



An Enabling Environment for the Right to Defend Human Rights



Global Strategy Framework 2024-2028

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FOREWORD

Protection International (PI) was established as a non-profit organisation in Brussels in 2007 with the goal to foster resilience among human rights defenders (HRDs) and their collectives through preventive and comprehensive collective approaches to protection. Since then, we have been supporting and working in partnership with HRDs and their communities, local civil society groups, individuals, organisations, networks, and communities facing threats, judicial harassment, stigmatisation or other forms of repression, in order to best mitigate risks. Our participatory model of intervention is continually evolving in accordance with the changing socio-political contexts in which HRDs are situated.

From 2007-2018, we created ‘protection desks’ in countries that needed particular support, before evolving into a larger collection of offices around the globe which reported to a centralised head office in Brussels. In 2019, we started a decentralisation process aimed at creating more grounded and context-oriented decision-making that is more aligned with our grassroots approach. This resulted in the establishment of Regional Hubs and Country Offices. **We continue to evolve into an organisation that strives to ensure that responsibility, accountability, and power are shared amongst our offices and teams across the world.** We developed internal policies that reflect good practices and principles of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) in our way of working. We also sharpened our



preventive tools, released manuals and research publications on HRD protection, promoted and built protection networks, and engaged with governments to ensure that protection policies for HRDs are in place, to name a few. **After more than 15 years of existence, we continue learning and improving as we grow and evolve.**

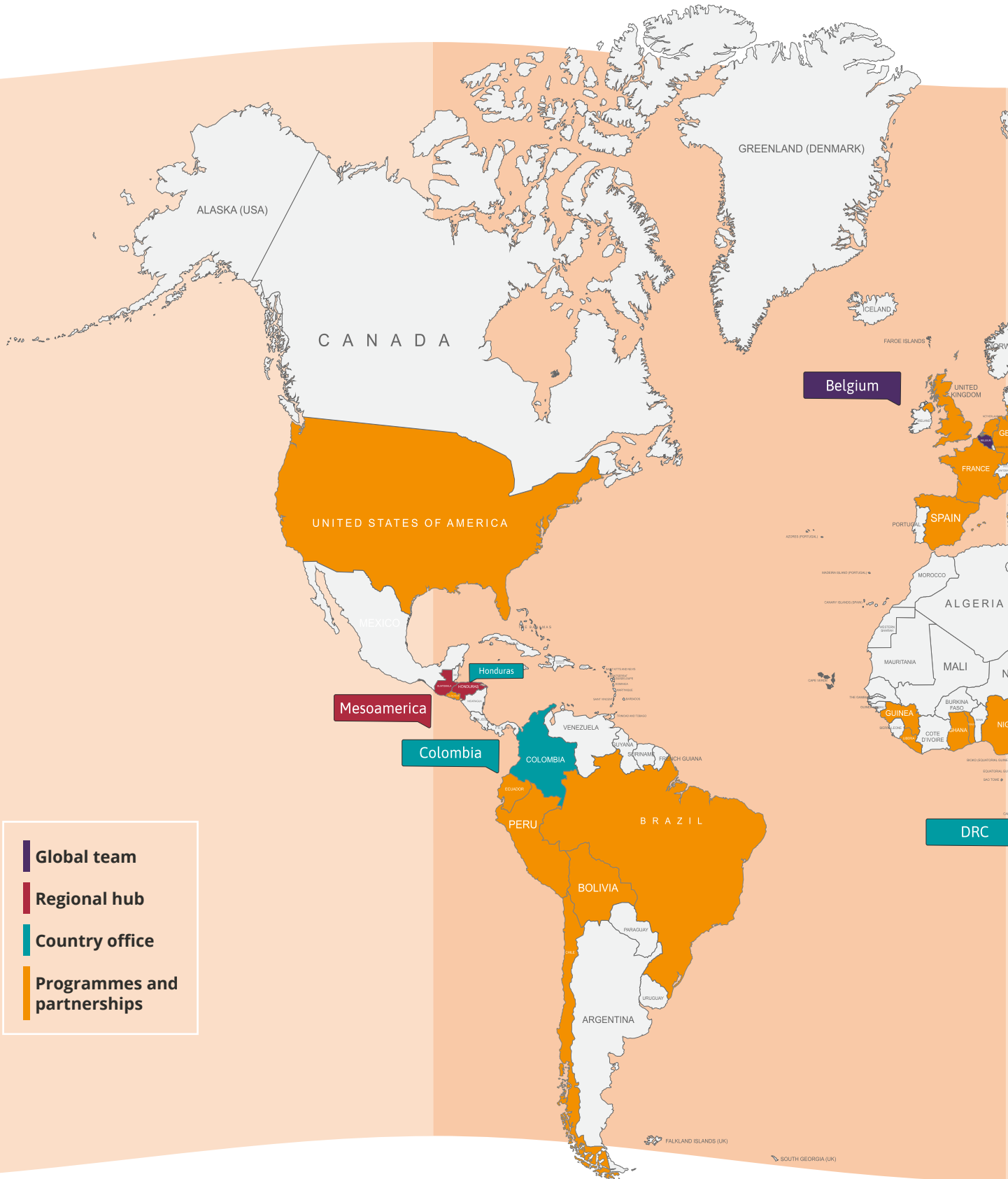
For the next five years, our global strategy aims to take stock of the lessons learned over the past years, and to strategically direct our time, efforts and resources to further develop and improve ourselves while we address critical issues that HRDs face on the ground. We are committed to be an even stronger ally and partner of HRDs and their collectives, to rigorously engage in relevant spaces to influence and ensure an enabling environment for the right to defend human rights (RDHR), and to continue to focus on our institutional strengthening to further evolve into an organisation that takes care of its own people as we work together to achieve our mission.

This strategy is the result of deep conversations, dialogues and reflections amongst our teams across the world, consultation sessions and inputs from our partners, HRDs, and funders on our way forward.



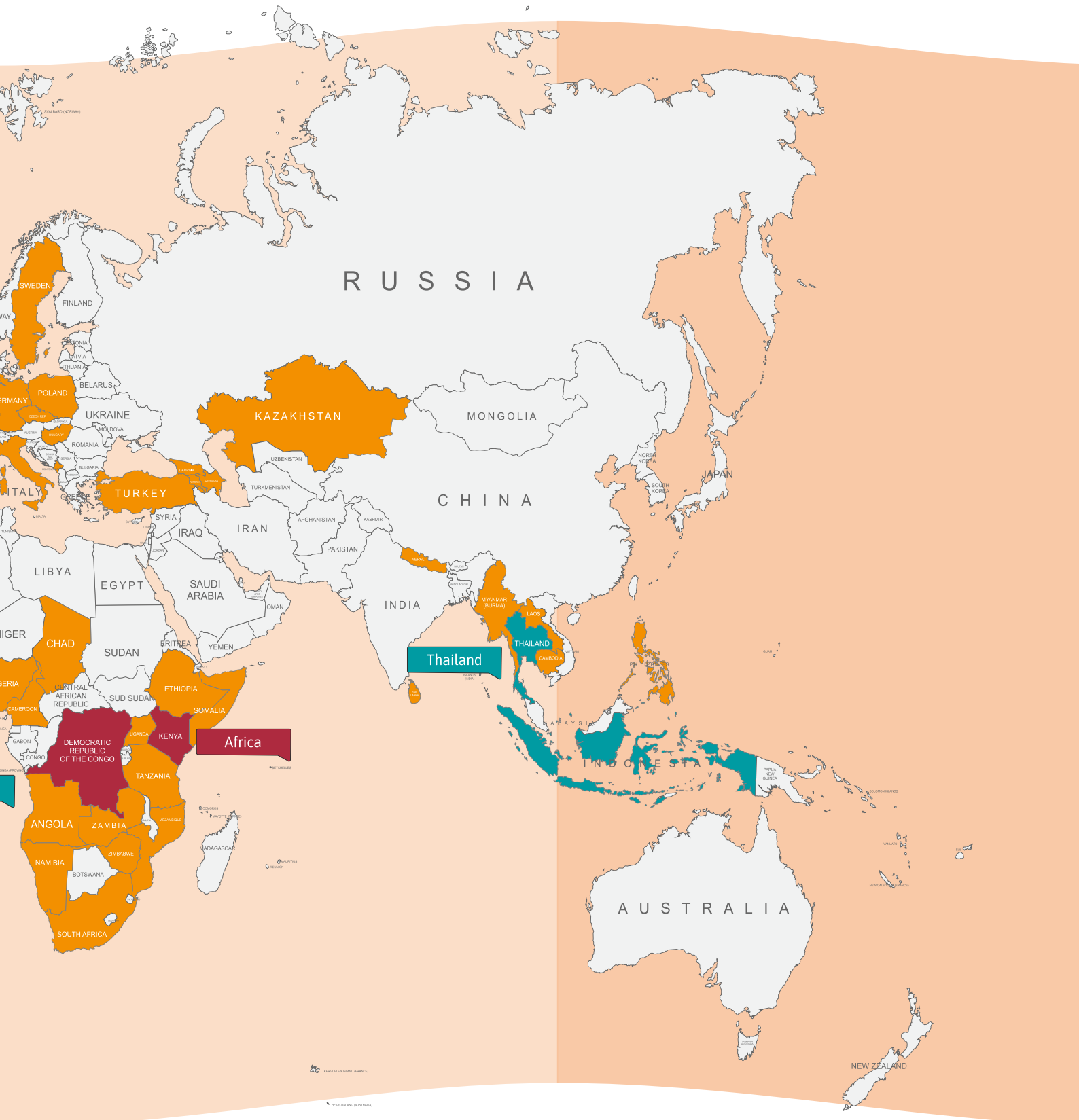
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THIS IS PROTECTION INTERNATIONAL PI AROUND THE WORLD



