominent sports league.

Restrictive contexts require CSOs to engage in complex partnerships to maximize the support they need during an advocacy action. Return to your earlier stakeholder mapping and identify groups or individuals that might have a common interest, even if your ultimate goal is not what they care about the most. Depending on context-specific risks, making your network broader can help you get closer to your goal.



21 organizations participate in a unified campaign to end violence against women and children in Dhaka, Bangladesh

Photo: UN Women/Saikat Majumdar

CASE 7: APPAREL COMPANIES AS ALLIES IN CAMBODIA

In Cambodia, civil society organizations and human rights activists face a hostile and repressive regime that has systematically suppressed any dissent to Prime Minister Hun Sen's three-decade long rule. In the lead up to parliamentary elections in 2018, the government stepped up its campaign to silence civil society, the opposition, and independent media. In this context, the space to assert the basic freedoms of expression, association and assembly was extremely limited. The government constructed an effective web of restrictive laws, regulations, and court rulings in order to restrict the space for independent civil society to function. Some of the most harmful included the Law on Associations and NGOs (LANGO) and the Law on Trade Unions, which limited the ability of CSOs and trade unions to associate, assemble, and operate.



GOAL: To reverse the restrictive context for civil society, independent media, and labor unions to function without obstruction under Cambodian law.



STRATEGY: To leverage international pressure on the Cambodian government and raise the “cost” to the government to maintain restrictive policies towards independent civil society, labor unions, and media.



TACTICS: Local and international civil society successfully engaged multinational companies – an unlikely ally – in motivating targeted interventions to defend civic space. For years, labor rights organizations and other CSOs had worked to establish relationships with international apparel brands, such as H&M and Adidas, in order to improve basic labor standards and protections under Cambodian law. In 2017, these efforts led to a letter from the American Apparel and Footwear Association (AAFA) to Prime Minister Hun Sen stating their concern about the erosion of democratic institutions in Cambodia. Local CSOs continued to engage the international brands to raise their concerns directly with the Cambodian government.



IMPACT: In early 2018 when the government issued politically-motivated criminal charges against prominent labor rights activists, the apparel companies voiced a clear concern, and as a result, the Ministry of Labor asked the court to drop all charges against three prominent activists in order “to ensure freedom of association.” In October 2018, the AAFA and the Fair Labor Association met with the government to express concerns about labor and worker rights in Cambodia and specifically urged the government to amend the restrictive 2016 Law on Trade Unions. Cambodian CSOs and labor unions still face a long road to reestablish fundamental freedoms, but their effort to leverage the voice of business to influence the government is a promising strategy. ■



Cambodian workers protesting for social justice – Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Photo: IDWF

CASE 8: ARMENIA'S NGO LAW AND OPPOSITION PARTY SUPPORT

In 2014, Armenia's President Serzh Sargsyan abruptly shifted away from the European Union to join the Russia-aligned Eurasian Economic Union. Civil society groups feared the move would result in a campaign against civil society organizations that did not favor Russian policies, as had been the case in Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. As anticipated, in early 2015, a slow but steady negative media campaign started against Armenian NGOs, presumably authored by Russian experts and journalists, which was published in Armenian media outlets. This grew into a huge campaign against NGOs driven by government-aligned Russian media that tried to push a stereotype of NGOs as "foreign agents". In this context, the Armenian Ministry of Justice introduced an onerous and restrictive draft NGO law. The existing law already required full reporting to the government, but the new NGO law went even further. It would require NGOs to submit names and details of participants, staff, and beneficiaries. The proposed law also planned to label any NGO receiving foreign funding as a foreign agent.



GOAL: To protect the right of Armenian NGOs to operate freely without undue interference from the government.



STRATEGY: To launch a broad-based campaign against the NGO law proposed by the Armenian Ministry of Justice.



TACTICS: In order to reverse this effort, one of Armenia's leading civil society organizations – the Analytical Centre on Globalization and Regional Cooperation (ACGRC) – led a campaign to amend the law. Civil society was united in their opposition to the law, but they needed other allies that could leverage political pressure. The ACGRC realized that it would be essential to have opposition MPs on their side to voice these concerns loudly in Parliament. These Parliamentary proceedings are broadcast on public media, so this approach also allowed them to reach a broader audience. The ACGRC identified potential allies whose values aligned with their work – two opposition MPs who voted against the decision to join the Eurasian Economic Union. They did not pursue a formal partnership with the party as a whole, but rather developed relationships with the individual MPs who agreed to take their demands to the parliament. This was a new tactic for ACGRC – previously they had only invited MPs or political party figures to speak at conferences; this was the first time they worked with them as allies pushing for the same goals.



IMPACT: Though government-affiliated NGOs (GONGOs) and the government-aligned media smeared their efforts, their campaign was successful. Both parliamentary and diplomatic pressure was critical to that success. Meetings between the Armenian opposition MPs and European diplomats in Yerevan, as well as with the European People's Party president during a visit to Armenia in April 2015, resulted in pressure on the Armenia government to halt efforts toward this more restrictive NGO law. Ultimately, this advocacy helped convince the government to accept the NGOs' amendments. Although it is not a perfect law, the most dangerous points were removed because of their efforts to bring together civil society and the opposition MPs. Armenian CSOs still face attacks from Russian-sponsored media, but since the Revolution in 2018, it appears that the new Armenian government may be more committed to protecting the rights of civil society. ■



Civil society roundtable in Armenia
Photo: Analytical Centre on Globalization and Regional Cooperation (ACGRC)

TACTIC E: DEALING WITH SLANDER AND STIGMA

THIS TACTIC HELPS CSOS:

- Repair the image of the organization and activists
- Regain trust and credibility in the community by “humanizing” CSO leaders and activists
- Counter fear and hate speech

Many CSOs in restrictive contexts are the target of intentional campaigns to damage their credibility and reduce support from the public. Such misinformation, rumors, and lies can be very harmful. For individuals, it can focus on private lives and threaten families. For organizations, it can force groups to shut down. In the age of social media, the impact of such campaigns is huge, and online mis-information can quickly turn into off-line physical threats as well.

Lies and rumors can take many shapes, but the tactic is often used when civil society organizations challenge the status quo, advocate

for accountability, or stand in the way of powerful economic interests. The attacks could come from government authorities, politicians, criminal gangs, narco-traffickers, corporate or industrial interests, among many others. They may claim that CSOs are anti-development, anti-family, pro-Western, foreign agents, terrorists, or all of the above. Often, these attacks are also gendered and sexualized when deployed against woman human rights defenders. Once this perception is circulating within the media, it is difficult to reverse—but not impossible.

Here we address just one dimension of this issue. We look at how organizations have responded when civil society as a sector is attacked by a disinformation campaign. Because independent civil society is frequently attacked with these untruths, advocacy campaigns need to plan how to respond to these kinds of attacks. After an attack has happened, it is important to repair the image of the organization within the community and to promote the idea that CSOs are legitimate members of the community. Sometimes dealing with the attack can be done as part of the ongoing advocacy effort but other times the attack may need to be addressed directly before anything else can happen.



A woman participates in a protest demanding government accountability

Photo: RONALDO SCHEMIDT/AFP via Getty Images

CASE 9: KELLA TASZ IN HUNGARY

Since 2010, Hungary has witnessed a rapid erosion of the checks and balances that limit the abuse of power. With Victor Orban's victory in Hungary in 2010, his brand of authoritarian populism went directly after civil society. His government passed a 2017 law that strictly regulates foreign-funded organizations, labelling NGOs as "security threats" and "foreign agents". One of the government's central arguments is that NGOs, particularly human rights organizations, lack legitimacy as they do not represent the interests of the average person. In response to the massive stigmatization campaign, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU) started an initiative called "HCLU is needed" or "Kell a TASZ" in Hungarian.



GOAL: To transform the smear campaign against civil society into a positive, hope-filled narrative about what civil society seeks to achieve.



STRATEGY: Launch a multi-faceted media and outreach effort to show Hungarians that CSOs make positive contributions to the country and advocate for the rights of all Hungarians.



TACTICS: The HCLU directly addressed slander, stereotypes, and stigmatization through its social media campaign and outreach strategy. Rather than being reactive to the conspiracy theories or attack campaigns, their response was positive. It started as a social media hashtag campaign, but then evolved into an outreach strategy that established unlikely connections with different segments of Hungarian society that were not sympathetic to civil society groups. HCLU leaders wrote, "We wanted to counter **possible de-humanizing attacks** by humanizing our staff members and clients. We introduced our team through personalized online stories that demonstrated [to the public] that they are 'one of us' and that human rights protect everyone."

HCLU used authentic stories of the lives of their staff and constituents to draw commonalities with other Hungarians to directly challenge false accusations. They emphasized that the human rights advocacy benefits not just civil society organizations in the capital, but all Hungarian citizens across the country. Second, they initiated a campaign to win over the "persuadable middle" that stands between the increasingly polarized factions of contemporary politics. This specifically referred to citizens who are not Orban supporters, but who also do not engage often with Hungarian civil society. They soon found that the persuadable middle soon started participating in the hashtag campaign by sharing their own stories and reflections, a success which was previously unimaginable in an environment where the Orban government had demonized civil society organizations and politically divided the society.⁴



IMPACT: Ultimately, the messages showed what they stand for, not against, and illustrated their vision and hope rather than drumming up fear. By using plain language and humor, they creating posts with memes, inspirational quotes, and videos explaining what Hungarian civil society does. They used many communication channels and reached beyond the "usual suspects" by asking graphic designers, musicians, and other artists to publish statements about their work. They generated a huge outpouring of support from the public, seen in the number of donations and written testimonials from ordinary citizens in support of HCLU. ■



Mass protest against proposed civil society restrictions in Hungary
Photo: Attila PETHE, Hungary

4 <https://www.openglobalrights.org/dropping-the-defense-hopeful-stories-fight-stigma-in-hungary/>

CASE 10: WOMEN'S RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN EGYPT

Since 2015, the government of Egypt has engaged in a systematic and comprehensive assault on civil society intended to silence any form of dissent or efforts to hold the authorities accountable for flagrant human rights abuses. In addition to administrative, financial, and legal challenges to hamstringing CSOs's operations, staff members and leadership of these CSOs also face slander and stigmatization in the government-aligned media. Government propaganda portrays Egyptian CSOs as advocates of foreign values, stooges of the West, or terrorist sympathizers. Despite the incredibly hostile and dangerous conditions for human rights work, many courageous Egyptians continue to serve their communities and push back against this narrative. One prominent CSO, a women's rights organization that supports domestic violence victims, found themselves at the center of this storm. The CSO's staff and constituents were directly targeted, and they felt they could no longer engage in their work safely.



GOAL: Build broader public support for the work of civil society organizations and human rights defenders in their efforts to serve their communities and advance basic human rights.



STRATEGY: Reverse negative stigmatization of civil society organizations and restore the CSO's credibility.



TACTICS: In order to counter the government's attempts to vilify their human rights work, the CSO launched an effort to reach "influencers" to restore its credibility and generate a degree of protection for its staff. The organization decided to engage an important and unlikely ally – religious leaders at the local level in communities they served. They chose to orient the effort outside of Cairo to reach important governorates that had less exposure to the national-level CSOs. Their outreach sought to illustrate the positive contributions that civil society – and specifically women human rights defenders – make to the stability of the country and why it was important to counter the government's rhetoric. While religious leaders are not typically considered natural supporters of an organization that defends women's rights and seeks to elevate women's role in society, the religious leaders became instrumental in generating public support for their grassroots work.



IMPACT: The organization reported that their engagement with religious authorities, among other stakeholders, helped to generate more public support for civil society work. While the Egyptian authorities continue to target civil society with intimidation, arrest, legal suits and travel bans, these efforts to reverse negative stereotypes at the local level is essential to their safety and survival in a period where CSOs need community support to weather these attacks. Rather than amplifying the negative stereotypes that state-run media perpetuates about women's rights defenders, these allies are now countering such messages. ■



Woman signaling stop with Egyptian flag

Photo: Crazystocker / Shutterstock.com

TACTIC F: WORKING WITH THE DIASPORA

THIS TACTIC HELPS CSOS:

- Provide access to audiences that groups inside the country cannot reach safely
- Reduce risk for communities inside the country who would be targeted for their advocacy
- Get the help of a possibly powerful group that shares the values of the in-country population

In some cases, using the power of diaspora communities – fellow countrymen and women living abroad—can be an effective component of an advocacy campaign. While it is important that

a movement have grassroots support and credibility among the local population, members of the diaspora may have opportunities to do advocacy that would not be available to those inside the country. They often have access to audiences—like diplomats or UN special rapporteurs—with whom CSOs inside the country would not be able to meet or safely communicate. The diaspora also often has a solid understanding of the particular tactics that a government uses to oppress civil society and may have particular insights that other sympathetic allies may not. Diaspora activists and communities have the ability to spread messages, build connections with other allies, access financial resources, and get an audience with policy-makers in their host country. These are good building blocks for successful advocacy.

CASE 11: UYGHUR DIASPORA MOVEMENT

In 2018, the New York Times and other media outlets revealed that the Chinese government established concentration camps in regions of Xinjiang to punish and “reeducate” Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in China. These reports indicated that over 1 million people were put in these camps, including children. The Uyghur community inside China was – and still is – being heavily surveilled and many who attempted to raise their voices were arrested. Their ability to expose the breadth of the crackdown against Uyghur culture and life was limited by the lack of access to the outside world and the direct assault on their community.



GOAL: To raise awareness on the massive human rights violations the Chinese government is committing against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang and to pressure the international community in addressing the situation.



STRATEGY: Leverage connection between diaspora groups and on-the-ground individuals to document and expose the abuses then amplify through multilateral human rights organizations



TACTICS: The Uyghur diaspora is broad and well-organized; they number between 1.0-1.6m, according to the World Uyghur Congress (WUC). Media reports were informed by the research and writing of diaspora Uyghur civil society groups who were receiving first-hand accounts of the inhumane treatment. In particular, the efforts of the US-based Uyghur Human Rights Project (formed in 2004) and the Uyghur American Association (formed in 1998) played a substantial role in efforts to promote ▶



Diaspora Uyghur community protesting at the White House in Washington, DC

Photo: Michael Candelori/NurPhoto via Getty Images

human rights conditions for Uyghurs and other indigenous groups in Xinjiang. These two groups, in addition to WUC and Radio Free Asia (of whom Uyghur Service journalists are among the imprisoned), had a major impact successfully lobbying 17 members of the US Congress to urge the government to impose Global Magnitsky Act sanctions against Chinese officials⁵ and in pushing successfully for an EU Parliament Urgency Resolution in October 2018 related to China's use of internment camps.⁶

IMPACT: The exposure of these massive human rights violations created an international outcry. The power of the diaspora in pushing back against these human rights violations has been made clear by China's efforts to silence this diaspora. In fact, they have pushed countries friendly to China – Egypt, Vietnam, Thailand, and others – to repatriate, interrogate, and detain Uyghurs. Those who remain free on the outside continue to press the international community, the US, the EU, and the United Nations to pressure China to respect basic human rights for this vulnerable population. When faced with international pressure based on the horrifying testimonials and the satellite imagery released with many of these reports, the Communist Party was forced to retract their denial of the camps and to acknowledge them, though they insisted the camps intended to provide “technical training and de-radicalization programming”. ■

TACTIC G: INNOVATIVE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

THIS TACTIC HELPS CSOS:

- Organize where the ability to meet and communicate in person may no longer be safe or practical
- Speed up efforts to reach broader, and perhaps unlikely, audiences
- Create attention to and curiosity about an advocacy action
- Get around traditional censorship

Digital technologies have a tremendous impact on human rights advocacy in restrictive contexts. Innovative use of digital technologies provides tools to limit exposure and manage visibility, particularly in environments where freedom of expression, assembly, and association are limited. Online petitions, microblogs, and platforms for citizen journalism have also provided alternative venues where citizens can take direct action on issues they care about and can stay informed about news that might not be covered in mainstream media. These digital technologies facilitate advocacy action for building networks, reaching new audiences, mobilizing solidarity, crowd-sourcing data, fundraising, and increasing visibility.