- Global team
- Regional hub
- Country office
- Programmes and partnerships

PI stands for the right to defend human rights (RDHR) for everyone. **Since 2007, we have been working with human rights movements across the globe.** We provide long-term accompaniment and support to HRDs and their collectives at risk. Our objective is to support the defenders in ensuring their own safety, holding duty bearers accountable to fulfil their obligation to protect HRDs, and garnering support from key stakeholders to maximise their contribution to HRDs protection.



Our vision

We aspire to a world in which fundamental human rights and freedoms are universally recognised and respected by all. Everyone has the right to defend these rights and freedoms without fear of threats or attack.

Our mission

Our contribution to that world is to support HRDs through comprehensive protection programmes. Our programmes enable HRDs to build capacities for managing their protection effectively. We carry out targeted advocacy so that those who have the duty to protect HRDs fulfil their obligations, and we work to convince other individuals and institutions with a stake in the protection of HRDs to maximise their positive contribution. PI always works in partnership with defenders.

Our core values

✦ Solidarity & Collaboration

We are committed to standing alongside HRDs and supporting their efforts to improving our societies through peaceful means.

✦ Participatory Decision-Making

We promote the respect and participation of everyone in the decision-making process. We are committed to horizontal and active listening – recognising the value in having a diversity of skills, perspectives and ideas.

✦ Accountability & Integrity

We are committed to communicating, both internally and externally, about what we are doing as an exercise of transparency that reflects a reliable and credible organisation, fostering trust amongst our partners. We maintain a zero-tolerance policy on corruption.

✦ Grassroots Ethos

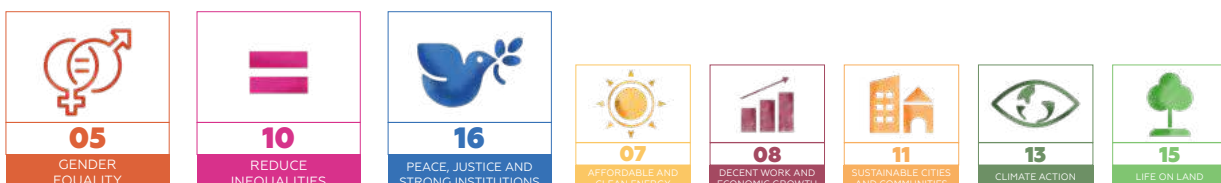
We are committed to identifying the needs of HRDs and their communities, to adapting our work to their realities (cultural, historical, economic, etc.), and to valuing their work and their voices.

✦ Commitment to Human Rights

We believe that respect for human rights will contribute to a more just global society. Everybody has the RDHR and fundamental freedoms without discrimination based on their identity, nor fear of being threatened or attacked.

✦ Creativity & Learning

We are committed to reflecting on our individual and collective practices, learning from our mistakes, being open to new ideas and ways of working, sharing internally in order to learn, innovating and improving our level of understanding, and putting our lessons learned into practice to contribute more effectively to the work of others.



PI's mission and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

PI is both directly and indirectly addressing a variety of the SDGs, especially SDG 16 (promote Peaceful & Inclusive Societies), SDG 5 (achieve Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (reduce Inequality), and is contributing to the UN's ambition to fulfil its plan of action for people, planet and prosperity.¹ PI does so by accompanying HRDs and collectives who strive to achieve these goals through capacity-building processes, which are implemented through a gender-responsive approach, with the ultimate objective to enhance accountability and end impunity, promote the rule of law, demand accountable and transparent institutions, and prevent threats and killings.

¹Through our support to HRDs working to attain SDGs, PI is also indirectly contributing to SDG 7 – affordable and clean energy, SDG 8 – decent work and economic growth, SDG 11 – sustainable cities and communities, SDG 13 – climate action, and SDG 15 – life on land.

What we do

PI supports HRDs and their collectives at **risk**, based on international human rights standards that recognise the work of HRDs and the positive role they play in building more just societies. PI aims to promote and protect the RDHR of everyone. Our interventions seek to **analyse the context and the root causes of violence against HRDs and their collectives, and to act upon them**. We do so, for instance, by delivering capacity-building and capacity strengthening support on protection management to HRDs, by engaging with duty-bearing authorities to urge them to fulfil their obligation to protect, and by seeking support from key stakeholders to maximise their contribution to the protection of HRDs and their collectives.

PI implements the **principles of universality and indivisibility of all human rights, of participation, non-discrimination, accountability, and transparency** through our horizontal and comprehensive working approach, our close cooperation with local partners and our focus on some of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups according to country contexts, all of which engage stakeholders and duty-bearing authorities.

We have developed a **comprehensive, collective and long-term approach to the protection of HRDs and their collectives**.

We look at protection from a **preventive lens that aims to foster resilience**, limiting the need for emergency interventions over time. Our comprehensive understanding of protection encompasses physical and digital aspects while addressing HRDs' wellbeing through collective resilience, and the protection of the territory/space in which they operate and of their cultural and spiritual identities.

PI supports the creation and strengthening of **protection networks** as a key element against the isolation of HRDs and their collectives. **We foster a collaborative approach to mobilise and influence like-minded actors** at the local, national and international levels. The number and diversity of allies that HRDs can rely upon (e.g. other HRDs, human rights organisations, like-minded national institutions, diplomatic missions, donors and inter-governmental organisations) can be key to address the threats and aggressions they face, including physical attacks, defamation, smear campaigns, criminalisation and cyber threats.

Approach to our work

We adopt a grassroots approach, providing contextual support for the HRDs' benefit, from the local to the international level. Our support aims to **increase agency for the HRDs and their collectives placed in the most vulnerable situations while contributing to the creation of enabling environments** for the exercise of their RDHR.

Our model of intervention is rooted in the global majority and people placed in vulnerable situations, with highly qualified national and local teams to ensure the sustainability and contextual relevance of our interventions and support in the strengthening of local social movements. Our relationships with our local partners are based on an equal footing and on mutual respect. The actions of our Country Offices and Regional Hubs are complemented by those of our Global Team to amplify the voices of HRDs and their collectives in international fora. This rich exchange of experience and learning underpins our evidence-based research on the protection challenges and practices of HRDs and collectives. Such research results then feed into the development of new tools and capacity building and strengthening processes.