In restrictive contexts, meeting in person or organizing rallies publicly might be prohibited. Although online communication provides an alternative place for organizing and advocacy, digital technologies can also put civil society organizations and activists at risk. Understanding your digital security needs should be part of your planning. The digital security resources provided in the Annexes of this guide can help.

Engaging in advocacy in very restrictive environments may seem impossible, or at least extremely risky. However, there are some digital campaigning examples that give us hope. In this example, activists won small victories in a much bigger fight. But remember that even small steps are essential building blocks in the long path to justice and respect for fundamental freedoms.

5 <https://www.rubio.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2018/8/rubio-colleagues-urge-trump-administration-to-sanction-human-rights-violators-in-china-s-xinjiang-region>

6 <https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/uyghur-congress-applauds-european-parliament-resolution-urges-concrete-action/>

CASE 12: #METOO MOVEMENT IN CHINA

In 2018, the #MeToo campaign reached China despite heavy censorship, galvanizing a number of Chinese women to speak out online about their experiences with sexual harassment. The media wasn't investigating or reporting on the issue and the police weren't sympathetic, so the only place to air complaints was online. The momentum around these disclosures was organic and spontaneous – it was not organized by any organization in advance, but it does demonstrate the power of social media to change perceptions and compel action if scrutiny and pressure is sustained and reaches a critical mass.



GOAL: To raise awareness about the prevalence of sexual harassment in China by exposing instances of sexual harassment and ultimately holding violators accountable.



TACTICS: Once the #MeToo movement made its way to China, individual women voluntarily posted their experience social media to help create awareness on sexual harassment and, perhaps, to gain a sense of solidarity among those who have experienced such violations. One of the most well-known claims was made by Luo Qianqian, a former student at Beihang University in Beijing, who accused a professor of sexual misconduct in an online post. Censors responded quickly, but her post went viral; then, five other Beihang students came forward with similar allegations against the same professor. Although the authorities tried to suppress the allegations, the professor was ultimately dismissed from his job as a result. The momentum didn't stop there as posts popped up from other universities as well.



IMPACT: Students, alumni, and teachers from several universities including Beijing University, Fudan University, and Wuhan University made public appeals to school authorities to introduce a set of monitoring and disciplinary measures to prevent campus sexual harassment. More than 50 professors from universities across the country signed a **declaration** on January 19, 2018 urging the Ministry of Education to offer policy guidance for preventing sexual harassment on campus. Granted, the government has not introduced a concrete policy yet, but the fact that these calls gathered steam and that censors could not entirely control the flow demonstrates the power of online advocacy even in an environment like China. ■



CASE 13: ONLINE CAMPAIGNING IN BRAZIL

By 2010, Brazil's economy was growing at a decent pace, but corruption had reached catastrophic proportions. Corruption infiltrated nearly every aspect of economic and social life, but one of the most common types of corruption in Brazil is embezzlement of public funds, known as *superfaturamento* in Portuguese (literally «super invoicing»). This technique allows individuals, especially politicians, to enrich themselves through public contracts with private enterprises. This system concentrated wealth in the hands of the few political elite. In response, civil society organizations in Brazil decided to challenge the practice and launched a campaign to limit corrupt politicians from running for office.⁷ While Brazil was not considered a closed space at the time of this campaign, the issue was incredibly controversial and touched upon the most sensitive issues of money and power. A top politician reportedly told one of the CSOs involved that the bill would never pass “because so many congressmen were themselves under investigation for corruption.”

GOAL: To counter systemic and widespread corruption in Brazil.

STRATEGY: Launch a civil society campaign to pass “Ficha Limpa”, the Clean Record Law, an ambitious proposal to bar politicians convicted of crimes from running for office.

TACTICS: Given the sensitivity of the issue and that most elected members would not support the bill, Brazilian CSOs had to think creatively about how to create a groundswell of support that congress members couldn't ignore. The CSOs strategically utilized the power of digital technologies to generate widespread support; the bill was publicized through an online petition that attracted more than half a million signatures and was backed up with thousands of phone calls to members of the Parliament. When the phone lines were flooded with this tremendous outcry, it garnered real attention. When the campaign was over, this petition was endorsed by more than 2 million people.⁸

IMPACT: The proposed legislation was accepted by the Brazilian parliament amid growing public pressure. Thousands of candidates were barred from office, in what was regarded as a transparency revolution. Another crucial breakthrough came in 2015 as a result of 14 months of further online campaigning that amplified efforts by social media, which was covered by traditional media as well. As a result, corporate funding for election candidates was declared unconstitutional. ■



⁷ <https://secure.avaaz.org/page/en/highlights/>

⁸ <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/clean-slate-law-raising-accountability-in-brazil/>

TACTIC H: EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY

THIS TACTIC HELPS CSOS:

- Respond to misinformation that hurts advocacy arguments
- Show that their campaign is based on solid evidence
- Develop recommendations that are based on hard facts, rather than opinions or misperceptions

Evidence-based advocacy refers to initiatives that use quantitative data and facts to influence public debate about an advocacy issue. Such evidence can make arguments more believable and provides concrete figures for allegations of rights violations, marginalization, inequality, or discrimination. Evidence-based advocacy is also used to respond to misinformation and fake news from governments and non-state actors. This is important in restrictive contexts where attacks on CSOs are designed to decrease public trust in civil society. Of course, it can be difficult to find solid data in restrictive contexts, but CSOs may also be able to generate their own evidence in partnership with universities and research organizations.

CASE 14: DATA-DRIVEN CAMPAIGN IN KENYA

In Kenya, the development of the Public Benefit Organization (PBO) Act of 2013 was considered a success story: it was prepared in consultation with civil society and followed international best practices for civil society regulation. Yet, before the bill had even been implemented, Kenyan civil society had to mobilize to ward off several attempts to weaken the bill. The most worrisome was an amendment proposed by the government in 2013 that would have unduly restricted vital foreign funding to organizations.



GOAL: To ensure Kenyan civil society organizations did not face any additional restrictions in their funding or operational environment.



STRATEGY: To raise awareness regarding the benefit of the civil society sector to Kenyan society and to highlight the adverse effects that amending the PBO Act would have on Kenya.



TACTICS: To demonstrate civil society's concrete contributions to Kenya's economy, a coalition of Kenyan CSOs launched an evidence-based advocacy campaign based on research that captured the tangible economic benefit of civil society. The campaign produced materials that emphasized that civil society contributed over \$1.2 billion to the Kenyan economy, employed more people than the manufacturing sector, and benefited millions of Kenyans throughout the country, especially marginalized communities. Based on these findings, the CSOs issued press statements, launched a social media campaign, and held public rallies with messaging grounded in the economic value of civil society to the country.



IMPACT: Civil society was able to present a united front, with a data-based message that appealed to a broad range of the public. Due in part to this campaign, Kenya's Parliament deferred passage of the proposed PBO amendments to allow time for consultation with the civil society sector. ■



A standoff between protesters and police in Nairobi after police banned an organized protest
Photo: Anonymous, Nairobi, Kenya, February 2014

TACTIC I: STRATEGIC LITIGATION IN RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

THIS TACTIC HELPS CSOs:

- Get media attention to raise public awareness at the national, regional, and international level
- Support strong coalitions among different parts of civil society, including lawyers, activists, and media
- Influence behavior of authorities or implementation of policies that can have a real impact on civil society and rights-based issues

The American Bar Association says that strategic litigation, “involves an organization or individual taking on a legal case as part of a strategy to achieve broader systemic change. The case may create change either through the success of the action itself and its impact on law, precedence, or policy or by publicly exposing injustice, raising awareness, and generating broader change.” Strategic litigation is a tactic that is more effective if it is used as part of a wider advocacy campaign.

In restrictive contexts, judicial processes may be biased and lack transparency. However, even if a CSO does not win the litigation case, there are still benefits from the effort. Benefits might include changing the public discussion, promoting individual or community empowerment, or pushing agencies or ministries to change behavior. Even better, when the outcome of a case is positive, it can set a precedent for preventing future human rights violations. Successful cases can result in a judicial decision that causes direct or indirect changes in policy, law, court processes, and institutions.

Strategic litigation can also target regional organizations if national level judicial processes fail to provide justice for survivors of human rights abuses. Regional or international organizations can also support norms or precedents for advocacy initiatives. The European Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights have helped with these kinds of strategic litigation in the past.



European Court of Human Rights

Photo: Michel Christen © Council of Europe

CASE 15: MEDIA AND LAW STUDIES IN TURKEY

Since the failed coup attempt in 2016, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has used all means to smother civil society and stifle any kind of dissent. The government has arrested hundreds of journalists who have been critical of the government or who have expressed sympathy for the country's Kurdish population. The Committee to Protect Journalists reports that Turkey is among the biggest jailers of journalists in the world and more than 160 journalists were in prison at the time of this writing. The Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA) in Turkey was launched in 2018 as a network of journalists and lawyers who would work together to push back against assaults on fundamental freedoms.

GOAL: To protect free speech and the media in Turkey.

STRATEGY: To challenge the growing crackdown on freedom of expression through strategic litigation on domestic and international stages to amplify international pressure on Turkey.

TACTICS: Many of the Turkish journalists and lawyers who are arrested and charged do not get a fair hearing since the courts in Turkey lack full independence. While MLSA lawyers continue to pursue cases through Turkish courts to defend journalists who were unjustly imprisoned, they have also taken cases to the European Court of Human Rights. This tactic has been successful for a couple reasons; although Turkey has distanced itself from the EU accession process, the Turkish government still cares deeply about international opinion and particularly its relationship with the EU. MLSA is able to strategically utilize geopolitical dynamics by following bilateral processes between the EU and the government of Turkey to benefit from potential advocacy opportunities. At the same time, MLSA lawyers are able to monitor and align local judicial procedures with that of the European Court of Human Rights. For instance, the lawyers working with the organization might choose to “delay” several local court processes if they felt it might be counterproductive to a desired decision by the ECHR. By working both the national and the regional level, MLSA is able to gain momentum and generate local and international media attention, which helps keep the abuses of the Turkish government under the spotlight.

IMPACT: In its first year of operation, MLSA defended a total of 52 clients – 10 of whom were journalists in prison. In 2017, MLSA co-founder and human rights lawyer Veysel Ok was part of a legal team that submitted an application to the European Court of Human Rights on behalf of journalists Şahin Alpay and Mehmet Altan for fabricated charges of terrorism. Their convictions had been upheld in the Turkish courts, but after months of advocacy and engagement, the ECHR ruled they had been wrongfully convicted and ordered the Turkish government to pay Altan and Alpay 21,500 euros. While they were released only after a positive ruling ultimately came from Turkey's constitutional court, the ECHR ruling was a powerful message. ■



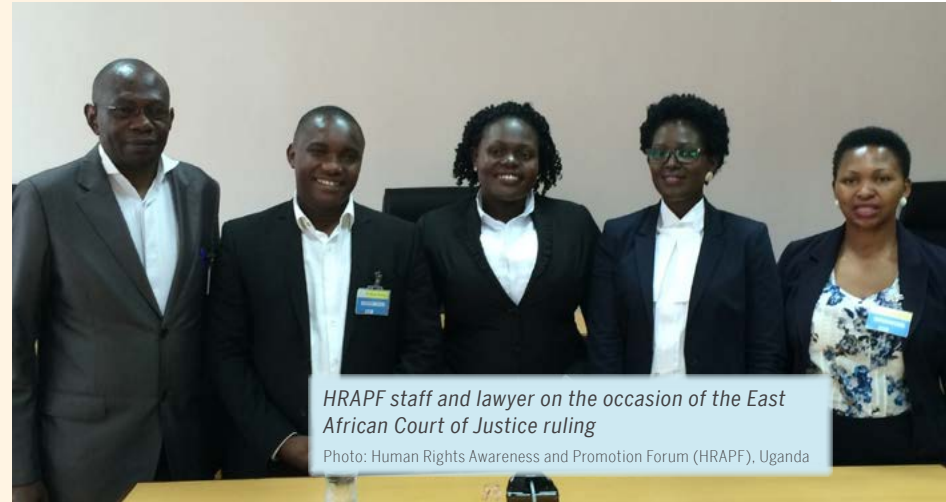
Team of Turkish lawyers engaged in advocacy, Constitutional Court in Germany
Photo: Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA)

CASE 16: CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE ANTI-HOMOSEXUALITY BILL IN UGANDA

In 2009, the Anti-Homosexuality Bill (AHB) was introduced in Uganda to expand the criminalization of homosexuality by creating penalties for “aiding and abetting” and the “promotion” of homosexuality. If passed, the bill would restrict groups specifically working on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Intersex (LGBTI) issues and other CSOs providing health, education, and other services that benefit the LGBTI community. The Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF), a Ugandan human rights organization, recognized this as a grave danger to the LGBTI communities they served. But the bill also contained provisions that would have even broader consequences, for example, the law dictated that groups would have to report any LGBTI person that they knew – so it would affect mainstream CSOs as well.

GOAL: To defeat the proposed Anti-Homosexuality Bill (AHB); or if that was not possible, to remove the most harmful and damaging provisions from the bill.

STRATEGY: Since the issue of LGBTI rights is extremely divisive in Uganda, HRAPF and other like-minded groups decided they would have more success if they could broaden opposition to the bill and get mainstream CSOs on their side. To do this, instead of focusing solely on the need to decriminalize homosexuality, their strategy mobilized support across civil society to oppose the government’s attempt to restrict NGO activities and freedom of association more generally.



HRAPF staff and lawyer on the occasion of the East African Court of Justice ruling

Photo: Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF), Uganda

TACTICS: To implement their strategy, HRAPF helped build an intersectional coalition that included 50 organizations to defeat this legislation. The diversity of the coalition was its strength – it included many mainstream human rights organizations working on issues such as children’s rights groups, lawyers, sex workers’ rights groups, and other human rights groups. By joining together under one umbrella, this coalition was highly effective and gave protection to activists leading the effort. This was critically important in a country with hostility and violence towards members of the LGBTI community.

The coalition’s advocacy was effective in preventing passage of the bill for four years, but ultimately the Act passed in December 2013. Then, the coalition turned to strategic litigation. Despite attacks from the government, the coalition continued and challenged the Act in the constitutional court. To file the case, they included a group of 10 petitioners; these included not just LGBTI persons, but also a law professor, a member of the ruling party, a member of the opposition, a medical doctor, and mainstream organizations. Once again, this strategy of broadening the campaign beyond the LGBTI community was essential to their success.