Drawing inspiration and learning from the values of the justice movement and the feminist movement, as well as from the HRDs and groups we work with, PI aims to apply JEDI principles throughout our operations. Upholding women's rights, achieving gender equality, and addressing intersectionality are at the top of our agenda as we improve PI's operations, both at the level of programming and within our human resources management. In security management, **PI dismantles unequal power relations and discrimination that specifically affects women, both of which form the base of gender inequality.**

PI is cognisant of the imperative of decolonising and the ongoing struggle against racism and xenophobia. **We, therefore, work towards a deracialised organisation that shares power, responsibility, and accountability across its offices.** Cognisant of the fact that abusive power can marginalise people and place them in vulnerable situations, PI implements specific programmes focusing on the roles and representation of women, young people, LGBTQI+ people, indigenous peoples, religious minorities and other groups, taking into account their individuality as HRDs but also the organisational structures they are a part of.



Pillars of our work



Support, capacity building and strengthening

We support HRDs to become more aware of their rights and to manage their protection (both preventively and reactively), and we provide psychosocial support.



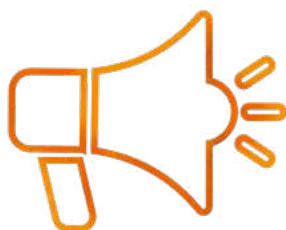
Networking and alliance building

We join forces with others to share knowledge, build collective power, and form strategic partnerships.



Resource mobilisation

We raise funds, mobilise and share resources with groups to ensure capacity strengthening and growth.



Advocacy and outreach

We push for policy changes to protect HRDs and ensure the RDHR, and make sure our messages are delivered effectively.



Research

We continually seek to innovate by developing new tools, analysing public policies for the protection of HRDs, and collecting data to support our advocacy efforts.

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THE WORLD WE ARE IN

Our current reality

The adoption of the UN Declaration on HRDs in 1998 marked a momentous step forward. It was followed by the establishment of international standards and even national legislation in a few countries aimed at recognising and safeguarding the rights of HRDs. In addition to this, the SDGs adopted by all UN members in 2015 highlighted the importance of the prioritisation of and the connection between the environment, and social and economic aspects to ensure sustainable development across the world. The people and the planet were placed at the centre of the SDGs. **Even so, people defending their rights continue to face injustice, human rights violations, and inequality.** The advances and commitments stemming from the adoption of the UN Declaration on HRDs have been consistently under attack and threatened from various fronts.

We are experiencing a **crisis of democratic institutions** that continues to escalate militarisation, repression, authoritarianism, pervasive corruption, and rampant impunity. Far-right politics or right-wing extremist agendas are gaining ground in many countries, **fostering narratives of hatred and discrimination that justify historical structures of oppression** such as colonialism, racism, patriarchy, xenophobia, and heterosexism. Furthermore, the convergence of the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global impact of the invasions of Ukraine and Palestine and ongoing

wars, the steady narrowing of civic space, alarming economic crisis, unbridled natural resource extraction, extreme weather changes are heightening vulnerability among marginalised populations, exacerbating socio-economic disparities and environmental degradation, further contributing to the marginalisation of already disenfranchised groups.



The failure of state authorities to fulfil their duty to protect HRDs, coupled with the increasing defiance of powerful non-state actors – such as extremist religious and conservative groups, radical political parties, abusive private corporations, organised crime, and armed groups – **compounds the challenges faced by HRDs.** The complex interplay of archaic societal structures and injustices create a hostile operating environment in which barriers such as repressive laws and policies, and judicial harassment further hinder HRDs from effectively defending human rights. These contribute to the erosion of civil society space and a surge in repression and violence against activists and defenders (with some being more affected than others due to their intersecting identities in particular indigenous peoples, women, young people, migrants, and members of the LGBTQI+

community, among others). Consequently, the number of HRDs and communities at risk continues to rise, necessitating urgent resources to enhance their protection and uphold their RDHR without fear of reprisal.

Financial resources and funding also remains a critical issue for our mission and our people. While significant financial resources have been invested by inter-governmental bodies, and by the philanthropic community and foundations, flexible and/or core funding is offered only by a handful of donors. **The scarcity of this flexible/core funding traps organisations in raising project funding and delivering on commitments, while preventing them from investing in institutional strengthening and staff wellbeing.** There must be a global awakening on funding organisations' core missions to achieve the goals set forth in the UN Declaration on HRDs and in the SDGs.

How we want to make a difference – meaningful impact

Despite these challenges, opportunities for progress exist. As threats against HRDs escalate globally, so does the response, not only from traditional non-governmental organisations (NGOs) but also from a broader spectrum of actors including citizens' movements, young people and more connected generations, people with disabilities, indigenous peoples, feminist movements, environmental activists, or anti-corruption advocates. Meanwhile, institutional debates on business and human rights, due diligence, new technologies, climate justice, and more importantly, on public policies aimed at protecting the RDHR, are creating space for structural changes. In this reality, the resilience of HRDs and their commitment to peaceful resistance, alongside the

effectiveness of alliances and networks for protection, offer hope for the global human rights movement in the face of formidable discriminatory forces.

Our understanding of what needs to change involves addressing the systemic issues that perpetuate violence and aggressions against HRDs and collectives who defend human rights. To do so **means adopting a preventive approach to the protection of HRDs and their collectives from an intersectional perspective,** strengthening the participation of marginalised HRDs at risk, and mobilising networks and resources for the protection of HRDs. At the core of our work, **it entails advocating for enabling environments for the RDHR, countering stigmatisation,**

fighting against criminalisation, and strengthening digital governance.

The next few years are critical for HRDs across the world – we are committed to support them, to push for change, and to deliver on our key change promises which are encompassed in our pathways. We aim to have meaningful impact in supporting HRDs and their collectives in their agency to make informed decisions about their protection and to defend human rights safely, while urging power holders to take all necessary actions to eliminate barriers, and to create and uphold enabling environments offline and online. Through these initiatives, we aspire to cultivate a culture of respect for human rights and ensure that HRDs and their collectives

can operate safely and effectively in their pursuit of justice and dignity for all.

We acknowledge that systemic and transformative change does not happen overnight. We therefore focus on the meaningful and positive impacts we will achieve in the next five-year period of our framework. We will take time to effectively and sustainably build our collective strength and power to continue to deliver on our long-term mission. Our current five-year cycle will focus on pathways to deliver on our key change promises and our strategic objectives.



Mujer yanomami. © Victor Englebert/Survival

Pathway 1: HRD-led initiatives

PI contributes to a future where HRDs and their collectives are increasingly able to lead initiatives that increase their protection and shape their environment. Each step, from targeted activities to strategic outcomes and desired impact, builds towards a reality where HRDs and their collectives are at the forefront of advocating for and exercising their RDHR.

◆ **Starting Point – Activities**

PI supports HRDs and their collectives through tailored, culturally appropriate, gender-responsive, context-sensitive protection activities. These will include accompaniment, advisory support, training and workshops on capacity strengthening, comprehensive data collection and research, facilitating access to emergency grants, conducting lobby tours, and participating in consultations and co-creating learning sessions, among others.

◆ **Building Blocks – Outputs**

The activities yield several outputs that serve as building blocks for change. Firstly, PI will support HRDs and their collectives in creating comprehensive protection and care plans (i.e. including physical, digital and psychosocial wellbeing dimensions) that take into account their intersecting identities and specific contexts. In collaboration with HRDs and their collectives, PI will also produce training materials, tools and guidelines on security and protection, that will be disseminated widely in multiple languages and accessible formats. Secondly, PI will maintain and expand its distance learning online courses and training modules on different protection-related topics, which will be offered in multiple languages and accessible formats.

In tandem with HRDs, PI will facilitate the establishment of collective protection spaces, fostering a collaborative environment for HRDs, their collectives and protection actors. These spaces will serve as conduits for sharing research results and practical guidelines on engaging with HRDs and their collectives effectively.

◆ **Pathways to Change – Immediate Outcomes**

HRDs and their collectives strengthen their advocacy for their rights, equipped with greater awareness of the risks involved in their work and with more robust protection resources to prevent and mitigate threats and attacks. In collaboration with protection networks, they develop coordinated strategies to counteract the stigmatisation of defender groups and to shape public discourse about the defense of human rights. HRDs and their collectives harness their collective knowledge and research to create evidence-based policy recommendations, positioning themselves as informed advocates for change.