IMPACT: The constitutional court ruled quickly: in August 2014, they struck down the law before it was even implemented. This coalition also took the struggle to the regional level by raising it at the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR). The Court ruled it would not hear the case because it was being considered by a Ugandan court, but their ruling attracted media attention and international support, which ultimately helped their strategy. HRAPF and its allies showed that the law should protect all of society, not just one community. ■

TACTIC J: CREATIVE CULTURAL RESISTANCE

THIS TACTIC HELPS CSOS

- Communicate to citizens in a way that is less political and reaches more people
- Attracts attention and creates a positive perception of civil society
- Increase the visibility of the advocacy action

Creative cultural resistance is a tactic where artists and activists can push for change by using culture and the arts in advocacy campaigns. Cultural tactics can get positive public attention and help non-activists feel connected to the issue. Cultural resistance can even change people's ideas of what is possible in civil society. These tactics might combine advocacy issues with sports, art, music, and popular culture to get more public support for the goal.

This section and the examples presented draws heavily on the impactful work of New Tactics, a program of the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), which helps activists become more effective through strategic thinking and tactical planning. For more information on their work, please visit: www.newtactics.org.

There are several benefits to using creative resistance. It communicates through forms that are easily understood and that may be easily reproduced. In restrictive contexts where traditional NGO activities may not be safe, cultural tactics may be a less risky way to build popular support and influence particular targets. In very restrictive contexts, it is also a safe way to build organizational capacity because working with the arts builds an organization's planning, coordination, and resource management skills. These tactics can also be used successfully by looser networks or groups of activists who self-organize.⁹

The following case studies illustrate some cultural resistance tactics used by groups in their specific context.



A demonstrator plays the violin during a protest against President Nicolas Maduro in Caracas, Venezuela

Photo: Federico Parra/AFP via Getty Images

⁹ <https://www.newtactics.org/conversation/cultural-resistance-power-music-and-visual-art-protest>



Street art produced by the Syria Banksy Project

Photo: Kesh Malek, Syria



Artistic Actions

- Gaza:** Alhoush¹⁰ works with underrepresented artists to put a spotlight on the challenges that Gazans face, in addition to their resilience, by exhibiting art within a public space. The organization launched “THIS IS also GAZA: A Celebration of Contemporary Visual Arts from the Gaza Strip”. The exhibit showcased the work of 38 Gazan painters, photographers, filmmakers, and video artists across a mix of mediums including film, painting, photography, video, poster art, music, and public discussion.
- Russia:** In Yekaterinburg, citizens faced severe road quality issues, which were ignored by local politicians. To attract attention, the artists in the collective URA.RU, painted potholes¹¹ with the faces of the governor, mayor, and vice-mayor. The politicians’ mouths were replaced with cracked pavement, gravel, and bricks. Then, the group placed hidden cameras around the sites of the artwork. When the politicians sent workers to paint over the images, their actions were captured on video and posted to social media, which forced them to finally address the problem.

- Syria:** The Kesh Malek Organization¹² was formed by a group of youth working towards justice, freedom, and dignity. Through the Syria Banksy campaign, the organization aims to use graffiti that references international pop culture memes to amplify voices from within Syria and to bring the conflict to an end.
- Chile:** During the Pinochet dictatorship, Chilean women organized themselves to create arpilleras, or tapestries,¹³ which came to symbolize their protest against the dictatorship and its brutality against the people. The arpilleras were sold as a way for women to make an income and concealed messages that circulated throughout and beyond Chile.

Social Media Actions

- Israel:** In December 2015, Israel’s Ministry of Education banned the novel *Borderline*¹⁴ – a love story between a Palestinian man and Israeli woman – from being included in high school curriculum. In response, Time Out Tel Aviv created a video called “Jews and Arabs Kiss”¹⁵ to protest the ban. The video brought together different pairs of Arabs and Jews, women

¹⁰ <https://www.newtactics.org/comment/5487#comment-5487>

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/19/russia-pothole-portraits-activists-banksy>

¹² <https://www.keshmalek.org/syria-banksy/>

¹³ <http://www.coha.org/chilean-women%E2%80%99s-resistance-in-the-arpillera-movement/>

¹⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/01/novel-about-jewish-palestinian-love-affair-is-barred-from-israeli-curriculum>

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2016/jan/07/jews-arabs-israel-kiss-book-video>



and men, gay and straight, strangers and couples, to kiss in front of the camera. Due to the popularity of the video, the ban backfired, and book sales dramatically increased.

- **Turkey:** While news channels around the world covered the escalating demonstrations in June of 2013, the state-run news station aired a documentary about penguins.¹⁶ In response, the protest movement adopted the penguin as a symbol of government censorship. Images of penguins began to circulate across social media. Under pressure, President Abdullah Gül later encouraged the media to cover the demonstrations.

Popular Culture Actions

- **Poland:** The organization Nigdy Wiecej (Never Again)¹⁷ is using pop culture to build an anti-racist youth network in Poland. The group reaches out to youth at rock concerts and soccer matches to spread awareness about hate speech. Through this campaign, the organization educates and recruits attendees to join a network that monitors and reports on neo-fascist and racist groups in their hometowns. The organization has initiated campaigns surrounding youth events including “Music Against Racism” and “Let’s Kick Racism Out of the Stadiums”.
- **Ukraine:** A Lifeline partner in Ukraine held exhibitions highlighting restrictions on freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association during the “EURO 2012” UEFA Championship. Their efforts aimed at getting the attention of the public in Ukraine and the international community to raise awareness on the decline of the human rights situation in Ukraine. Since the championship brought together a segment of the population the human rights group wouldn’t normally access, they reported that this approach moved them closer to people who do not receive information on human rights issues on a regular basis.

¹⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/09/turkey-mainstream-media-penguins-protests>

¹⁷ <http://www.nigdywiecej.org/en/>

■ PART 3 RESOURCES

ANNEX A: RISK ASSESSMENT

Groups in a restrictive context should do a risk assessment before starting an advocacy campaign. This will help your work be safer and more sustainable. In fact, if you assume that threats will happen they won't surprise you and you will be able to respond or change tactics and keep going. It is also good if your team really understands the risks they are taking and what you can and cannot do to protect them.

Situational Awareness Approach to Risk Management

Threats can change or increase quickly. It is good to take time to identify, understand, and adapt to different situations. For example, developing **socio-political awareness** might include identifying who with power might feel a negative impact from your work (e.g. if you publish an anti-corruption report). Think about what resources they have to target your organization (e.g. youth militia). Likewise, **geographic awareness** might mean planning a protest route with options for protestors to disperse quickly and quietly if the authorities respond with excessive force. More on this approach is available from **Front Line Defenders**.

Risk Assessment Questions for Organizations

- If decision-making is primarily done by one person, or a few people, what is the back-up system for decision-making if they are arrested?
- Have you developed a written security procedure and provided security training to your staff? Have you tested to see if staff members follow procedures?
- Do you have a procedure for recruiting staff and volunteers to make sure they are not agents of governments or hostile groups? Do you have policies for when employees leave the organization, including unhappy employees (e.g. changing passwords or locks)?
- Are there specific security procedures for your occasional volunteers or visitors to your organization's office?

EXAMPLE OF HOW TO STRUCTURE A RISK ASSESSMENT

Risk: Arrest in the context of police search of home and confiscation of papers/phone/laptop

Probability of this happening: Medium to high

Impact if it happens: Medium to high for myself, my family, and my organization

Threat assessment: Police usually raid homes in the early hours of the morning, and other HRDs have been targeted in this way recently.

Vulnerabilities:

- There is no due process; there will not be a search warrant or right to have a lawyer present
- We deal with sensitive information in my organization
- My young children live at home

Preventive Action:

1. Discuss the risk with my spouse and tell them who to call if the police arrive and what to do afterwards.
2. Arrange for the children to sleep at their Aunt's at times of heightened risk.
3. Investigate possibility of CCTV in home to record events.
4. Learn about my rights in detention so I can request them authoritatively (even though they may not be granted).
5. Have a lawyer briefed in case I am allowed access to a lawyer.
6. Do not store sensitive work information at home.
7. Delete or encrypt sensitive information from computer and phone
8. Ensure all my personal affairs (e.g. taxes) are in order so that they cannot become a pretext for a political prosecution.

(Source Front Line Defenders)

- Have you considered specific steps to reduce risk for victims and witnesses when documenting human rights violations?
- Is there support to address stress and burnout for you and your staff?
- Does the organization have a specific procedure to follow if there is an arrest or physical attack?
- Do you have a list of national and international contacts (e.g. embassies, media contacts, community leaders, and others of influence) that can be alerted to act in response to attacks?
- Do you have contact information for organizations that provide emergency assistance to HRDs/ CSOs at risk, and do you know what information they require? (e.g. **Front Line Defenders**, **Lifeline**, **UAF**)

ANNEX B: CHECKLIST OF PRACTICAL SECURITY STEPS

Front Line Defenders Workbook on Security <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/workbook-security-practical-steps-human-rights-defenders-risk>

Protection Handbook <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/protection-handbook-human-rights-defenders>

Digital Security <https://securityinabox.org/en/>

Home

- Assess where you think there are vulnerabilities in your home, and then explore ways to reduce risk. Remember, there are many low-cost or no-cost steps that you could take (setting an emergency procedure for family members, online self-learning, establishing community protection, ensuring consistent use of existing security hardware, such as locking doors and windows).
- If opting to install new security hardware, consider security measures that would not attract extra attention in your community, since that might increase your risk.
- Have a separate entrance and emergency exit if possible.
- Avoid taking work home if the content is sensitive.
- Ensure that you carefully follow other laws and regulations such as tax laws, traffic laws, and drug laws so you do not attract unwanted attention.

Office

- Invest time and effort in developing good relations with your neighbors who could alert you to anything suspicious in the neighborhood.
- Have a data protection plan and don't keep unnecessary data on-file.
- Use secure communication platforms like Signal and encrypted email whenever possible.
- Ensure that no staff member is working in the office alone; two or more is always safer.
- If concerned about an office break-in, first explore solutions that don't require a big financial investment. CCTV and security cameras can be useful to capture evidence and to dissuade intruders, but can have some downsides. Security cameras may give a false sense of security, could be easily hacked, and might require ongoing funds to maintain.
- Consider secure routes to and from work and secure locations for meetings.
- Develop a safe transportation plan so at-risk staff can use the safest options. This might require changing timing or location of meetings; changing the mode of transportation; and if necessary, providing funds to use private cars that would be undetected.
- Share sensitive information with as few people as possible, even among trusted staff.

Travel

- Consider having a code word to signify sudden danger and plan for daily check-ins with a trusted colleague.
- Avoid following the same routine that can be used by anyone surveilling you
- Consider safety when choosing meeting location, including number of exits and whether a more public venue makes you more or less safe.
- Keep passport/travel documents up-to-date (including visas), make copies of all documents, and place copies with a trusted colleague.

Detention/arrest/abduction

- Memorize your lawyer’s phone number; do not answer any questions without presence of lawyer.
- Know your rights and request them firmly.
- Carry any necessary medication with you at all times.
- Share a list of emergency assistance programs with trusted colleagues in advance.

Demonstrations

- Consider organizing the demonstrators in groups of four – everyone should look out for each other.
- Consider enclosing your demonstrations in a human chain.
- Do not have all your key staff at a demonstration.
- Consider working with those that can act as ‘accompaniers’ (e.g. respected religious leaders, embassies staff from countries considered impartial).

ANNEX C: DIGITAL SECURITY CHECKLIST

Issue	Recommendations	Tip/Resource
Device Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Password protect your device • Update your operating system when prompted • Run anti-virus software • Back up your devices regularly • Delete sensitive information regularly (consider secure deletion software to wipe the device if applicable) • Don’t plug devices into public USB ports or plug unknown USB flash drives to your device • Don’t use untrusted public WiFi networks • Don’t leave devices unattended in public/hotel/conference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use password manager software to store your passwords: Keepass, LastPass, Dashlane • Free Antivirus: Avira, AVG, Avast, inbuilt Windows Defender • Delete your Data Securely: Bleachbit • Cloud backup: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End-to-end encrypted cloud storage: Tresorit • Client-side encryption https://cryptomator.org/ for your cloud files
File / Disk encryption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable full-disk encryption on your device • Use Bitlocker for windows, Filevault for Mac, or free open source disk encryption software – VeraCrypt • Most smartphones come with encryption enabled, check settings to confirm • If applicable, make sure to encrypt flash drives to protect the data in it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With encryption ON, both your device and your password will be needed to unscramble the encrypted data • Helpful resource: “Keeping your Data Safe” https://ssd.eff.org/en/module/keeping-your-data-safe
Email + Social Media Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use strong passwords: https://xkcd.com/936/ • Don’t use the same password for more than one service • If supported, implement two-factor authentication • Be very careful clicking links or opening attachments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-factor authentication (2FA) strengthens login security by requiring additional method of authentication • List of websites and whether or not they support Two Factor Authentication: https://twofactorauth.org/

Issue	Recommendations	Tip/Resource
Web-based end-to-end encrypted email services	End-to-End encrypted email means that only the sender and the recipient can read the messages exchanged and data shared between them.	Some free, web-based options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protonmail • Tutanota • Hushmail
Encrypted email communication	If you're concerned about online privacy and security of your communication, one of the common methods for encryption is called PGP. Based on public key cryptography, PGP can make sure that your data is safe from prying eyes, and that only intended audience can read the content of your communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pretty Good Privacy (PGP encryption) explained, Thunderbird guide: https://guides.accessnow.org/tag_pgp.html • Mailvelope (browser plugin) • List of email applications that support OpenPGP standard: https://www.openpgp.org/software/
Encrypted messaging apps:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of which apps are the most secure for your particular country/region: https://securityinbox.org/en/guide/secure-communication/: user data and privacy, metadata, recent security news]. (Signal App has the highest standards as of October 2019) • Review privacy and security settings of each application. • Even if you use the most secure apps, there is a chance someone might get your sensitive conversations or personal files because it was stored somewhere on your device. It is essential to create a process for revising the app content and deleting sensitive messages regularly (e.g. use disappearing message function if possible) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure your mobile device https://securityinbox.org/en/guide/smartphones/ • Thinking about what you need in a secure messenger https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2018/03/thinking-about-what-you-need-secure-messenger • Signal, the secure messaging app https://freedom.press/training/locking-down-signal/ • Whatsapp safety tips (has some security issues) https://www.whatsapp.com/safety • How to secure messaging apps https://guides.accessnow.org/IM_Tips.html
Safe Browsing:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update your Browser version regularly. • Check website authenticity (look at the link, HTTPS icon at the start). • Make your browsing more secure: https://www.eff.org/https-everywhere • Use VPN to protect your browsing information from prying eyes (especially if using public / shared Wi-Fi). 	VPN is an encrypted tunnel between two devices that lets you access every website and online service privately and securely. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VPN comparison guide https://thatoneprivacysite.net/ • Run your own VPN https://getoutline.org/en/home

ANNEX D: BEST PRACTICES FOR WELL-BEING

An integrated approach to security also includes attention to mental health. In addition to being important in its own right, attention to well-being ensures organizational sustainability and that your team is in the right headspace to make good decisions about their security and work. A lack of attention to well-being takes a significant toll on frontline human rights defenders, organizations, and movements. Human rights campaigning can involve exposure to a great deal of stress, trauma, and secondary trauma. That, combined with working in harrowing, restrictive environments under fear of attack is extremely stressful. Activists with different identities may also face different types of challenges that affect wellbeing, for example, a defender's gender and/or sexual identity could put them under additional threat.