◆ **Culmination – Meaningful Impacts**

HRDs and their collectives deepen, reinforce, and diversify their protection networks, extending their spheres of influence. These protection networks are resilient, and capable of mobilising quickly to support defenders in times of crisis. The influence of HRDs and their collectives transcends their immediate networks, allowing them to shape protection agendas at the national, regional, and international levels. HRDs and their collectives become pivotal architects of systems change designed to protect their RDHR.

Pathway 1 Key Areas

Capacity Building and Strengthening Leads to Enhanced Security and Protection

HRDs and their collectives are willing and able to meaningfully participate in capacity building and strengthening activities adapted to their contexts.

HRDs and their collectives are willing and able to adopt more effective security practices because of these capacity building and strengthening activities.

Access and Utilisation of Tools and Support

HRDs and their collectives access support, tools and resources developed by PI.

HRDs and their collectives understand and utilise these tools effectively.

Engagement and Collaboration

HRDs and their collectives that are highly stigmatised, marginalised and discriminated against are able and willing to participate in new partnerships and networking opportunities.

Influence on Policy and Practice

State authorities are willing to consider and act on the policy recommendations concerning HRDs at risk.

Effective Risk Analysis Training

HRDs' risk analysis and protection plans are based on accurate and comprehensive data.

HRDs and their collectives can adapt their strategies and practices in response to the outcomes of their risk analysis.

Sustainable Funding

Sufficient and sustained funding is available for all the activities and initiatives outlined.

Donors and funding bodies prioritise HRD support in their agendas.

Networks and Campaigns Influence Perceptions

The public and relevant stakeholders are receptive to the campaigns and messaging put forward by HRDs and their collectives.

Positive narratives and campaigns can influence target audiences' perceptions around the role of HRDs and collectives who defend human rights, thus counteracting misrepresentation and increasing public support.

Long-term Commitment

HRDs and their collectives remain committed and active in the long-term to ensure the sustainability of outcomes.

There is a continuity of engagement from both new and established allies.

Stable Socio-political Context

There is a minimum workspace for HRDs and their collectives to allow their activities and collaborations.

Legal and institutional frameworks are in place or can be developed to support the protection and rights of HRDs and their collectives.

Learning and Adaptation

There is a willingness and ability among HRDs, their collectives and their networks to learn from experiences and adapt strategies accordingly.

Feedback mechanisms are in place to understand what is or is not working in real time.

Pathway 2: Enhanced institutional support for the protection of HRDs and their collectives for their RDHR

PI foresees a future where the courage of HRDs and their collectives is matched by the support of diverse state and non-state actors as well as institutions at multiple levels that can propel HRDs' mission forward. The change envisaged is one where HRDs and their collectives operate safely with institutional support and recognition through public policies that respect, protect, and fulfil the RDHR.

◆ **Starting Point – Activities**

PI and HRDs and their collectives organise and participate in human rights networks, attend conferences, and run joint campaigns both online and in-person. Together with HRDs and their collectives, PI monitors existing public policies that affect them, as well as identifies and assesses disabling factors for the defense of human rights, exposing barriers that hinder HRDs and their collectives from exercising their RDHR. PI and HRDs engage with state actors, other protection actors, and the public through meetings, roundtables, and online communications platforms, to advocate for the protection of HRDs and their collectives and to create an enabling environment for the exercise of the RDHR.

◆ **Building Blocks – Outputs**

PI updates its Focus Observatory, its online platform that monitors, analyses and promotes public policies for the protection of HRDs and their collectives, to enable them to have access to up-to-date public policies that will help support their campaigns and advocacy.

State actors and key stakeholders are briefed on research-based recommendations to shape public policies for the protection of HRDs, their collectives and their exercise of the RDHR, leading to enlightened and strategic dialogues.

Meetings, roundtables and forums encourage engagement between HRDs and their collectives on one hand, and influential bodies on the other, such as the UN and the European Union (EU), as well as regional human rights mechanisms and other international institutions with a stake in HRD protection, ensuring that defenders' voices resonate in global governance.

Through fundraising events and facilitated engagement with authorities, financial and political support for HRDs are achieved.

These efforts are supplemented by advocacy that increases awareness of HRDs' and their collectives' needs, alongside national events and campaigns that advocate for public policies conducive to the protection of HRDs, the fostering of enabling environments, the strengthening of digital governance, and the unhindered exercise of the RDHR.

◆ **Pathways to Change – Immediate Outcomes**

The UN, regional human rights mechanisms, third countries and global networks of international institutions and civil society organisations (CSOs) pressure state actors and power holders to support HRDs and their collectives. Donors understand the risks

and threats facing HRDs and their collectives and work towards fostering an enabling environment for the RDHR. State actors and protection actors are called upon to revisit protection policies, refining them with a lens focused on HRDs' realities, including digital governance for safer human rights defence. HRDs' cross-sector collaborations exert additional pressure on governments and state authorities, ensuring that the existence of an enabling environment for the RDHR becomes an ingrained part of policy discussions.

◆ *Culmination – Meaningful Impact*

Key stakeholders such as diplomatic missions, donors and other institutional actors, acknowledge HRDs and their collectives, and integrate active support for them into their core operations and strategies. Comprehensive policies championing the protection of HRDs and their collectives are drafted and implemented by governments and state authorities, signifying a commitment that transcends rhetoric and manifests in action. The RDHR, both offline and online, is championed and recognised as a cornerstone of democratic and just societies.



Pathway 2 Key Areas

Stakeholder Engagement	International bodies, diplomatic missions and other key stakeholders are willing to engage with HRDs and their collectives and listen to their concerns and suggestions.
Political Will	There exists a sufficient political will among governments and state authorities to act upon the advocacy and policy recommendations put forward by PI, HRDs and their collectives.
Open Dialogue	Spaces for dialogue remain open and accessible to PI, HRDs and their collectives, allowing for free and productive exchanges.
Funding Priorities	Donors and funding institutions have the flexibility and interest to include HRDs' concerns and priorities in their funding strategies.
Civil Society Influence	Civil society can effectively mobilise and its voice is strong enough to influence public policies and institutional support mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels.
Research Utilisation	The research and evidence provided by PI, HRDs and their collectives are acknowledged, valued, and utilised by policymakers in shaping public policies.
Stable Socio-political Context	There is a minimum workspace for HRDs and their collectives to allow their activities and collaborations. Legal and institutional frameworks are in place or can be developed to support the protection and rights of HRDs and their collectives.
Legal Frameworks	There are adequate legal frameworks in place, or the willingness to create them, that can support comprehensive policies for HRDs protection and foster enabling environments for the RDHR.
International Pressure	UN bodies, regional human rights mechanisms, and global networks are able to influence State actors on the protection of HRDs and their collectives and the RDHR.
Cross-Sector Collaboration	There is a readiness and openness among various sectors to work together to support HRDs and their collectives.
Public Perception and Support	The public and the media support HRDs' efforts, thus positively influencing governments and authorities. At the very least, the public and the media are not hostile towards HRDs and their collectives.
Policy Implementation	Once policies are adopted, CSOs have a solid entry point to advocate to governments and duty-bearer institutions for effective HRD protection.

Pathway 3: Power-holders tackle existing barriers to exercising the RDHR

PI foresees an enabling environment for the exercise of the RDHR so that all HRDs and their collectives can carry out their work safely, an environment in which power-holders understand and acknowledge existing barriers that prevent HRDs from exercising their RDHR. The pursuit of such an environment leads to the dismantling of systemic barriers through the adoption of stringent policies that help create an environment where human rights, fundamental freedoms, as well as social and climate justice, can be defended and actively championed by broader sectors of society.

◆ **Starting Point - Activities**

Our starting point is the recognition that several barriers hamper the exercise of the RDHR. Beyond physical threats and attacks against HRDs and their collectives, these barriers may include social stigma, legal restrictions, institutional obstacles and even criminalisation. Power-holders like governments, corporations, and other influential actors, play a significant role in perpetuating these barriers through their actions or inaction. Addressing these barriers requires a multi-pronged approach, including advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about the challenges faced by HRDs, mobilise public support for their protection, and pressure power-holders to take meaningful steps to support and safeguard their work.