With that in mind it's very important to think about you and your team's well-being and psycho-social health in order to reduce burnout and mitigate the impact of trauma and secondary trauma. The most important place to start is organizational and leadership commitment to well-being at the highest levels —managers and senior staff play important roles in setting the tone for an organization and modeling good well-being practices. Some advocates see attending to well-being as part of their political vision commitment, rather than relegating it to a medicalized model of mental health.

There are many barriers to addressing mental health issues – cultural stigma, lack of awareness, lack of financial resources, and poor management—but there are also a lot creative responses to deal with the barriers. In contexts where there are few mental health professionals and individualized therapy is not widely accepted or accessible, peer-to-peer support is a highly effective way to deal with stress and trauma. While every context is unique, below are some suggestions based on a [study on organizational responses to mental health risks in the human rights field](#)¹⁸ conducted by the Human Rights Resilience project at New York University.

- **Providing education, training, and resources:** Periodic or one-off workshops, incorporating mental health education into

existing staff meetings or retreats, or providing written guides or tips to advocates.

- **Mainstreaming Attention to Well-being into Individual, Team, and Organizational Meetings:** Discussion of well-being in regular staff meetings can open space to vent harms or stress and encourage well-being practices.
- **Counseling and Psychological Support:** Organizations can provide or facilitate access to therapy or counseling; these could be individual and/or group therapy sessions. Some organizations make counselors available at the office; others provided financial resources for staff to access them elsewhere.
- **Peer Support and Socializing:** One of the most common and effective measures is the use of peer support mechanisms. This can include specific efforts to encourage peer-to-peer mental health support, as well as more general efforts to create opportunities for socializing and building inter-staff trust and bonds.
- **Shifting Topic or Type of Work:** Shifting the topic or type of work, including taking a break from direct work with witnesses and survivors, can help prevent or respond to burnout or secondary trauma.
- **Trauma-Aware Workflows:** Organizations can adopt workflow practices to mitigate harm, including recommendations that advocates not process graphic material at night or alone, break up exposure into discrete time periods, and block out parts of a graphic image.
- **Breaks and Leave:** Many advocates discussed the importance of breaks, and numerous organizations had various formal or informal break and leave policies focused on enhancing well-being.
- **Remote Working and Flexible Hours:** These can aid advocates in managing their workloads and personal responsibilities and facilitate working in varied or less-stressful environments.
- **Offering Individual Well-being Practices:** Some organizations offer or facilitate practices such as yoga, mindfulness, or exercise.
- **Art, Spiritual, and Religiously Rooted Healing Practices:** Advocates identified artistic, spiritual, or religiously rooted practices that aimed at individual at individual or collective care and healing.

18 https://www.hrresilience.org/uploads/1/1/6/2/116243539/190820_executive_summary_from_a_culture_of_unwellness_bluebooked.pdf

ANNEX E: STAKEHOLDER MAPPING AND POWER ANALYSIS

It is important to identify your stakeholders when you design an advocacy campaign. You need to understand the interests and influence of both supporters and people who oppose you. Then you can prioritize your actions based on your analysis of the levels of influence and interest of these stakeholders¹⁹.

Identifying stakeholders

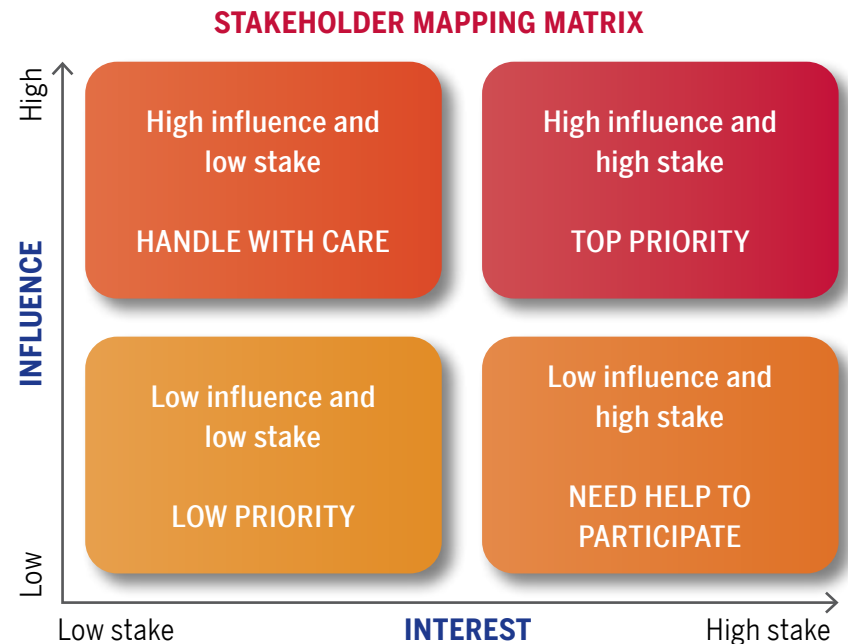
- Who are all the people and organizations who are interested in this issue? List relevant groups, organizations, and people and put them in the stakeholder list.
- From the stakeholder list, select people and organizations you think are target audiences and people who influence others (influencers).
- The list of targets and influencers will depend on the type of project you are doing, its advocacy goal, and its intended impact.
- Think about the perspectives, interests, and power of the people on this list.

Analyzing targets and influencers

- Make a list with names of the targets, their perspective on the problem, what you are asking them to do, and how you will communicate with them
- Then write the names of your targets in the boxes below showing if you think they support you, oppose you, are neutral, or are just people you want to participate.

Prioritizing targets and influencers

- Note which targets and influencers are most relevant
- Select the targets and influencers who will be most useful for you. Think about which supporters will be most important to work with if you have limited time and resources.



¹⁹ http://www.careaction.org/sites/default/files/power_tool-_multi-stakeholder.pdf?

ANNEX F: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

This resource will be periodically updated on the Lifeline website to ensure updates are captured. Check for updates at www.csolifeline.org

Security

Key Resources: Tips, tools, and how-to's for safer online communication: <https://ssd.eff.org/en>

Comprehensive, updated security guides in multiple languages: <https://securityinabox.org/en/>

Personalized online safety recommendations game: <https://securityplanner.org/#/>

Comprehensive digital safety kit: <https://cpj.org/2019/07/digital-safety-kit-journalists.php>

Digital security courses for activists and journalists: <https://learn.totem-project.org/>

Digital & physical security App (Android only): <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=org.secfirst.umbrella&hl=en>

Digital Security Helpline (Access Now) <https://www.accessnow.org/help/>. For NGOs with an acute digital security need, the most efficient way to secure assistance is to contact the Access Now Digital Security Helpline. The helpline provides a secure communications channel, with human as well as digital verification protocols, and it provides free advice, referring NGOs, activists and journalists to appropriate services, tools and other resources. The helpline responds to requests for assistance within two hours, and it may be contacted in English, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Russian, Tagalog and Arabic. It maintains offices in San Jose, New York, Berlin, Tunisia, Moscow and Manila.

Security in-a-box <https://securityinabox.org/en/>. Created by Tactical Technology Collective and Front Line Defenders, a detailed guide on how to secure operating systems of various devices, including technical setups and software settings.

Tactical Tech <https://holistic-security.tacticaltech.org/> – produced studies on how human rights organizations can most effectively train about digital security.

Protest Resiliency Toolkit (CIVICUS) <https://civicus.org/protest-resilience-toolkit/> strategies for effective and safe protests.

Front Line Defenders <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/workbook-security-practical-steps-human-rights-defenders-risk> Provides digital security advice within its general 'Workbook on Security: Practical Steps for Human Rights Defenders at Risk.' Appendix 14 includes a handbook for computer and phone security.

Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) <https://ssd.eff.org/en> and <https://ssd.eff.org/en/playlist/human-rights-defender>. 'Surveillance Self-Defense' is a good overview of digital security issues. The website provides an easy to- navigate set of overviews containing basic information explaining concepts such as encryption, hacking and metadata. EFF maintains a webpage specifically designed to navigate resources most relevant to human rights defenders

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) <https://www.cpj.org/reports/2012/04/technology-security.php>. Provides guidance on risk assessment and mitigation and maintains an Emergencies Response Team providing comprehensive support to journalists and media support staff around the world.

Internews <https://www.internews.org/resource/saferjournodigital-security-re-sources-media-trainers> Safer journo toolkit provides digital and online safety resources for journalists and media trainers.

Digital Security Training Module (CIPE) <https://www.cipe.org/vba/resources/tech-for-democracy/module-digital-security/> CIPE provides an online training on using free or affordable technologies to help organizations conduct advocacy more efficiently and effectively.

The Empowering Internet Safety Guide for Women (VPN Mentor) https://www.vpnmentor.com/blog/the-empowering-internet-safety-guide-for-women/?utm_campaign=85e66120d9EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_12_12_03_27&utm_medium=email&utm_source=IGWG&utm_term=0_a24996ea0a-85e66120d9-60907071 This is a guide that seeks to empower women to navigate online spaces where women are often subjected to online harassment.

Civic Space Research and Legal Analysis

Freedom in the World (Freedom House) <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018> Freedom in the World is an annual report that assesses the condition of political and civil rights across the globe.

Freedom on the Net (Freedom House) <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2018/rise-digital-authoritarianism> Freedom on the net is an annual report that assesses online freedom across the globe.

Civic Space Monitor (CIVICUS) <https://monitor.civicus.org/> The Civic Space Monitor provides information about the state of civil society freedoms in all countries.

State of Civil Society (CIVICUS) <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/state-of-civil-society-report-2018> This annual report looks at the major events that involve and affect civil society around the world.

Guide to Reporting on Civic Space (CIVICUS) <http://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/reporting-civic-space/Guide-to-Reporting-Civic-Space-Media-Toolkit.pdf> This toolkit helps individuals report on restrictions of civic space by connecting journalists and media with the challenges and opportunities in civic space.

Global Trends in NGO Laws – LGBTI Civil Society Organizations Around the Globe: Challenges, Successes, and Lessons Learned <http://www.icnl.org/2-Global%20Trends%20Vol%207%20Iss%202.pdf?pdf=trends7-2> This report looks at trends, opportunities, and barriers to the operations of LGBTI civil society organizations.

ICNL Civic Freedoms Resources <https://www.icnl.org/resources> ICNL provides a number of resources about issues shaping the legal environment for civil society, philanthropy, and public participation.

Global Analysis (Front Line Defenders) https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/global_analysis_2018.pdf The annual Global Analysis details specific instances of assaults, threats, smear campaigns, and more against HRDs.

Guide for Video Documentation (Witness) <https://www.witness.org/resources/> This guide provides information on how to safely and effectively record instances of human rights violations.

Countering Slander and Harassment

Online Harassment Field Manual (PEN America) <https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/> This field manual contains effective strategies and resources for writers, journalists, their allies, and their employers to use to defend against cyber hate and fight online abuse.

How to Talk about Human Rights (Anat Shenker-Osorio) <http://australianprogress.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/A-Brilliant-Way-of-Living-Our-Lives-How-to-Talk-About-Human-Rights.pdf> This report analyzes what messages resonate or falter in the human rights sector and why they do so.

Organizational

Gaining Ground – A framework for Developing Strategies and Tactics in Response to Governmental Attacks on NGOs <https://www.inclo.net/pdf/gaining-ground.pdf> this guide provides case studies, strategies, and contextual considerations for addressing governmental attacks on NGOs.

Visualizing Information for Advocacy <https://visualisingadvocacy.org/content/visualising-information-advocacy.html> This book explores how best to conduct Advocacy through a combination of information, design, technology, and networks with a specific focus on visual information campaigns.

Defending Civil Society (World Movement for Democracy) <https://www.movedemocracy.org/defending-democratic-space/defending-civil-society> This project seeks to develop strategies and networks for and between activists and organizations pushing back against restrictions on civil space.

Advocacy and Campaigns toolkit http://civicus.org/images/stories/SD2015%20Post-2015%20Advocacy%20Toolkit_FINAL.pdf This toolkit is aimed at helping organizations and activists develop advocacy strategies with specific consideration of the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Diversity & Inclusion toolkit (intersectionality) <https://www.civicus.org/documents/toolkits/CIVICUS-gender-and-social-inclusion-toolkit.pdf> This toolkit is designed to help organizations implement gender and social inclusion in their operations and advocacy.

Well-Being

Rooted in Care: Sustaining our Movements (FRIDA) <https://youngfeministfund.org/2018/11/rooted-in-care/> This is a storytelling project for young feminists working on climate activism to reflect on the importance of self-care to their activism work.

Emergency Well-being (Capacitar) <https://capacitar.org/capacitar-emergency-kit/> This is a collection of simple tools and best practices for immediate use in cases of crisis, chronic stress, violence, and more.

Integral Change Center <https://www.integralchangecenter.org/> ICC provides support, rehabilitation, and professional development for leaders of social movements and organizations through capacity building of discriminated groups.

Protective Fellowships for Human Rights Defenders (University of York) <https://www.york.ac.uk/cahr/defenders/protective-fellowship/> The Center for Applied Human Rights at the University of York hosts human rights defenders for 3 to 6 months to both give them respite from their difficult work and to build their capacity for advocacy.

Rest & Respite Fellowship (Front Line Defenders) <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/programme/rest-respice-and-fellowships> HRDs participating in this fellowship benefit from a period of rest and respite while they work on a specific project, learn about digital security, or develop other skills that will benefit their work.

Narrative & Healing (Rhiza Collective) <http://www.rhizacollective.org/our-work#narrative-healing> Rhiza integrates processes of storytelling, arts, and healing with methods of psychosocial support to strengthen local systems of care and mobilize collective capacities for resilience and recovery.

UN Advocacy Guides

Guide to Human Rights Council (Swiss Mission) https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/eda/en/documents/publications/InternationaleOrganisationen/Uno/Human-rights-Council-practical-guide_en This is a guide on how the HRC is organized, how it operates, and how to utilize its advocacy mechanisms.

Guide to UNGA Third Committee (ISHR) <https://www.ishr.ch/news/new-guide-third-committee-united-nations-general-assembly-practical-guide-ngos> This is a guide for organizations seeking to advocate for human rights and address human rights issues with the Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee (SOCHUM).

Guide to NGO Committee (ISHR) <https://www.ishr.ch/news/updated-practical-guide-un-committee-ngos> This guide helps NGOs achieve consultative status in order to effectively engage the UN human rights system.

Advocacy Guide for WHRDs at CSW and the UN (NGO CSW) <https://ngocsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/NGO-Main-Guidelines-with-Supplement.pdf> This guide informs organizations and activists about the Commission on the Status of Women and how to effectively engage with it.

Country guidelines for HRD protection

Canada https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/rights_defenders_guide_defenseurs_droits.aspx?lang=eng

United Kingdom <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-support-for-human-rights-defenders>

more on European Union and HRDs

@CSOLifeline



info@CSOLifeline.org

www.csolifeline.org

The Lifeline Embattled CSO Assistance Fund provides **emergency financial assistance** to civil society organizations (CSOs) under threat or attack. To request an application, please email info@csolifeline.org. Lifeline's rapid response **advocacy** and **resiliency** grants support CSOs in responding to broader threats against civic space. To apply, please email: advocacy@CSOLifeline.org.

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Writer and Editor: Danya Greenfield, Senior Program Manager, Lifeline Fund for Embattled CSOs.

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