This work already begins in pathways 1 and 2, notably through the provision of support to HRDs and their collectives on security and protection, as well as through calls for the adoption of public policies on the exercise of the RDHR. These efforts are then complemented by strengthened data collection and research that underpin reinvigorated advocacy and participation in different human rights conferences, campaigns and events, both online and offline.

◆ **Building Blocks - Outputs**

Efforts to overcome barriers to the exercise of the RDHR involve several key building blocks. PI and its partners actively engage in Brussels-based and global networks, enhancing the international presence and influence of HRDs and their collectives. Collaborating with consortiums of CSOs, we strategically align and amplify advocacy efforts. Through advocacy campaigns led or supported by PI, we aim to raise awareness about the challenges HRDs and their collectives face, both offline and online, including stigmatisation. We analyse and challenge narratives that delegitimise their work while promoting positive narratives that validate their struggles, supported by widespread dissemination of research findings and lessons learned.

Furthermore, we participate in initiatives to combat the criminalisation of the activities of HRDs and their collectives, through the provision of legal support within protection networks and awareness-raising about strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) designed to silence dissent and intimidate activism. These efforts collectively challenge the systemic obstacles that HRDs and their collectives encounter in their defence of human rights.

◆ *Pathways to Change - Immediate Outcomes*

These outputs culminate in several immediate outcomes, which include increased dialogue and engagement between power-holders and HRDs, and greater recognition of the legitimacy and importance of HRDs' work. Dialogues result in the adoption of policies and mechanisms to protect HRDs, such as legislation safeguarding their rights, the establishment of national protection mechanisms, or the development of guidelines to safeguard HRDs' rights.

The provision of support, such as legal assistance and efforts to promote access to justice, contributes to addressing systemic injustices faced by HRDs, ensuring that legal frameworks uphold their rights instead of criminalising their activism offline and online. Governments are urged to repeal legislation used to criminalise HRDs and to be stringent in fighting impunity for threats and attacks, fostering an environment where HRDs can carry out their crucial work without fear of reprisals.

◆ *Culmination - Meaningful Impact*

The long-term outcome of this pathway to change is a transformative shift in the relationship between power-holders and HRDs, characterised by mutual respect, cooperation, and support for HRDs and their collectives. Through sustained advocacy and engagement to address disabling factors to the exercise of the RDHR, power-holders actively work to dismantle systemic barriers and create an environment where HRDs and their collectives can carry out their crucial work without fear of reprisals. These combined efforts lead to a society in which the RDHR is protected, celebrated and supported by everyone, as an essential pillar of democracy, justice and human dignity.

The culmination of Pathway 3 envisages a future in which the inherent value of HRDs and their collectives is recognised, and state authorities eliminate barriers to the access to justice, tackle criminalisation and SLAPPs while effectively fighting impunity for threats and attacks against HRDs and their collectives. An environment in which human rights, fundamental freedoms, social and climate justice can be defended and actively championed by broader sectors of society is created.



Pathway 3 Key Areas

Collaboration	Diverse sectors, including the media, academia, and various community groups, are open to and capable of collaborating on human rights initiatives.
Influence	Activities and outputs have the desired influence on power-holders (i.e. state and national authorities and corporations), pressuring them to make positive changes.
Recognition	Activities and outputs have the desired influence on power-holders, pressuring them to make positive changes.
Narrative Control	It is possible to establish a trusted verification and dissemination mechanism that the public will accept, in order to counter misinformation and positively influence public discourse and media narratives.
Public Support	The work of HRDs and their collectives is recognised and valued, and the public is supportive of campaigns that celebrate the RDHR.
Effective Campaigns	Positive narrative campaigns and advocacy efforts are effective in their design and implementation, and stakeholders embrace them.
Institutional Partnerships	Partnerships with academic and research-oriented institutions are formed and are effective in supporting the cause of HRDs and their collectives.
Political Will	There exists sufficient political will among governments and state authorities to act upon the advocacy and policy recommendations put forward by PI, HRDs and their collectives.
Open Dialogue	Spaces for dialogue remain open and accessible to PI, HRDs and their collectives, allowing for free and productive exchanges.
Stable Sociopolitical Context	There is a minimum workspace for HRDs and their collectives to allow their activities and collaborations. Legal and institutional frameworks are in place or can be developed to support the protection and rights of HRDs and their collectives.
International Pressure	The effectiveness of pressure from UN bodies, regional human rights mechanisms and global networks is contingent on the assumption that these entities have significant leverage over national governments and authorities.
Policy Impact	Activities will lead to the creation of policy-building tools that are use by authorities to make informed decisions that support HRDs and their collectives.

3

OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND KEY PRIORITIES TOWARDS ACHIEVING IMPACT

Building on the lessons learned throughout our past five-year Global Strategy, we are shifting the way we work by being more intentional. We will focus our work on our top three programme areas in which we will invest our time and resources.

Within this Global Strategy, we will focus on the following Strategic Objectives (SO):

- **SO 1:** HRDs and their collectives have the agency to defend human rights safely.
- **SO 2:** Power-holders actively contribute to upholding enabling environments for the RDHR.

To achieve our SOs 1 and 2, we will invest in our **cross-cutting strategic objective on internal institutional strengthening** according to which PI will be a more resilient, sustainable, responsive and transparent organisation in five years' time.

SO 1: HRDs and their collectives have the agency to defend human rights safely

Our work is centred on supporting and working in partnership with HRDs and their collectives around the world. We believe in a world where everyone has the RDHR. PI's focus is therefore on contributing to the continued strengthening of the safety, capacity, and agency of HRDs and their collectives. We work with them to assess what strategic activities can be undertaken to support them in dismantling power imbalances and levelling the playing field.



In the coming five years, we will focus and invest resources on the following:

1. SUPPORT THE AGENCY OF HRDs AND THEIR COLLECTIVES USING AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

We have developed our understanding of collective protection and have actively influenced structural changes in protection mechanisms and policies that aim at ensuring a safe environment for all those who individually and collectively defend human rights.

Applying an intersectional lens to our work allows us to take into account the lived experiences of HRDs and assess how their intersecting identities affect their agency and protection. It will enable us to identify and address the specific challenges and root causes of oppression and violence faced by HRDs and their collectives, and to promote more inclusive, tailored and effective protection practices.

Over the next five years, we will work to strengthen the agency of HRDs and their collectives, while incorporating an intersectional perspective on the risks faced by HRDs and their collectives.

Core pathways for us to continue to succeed:

a. Strengthen comprehensive protection management: a more comprehensive and intersectional protection to protection management will be developed together with the HRDs and their communities to allow them to carry out their vital work effectively while mitigating risks and promoting their overall well-being. It will encompass measures to protect HRDs and their collectives from physical harm, such as providing trainings on personal safety, implementing security protocols, and advocating for public policies that uphold their RDHR. Additionally, this comprehensive approach to protection management involve safeguarding HRDs' and their collectives' digital safety through awareness-raising on digital threats, secure information and communication technologies. Moreover, it will address the psychosocial dimensions of their work by offering emotional support and trauma-informed care, and building resilient networks.

b. Design and implement protection tools and strategies: we will design and implement tools and strategies based on the needs of HRDs and their collectives. The design and implementation will be done using an inclusive and intersectional approach in order to ensure protection for those in vulnerable situations within specific national and regional contexts.

c. Facilitate awareness raising on the RDHR: we will invest resources in developing more outreach and communication tools to share our vision and strategies on how to protect and promote the RDHR. We will use external communication tools to share stories of successful exercise of the RDHR and to inspire communities around the world.

2. SUPPORT HRDS AND THEIR COLLECTIVES IN DEVELOPING PROTECTION NETWORKS

The effectiveness of our interventions is rooted in our robust partnerships and networks. **PI actively collaborates with HRDs and their collectives across multiple countries to establish and enhance their protection networks.** We have found that collectives that have been able to strengthen their internal and external networks have shown a greater capacity to confront threats and generate safer environments for their actions. Not only have they been able to strengthen their internal organisational processes, but they have also built connections and widened their workspace beyond the local level to the national and international levels.

Core pathways for us to continue to succeed:

a. Support in the strengthening of the collectives' internal organisational capacity: we will consistently engage with HRDs and their collectives to support their group cohesion, implement organisational good practices, apply JEDI principles in their way of working, use appropriate tools in managing conflict resolution and in healing, develop psycho-social support practices including addressing trauma, and use effective communication tools to deliver their key messages.

b. Partner and develop stronger links and relationships with other like-minded organisations: we aim to continually engage with HRDs and their collectives, integrating new partners with diverse capabilities who have the ability to extend legal and emergency support, resource mobilisation, communication or advocacy tools, and more into their networks. The actors that are part of their networks may provide support and show solidarity in cases of emergency. In this way, collectives can benefit from the presence of external observers, documentation of threats and aggressions (e.g. videos, photos and public statements) or advocacy (e.g. pressuring different authorities, as well as national and international institutions to take action). Collectives can also receive legal accompaniment in cases of criminalisation, or temporary relocation in cases of displacement. They can also receive financial support for the development of their protection actions.



3. STRENGTHEN THE PARTICIPATION OF DEFENDERS AT RISK WHO HAVE BEEN MARGINALISED

We will work to increase the participation and inclusion of defenders who have been marginalised to ensure that their experiences and challenges are represented, and that they are actively involved and enabled to participate in spaces of dialogue, decision-making and policy-making. To do so, **we will actively include HRDs who have been marginalised in our activities, improve our working methods and develop inclusive tools and communication materials.** For instance, we will increase the accessibility of our activities and tools by investing in more translation, interpretation and accessibility needs for people with disabilities (PWDs).

Core pathways for us to continue to succeed:

a. Transcend language barriers: we will increase our fundraising efforts in order to invest more on translation for our written documents (e.g. publications, training manuals, briefing documents, policies and statements, etc) and hire interpreters to assist us in key events and meetings to enable more meaningful engagements and interventions.

b. Develop guidelines and implement actions that are accessible for PWDs: it is important for us to better understand the accessibility needs of PWDs. We will engage with HRDs with disabilities and partner with organisations working on disability rights to help us assess our tools, develop guidelines, and re-design key materials and templates (both for print and online media) to make them more accessible.

c. Support meaningful engagements and participation: we believe in the power of HRDs and their collectives, and will continue to support their participation in meetings and events, both online and face-to-face. When necessary, we will accompany them and ensure that spaces are enabling HRDs to meaningfully engage and participate.



4. SUPPORT THE BUILDING OF CROSS-MOVEMENT SOLIDARITY AT THE NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

Collective work and partnerships are one of PI's strengths. **We will continue to strengthen our collective power** and further develop our national, regional and international networks to pool resources – both in terms of skills and in financial capacity – to realise our global potential. We will also seek to join new networks and alliances in areas where we need more knowledge and partnership.

Core pathways for us to continue to succeed:

- a. Maximised, pooled, and mobilised resources together** with new and existing consortium partners.
- b. Increased effective and targeted advocacy** and outreach efforts with more networks and alliances across the world.
- c. Catalysed and contributed to building broader and more intersectional networks** and movements that advocate for the RDHR across different thematic areas.



SO 2: Power-holders take all necessary actions to create and uphold enabling environments for the RDHR

An enabling environment for the RDHR is essential for all HRDs and their collectives to carry out their work safely. From PI's perspective, this is particularly relevant and important for HRDs who face threats and are often at risk. The term **enabling environment** helps to encompass not only a legal perspective on the protection of HRDs, but also various social and political aspects that influence the agency of HRDs in practice. Recognising that a fully enabling environment will take decades to achieve, our goal for the next five years is to compel power-holders to acknowledge their roles and obligations in the protection and promotion of the RDHR and to urge them to take concrete action to create and uphold an enabling environment.



In the coming five years, we will focus and invest resources on the following:

1. ADVOCATE FOR AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR THE RDHR

We will identify and assess disabling factors and expose barriers that hinder an enabling environment for the RDHR. We will advocate for the dismantling of the barriers or for their transformation into enabling factors. Recognising the complexity of this task, **we acknowledge the need for collaborative and coordinated efforts by different stakeholders** over an extended period of time.

Core pathways for us to continue to succeed:

a. Advocate for public policies: we will monitor, analyse and advocate for effective public policies for the RDHR in countries where PI has a presence, and in other countries where CSOs as well as inter-governmental and international decision-making bodies invite PI to contribute. In particular, we will engage with countries that do not have public policies to protect the RDHR, and where laws limit or restrict the RDHR, to call for their revision and/or amendment.

b. Engage with human rights mechanisms: in countries where PI has a presence or partners, we will continue to strengthen our engagement and partnership with national human rights institutions (NHRIs) to promote the monitoring of the implementation of the UN Declaration on HRDs and the adoption of public policies for the protection of the RDHR. We will also strengthen our engagement with international and regional bodies (e.g. the UN, the Council of Europe, the EU, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the African Union, and the Organisation of American States, to name a few) to influence the development of their mechanisms for the protection of HRDs at the international and regional levels.

c. Build and strengthen capacities to influence power holders: we are cognizant that identifying disabling factors, exposing barriers, and advocating for an enabling environment require knowledge and skills. We are committed to building knowledge and strengthening the capacities of HRDs and their collectives to influence power-holders. We will continue to innovate, create, and develop tools that help unpack the complexities of advocacy and engagement with international and regional bodies. We will also work with like-minded organisations to organise joint activities in countries where we have a presence to analyse and map power-holders and plan our approach to influence them.



The safety and agency of HRDs are significantly affected by how they are perceived. Over the past decade, stigmatisation has been used to challenge the legitimacy of HRDs' struggles. Common tactics include name-calling, public shaming, insinuations, spreading of false rumours and lies (defamation), smear campaigns, red-tagging and the overall dissemination of negative narratives about their work. The negative effects of stigmatisation often lead to increased threats and attacks against HRDs and their collectives, as well as reduced public support. **The structure and impact of stigmatisation and smear campaigns should be analysed and addressed from an intersectional perspective**, taking into account the specific stigmatisation of certain groups of HRDs. It is also important to **counter stigmatisation with positive narratives and to highlight the importance of the work of HRDs for society** as a whole.

In the coming period, we aim to counter the stigmatisation of HRDs and their collectives as a critical pathway to their protection.

Core pathways for us to continue to succeed:

a. Counter negative narratives and promote positive narratives: to counter stigmatisation and the negative characterisation of HRDs, PI will work to help build and reinforce positive narratives around the RDHR of all and the importance of the work of HRDs and their collectives. To this end, PI will work with, support and promote initiatives that counter stigmatisation. We will also disseminate carefully crafted messages in order to address and counter key negative narratives identified, so that both the specialised and general public recognise the important role of HRDs and their collectives, and become more supportive of their human rights work. We will also use a hope-based approach – that is, we will ensure that our communications proactively and explicitly promote the values and solutions we want to see in society – to highlight the positive contributions of HRDs.

b. Clear public messages and impactful use of communication tools: we will work to identify our audiences to better understand how to make our communication tools as effective as possible, develop clear public messages that support and highlight the important work of HRDs, and use a variety of communication tools to deliver our key messages to reach the widest possible audience. We will seek to work with communicators and people with access to communication tools (e.g. writers, journalists, newscasters) to amplify our messages.

c. Research on communications and narratives as a means of protection: the development of communication tools and apps is happening at a rapid pace. Unfortunately, they are often used to disseminate narratives that stigmatise HRDs and have serious implications for their safety. PI will step up its research work to determine how best to address and counter these harmful narratives in their respective contexts. Our research will guide our approach depending on the narrative(s) we are dealing with, the individuals

who perpetuate them, the HRDs they target, and the values we wish to promote. It will explore how best to use communication tools to highlight the important work of HRDs, to change the public's perspective on them and to improve their protection.

d. Training on narrative analysis and work: narrative work is difficult and, if done incorrectly, can reinforce rather than counter negative messages and discourses. We will therefore train HRDs and their networks, as well as key stakeholders, such as policy and decision-makers, journalists, diplomats and donors, on how to identify negative narratives and craft messages to counter them and highlight positive narratives.



Criminalisation is a multifaceted phenomenon that uses criminal laws and ambiguous legal provisions to attack HRDs and their collectives and curtail their RDHR. The nature of criminalisation is twofold: it is a process and an outcome. As a process, it takes place through police interventions, criminal investigations and proceedings, and even the conviction of HRDs. As an outcome, it has a negative impact not only on the work of individual HRDs, but also on the safety and well-being of their families, CSOs and the social movement.

Core pathways for us to continue to succeed:

a. Access to justice: we will defend and promote the fundamental principle of the rule of law – access to justice. We want people to be able to make their voices heard, exercise their rights, challenge discrimination and hold decision-makers to account. To strengthen access to justice for HRDs, we will advocate for governments to develop national strategies and programmes that remove barriers, to repeal laws and regulations that criminalise the defence of human rights and the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and to address the growing threat posed by SLAPPs. In parallel, we will engage with key stakeholders to urge them to increase their support to criminalised HRDs, for example by engaging in more public diplomacy or attending court cases, and with funders to support HRDs and their collectives who seek legal advice and representation when under judicial attack.

b. Accountability and ending impunity for threats and attacks against HRDs and their collectives: given the alarming rise in impunity, PI aims to increase its efforts to demand stronger accountability mechanisms and end impunity for threats and attacks against HRDs and their collectives around the world. Criminal accountability for the most serious human rights violations is a cornerstone of our human rights. We will call on inter-governmental bodies, such as the UN, to strengthen, and where necessary, to establish fact-finding missions, as well as monitoring and investigative mechanisms aimed at exposing crimes. We will work towards the establishment of accountability mechanisms that will help governments to end impunity.



4. STRENGTHEN DIGITAL GOVERNANCE FOR THE RDHR

Digital governance includes the norms, institutions and standards that shape the regulation of the development and use of digital technologies. **For HRDs and their collectives, digital governance is affected by the struggle between excessive control and repression by power-holders on one hand, and the need for open and safe spaces for everyone to voice their concerns and claim their rights on the other.** The coming years will be marked by the growing threat and influence of digitalisation, and the increasing relevance of cyber-threats to HRDs.

Core pathways for us to continue to succeed:

a. Develop a digital governance strategy framework: with a digital governance strategy in place, PI will aim to be one of the strongest organisations that support HRDs and their collectives in strengthening their digital governance, assessing digital risks, and developing protection strategies against digital and online threats.

b. Support HRDs' advocacy for national policies on digital assets and data privacy/security: we will provide trainings and support to HRDs so that they can effectively push for national legislation to address cyber-threats, such as surveillance, tracking, etc.

c. Increase knowledge on digital public policies through Focus Observatory: we will monitor and assess public policies on digital and data protection around the world, include such policies in our Focus Observatory, and advocate for stronger policies where needed.

d. Expand network and build alliances with tech actors: we will work with local and global tech-focused organisations to provide input on HRD-relevant digital public policies affecting HRDs at both the national and international levels to ensure the unhindered exercise of the RDHR in the digital sphere.



SO 3: Cross-cutting Strategic Objective

PI is a resilient, sustainable, responsive and transparent organisation

In our last strategic framework, PI committed to decentralise and bring our work closer to the HRDs and their collectives. To achieve our ambitions and to achieve impact on the ground, we committed to set up a network of regional hubs and looked at how our collective and collaborative work could be done in a shared horizontal space. We established regional hubs in Africa and Mesoamerica, laid the groundwork for opening a hub in South East Asia, expanded our operations in South America, and strengthened our support to HRDs and their collectives in Western Europe and Eurasia. We transformed some of our protection desks into country offices to establish a permanent presence in countries where our operations are politically and strategically needed.

We also sought to strengthen our internal processes to build a financially sustainable and resilient infrastructure, making the best use of our human and technological resources to deliver our mission. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of recent wars and natural disasters on funding, we are moving towards a more rigorous strategy that is more grounded, realistic and intentional. **We are committed to increasing our institutional strengthening efforts and in investing in our people, putting them at the heart of our operations, while remaining true to our grassroots ethos.**



In the coming five years, we will focus and invest resources on the following:

1. DECENTRALISATION PROCESS

We will continue to evolve as a more decentralised organisation, with a clearer and more aligned understanding of what decentralisation means for PI. We remain true to our grassroots ethos, ensuring that the voices of HRDs and their collectives are heard, and seeking to make decisions where they matter most: close to HRDs. We will become an organisation that collectively agrees on power-sharing and decision-making, and that works towards active co-sharing of responsibility, transparency, accountability and power. We will make strategic decisions together about what we can commit to and deliver.

We are cognisant that it takes time to collectively transform and internally effect systems change. We are therefore going to take stock of the past five years, learn from our mistakes and accomplishments, and improve internally. We will develop policies and frameworks where needed, and strive to do better in areas we committed to improve on. We believe in our collective power to be the organisation we want to be and will partner with key donors, external consultants and partners who believe in us and in our work.

Core pathways for us to continue to succeed:

- a. Revisit our decentralisation process:** we will seek to understand where we have been successful and where we need to improve, capture lessons learned, invest resources to make decentralisation a success, and adapt our plans to our current situation.
- b. Reflect on and assess our current structure and ways of working:** with the increasing demands on PI to be present in key countries and on different fronts, we need to stay up to date and nimble to adapt to rapidly changing situations. We will continue our dialogues and reflection spaces to assess our organisational culture, our global governance and decision-making processes, the way we work, our human resources needs and our capacity and ability to respond to internal and external needs.
- c. Develop a roadmap and articulate our vision of a decentralised PI:** we will define what decentralisation means for PI, what a horizontal network of hubs will look like and how it will operate. We will assess what is needed to embrace and live by the principles of shared responsibility, accountability and power. The roadmap will also look at how this goal of decentralisation can be sustainably achieved in terms of both our finances and people power. We will also develop a roadmap for our growth and expansion to additional regions and countries, and assess how to ensure that the human and financial resources for this growth are in place.
- d. Release a change management and accompaniment process:** to support all PI people – staff, leaders, managers and board members – we will release a change management and support process with clear internal communication at every step of the way. Our aim is to ensure that the flow of information is clear, timely and fluid.

2. INVESTING IN OUR PEOPLE AND PUTTING THEM AT THE CORE OF OUR OPERATIONS

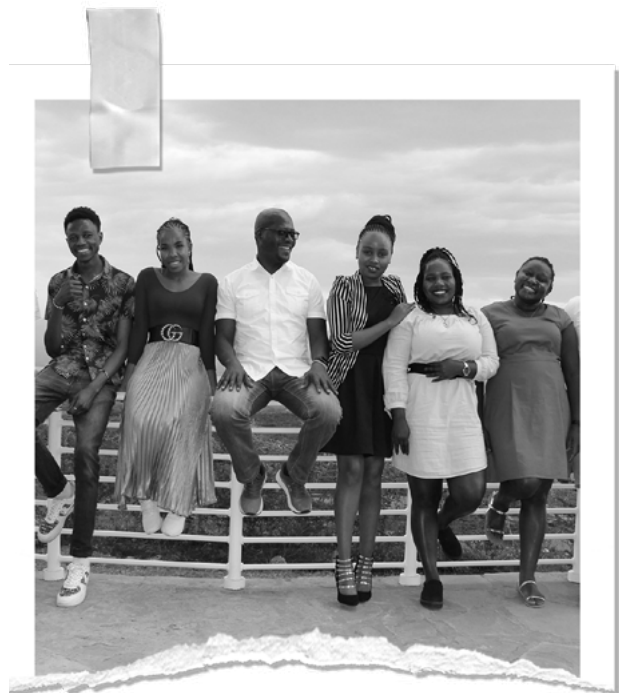
We believe in the strength and power of our people who deliver on our mission. Our people are our greatest resource and source of success. We commit to making our people happy to be part of our organisation and putting in place more robust and people care centred policies and guidelines to ensure this.

Core pathways for us to continue to succeed:

a. JEDI policy: working in a just, equitable, diverse and inclusive environment is the only way that PI can embrace genuine democracy and collective power. We will have a JEDI policy to help us understand what feminist leadership means, what inclusive power looks like, what active listening is, and how diversity (i.e. gender, race, age) with a decolonised and deracialised perspective can collectively move our organisation forward.

b. Finalise a people care and staff wellbeing framework: our aim is to allocate and invest more resources in staff care and wellbeing. We will look into improving staff development and work-life balance within PI, including through personal development trainings, regular trainings on organisational learning tools (LERNI), psychosocial support and coaching where needed. We will engage with our donors and partners to ensure investments in this area.

c. Review and implement more robust compensation principles across all offices and ensure living wages: we will redesign our compensation system across all offices to ensure that each staff member receives a living wage and is economically self-sufficient within national standards. We will establish principles to be applied across our offices and salary grades per country, so that new and senior PI staff are aware of their pay progression within the organisation.



3. INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

As we continue to decentralise, we are committed to allocating resources to strengthen our offices and improve our operational capacity. We will conduct a thorough assessment and review of our accountability and compliance systems, work processes and procedures to strengthen the way we work. Where necessary, we will develop and strengthen our sustainability and resilience management, while addressing the external challenges we face. We aim to be a sustainable and resilient organisation in order to deliver on our programmes.

Core pathways for us to continue to succeed:

- a. Sustainable and resilient financial resources:** we will have a stronger, more intentional and targeted fundraising strategy that will fund our priorities for the next five years. We will work to increase our core and flexible funding. We will also engage with funders around the world to increase their understanding of, and support for, the invaluable work of our people in order to help us, our partner HRDs and their collectives achieve our mission.
- b. Strengthen internal accountability:** we will continue to improve our financial management and control systems to align with our Financial Governance Policy across all offices. We will invest in resources to update and strengthen our internal accounting system in all offices and train finance officers with new tools and guidelines. Where necessary, we will increase the number of our finance duty-bearers to ensure our financial accountability. We will further continue to insist on the implementation of our policies to uphold our integrity and credibility (Anti-Corruption Policy, Conflict of Interest Policy).
- c. Robust resource mobilisation:** focusing on the strengths of our staff and on available resources and investments will be a key focus in the coming years. We will map our internal strengths and financial resources to direct joint work and investment across offices. When engaging with funders, PI will advocate for increased investment to co-fund core work across offices, thereby strengthening internal actions that secure our external impacts. We will also engage in more direct financing and re-granting through our consortium partners in order to optimise our reach and increase impact on the ground.
- d. Culture of learning and increased quality of work:** we are committed to our culture of learning, and will improve on how we evaluate our work, identify our successes, celebrate our achievements, share our impact stories, and contribute to change. We will develop a monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) framework with a human rights-based approach. This framework will enhance our ability to plan, prioritise and invest our resources effectively, and ensure the continuous improvement of our programmes and interventions.

4 APPENDIX

ACRONYMS

CSO : Civil society organisation

EU : European Union

HRD : Human rights defender

JEDI : Justice, equity, diversity and inclusion

MEAL : Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning

NHRI : National human rights institution

NGO : Non-governmental organisation

PI : Protection International

PWDs : People with disabilities

RDHR : Right to defend human rights

SDGs : Sustainable Development Goals

SLAPP : Strategic lawsuit against public participation

UN : United Nations

GLOSSARY OF TERMS - GENERAL

✦ Agency

In the context of human rights defence, agency refers to the capacity and ability of HRDs and their collectives to act independently, make decisions, and exert influence to bring about positive social change. Activists demonstrate agency through their actions, advocacy and efforts to defend and promote human rights, challenge injustice, contribute to social change and make decisions related to their own protection.

In PI, we understand the complexity of the contexts in which human rights defence takes place. Thus, the agency of HRDs is the sum of interactions between: a) what individual HRDs do, b) the opportunity to act, and c) their freedom to choose. The concept of agency is not only about the HRDs themselves; it also takes into account the broader context around them (the social, cultural, economic and political structures that prevent or enable HRDs to act as they wish).

✦ Capacity strengthening

PI's capacity strengthening programmes aim to enhance the skills, knowledge, resources and effectiveness of HRDs and their collectives. It involves providing trainings and tools to empower them in advocacy efforts and to build resilience against threats. The goal is to bolster existing capabilities and reinforce specific skills and resilience to navigate complex situations and advance human rights causes. While strengthening the ability to work safely and without fear is crucial, it is not sufficient; HRDs need freedom, autonomy and the possibility to make informed choices. Our programmes involve stages such as developing awareness of rights, recognising their capabilities at the individual and organisational levels, strengthening protection networks, and engaging autonomously with authorities to deter attacks. As capacities strengthen over time, partnerships can be exited when there is no detrimental effect to HRDs and their collectives.

✦ Collectives

In PI, the notion of collectives that defend and promote human rights encompasses formally established CSOs and associations, and informal groups that engage in collective action for a human rights cause. It refers to groups of individuals united by shared interests, goals or purposes. These can be structured organisations, such as NGOs, community associations, trade unions, peasant or sexual orientation and gender identity associations, etc., which are usually recognised as legal entities and formalised with defined roles and objectives. Alternatively, collectives can emerge as informal and spontaneous groups, driven by common concerns, activities or identities. This refers, for instance, to groups of activists, social and popular movements, women's or community organisations or indigenous or Afro-descendant communities. In both formal and informal collectives, their essence lies in the collaborative synergy of individuals to achieve common objectives or address shared challenges.

✦ Decentralisation

Decentralisation involves shifting decision-making authority closer to HRDs and their collectives. It includes developing organisational processes and systems to collectively agree on decision-making, and co-share responsibility, accountability and power. In order to achieve this, PI has been gradually transforming itself into a network of Regional Hubs, with increased collaboration and coordination and the ability to work independently and flexibly across several countries. Our Regional Hubs have their own locally-based management and governance bodies interlinked with our global governance, enabling them to establish links with existing initiatives and promote new initiatives in countries where the needs arise. To grow, PI built on its existing infrastructure, and at the same time expanded its work to new countries and regions. PI's Regional Hubs remain part of one organisation that works horizontally. Our global governance structure assigns

leadership to our Global Board while ensuring that the Regional Boards provide input to PI's strategic decision-making. In this strategic cycle, we will revisit our decentralisation process with the aim to understand the successes and areas of improvement, capture lessons learned, adapt our plans according to specific contexts, and strategically invest resources to succeed in our ongoing decentralisation.

✦ Digital governance

Digital governance includes the norms, institutions and standards that shape the regulation around the development and use of digital technologies. For HRDs and their collectives, activities surrounding digital governance include the responsible management of information, communication, as well as advocacy efforts in the digital realm. Digital governance is affected by the struggle between the control and repression exercised by repressive power holders on one hand, and the need to maintain open and safe spaces for society to voice its concerns and claim its rights on the other.

There are several dimensions of digital governance related to the RDHR:

- a. **digital security:** ensuring the confidentiality, integrity and availability of digital information to protect HRDs from online threats, while promoting practices to mitigate cyber-risks;
- b. **online advocacy:** leveraging digital platforms for effective human rights advocacy, awareness-raising and mobilisation;
- c. **data privacy:** safeguarding the privacy rights and digital data of HRDs and those they advocate for;
- d. **digital literacy:** empowering HRDs with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate and utilise digital tools effectively;
- e. **access to information:** ensuring that HRDs have open access to accurate and reliable information through digital means, combating online censorship, and promoting digital inclusivity; and
- f. **legal and ethical considerations:** complying with digital rights laws, ethical use of data and accountability in online activities.

✦ Enabling environment (for the RDHR)²

An enabling environment for the RDHR entails not only legal factors, but also different social and political aspects that contribute to the enactment of an environment that is favourable and conducive to the defence and promotion of human rights. PI underlines that the primary responsibility to create an enabling environment for the RDHR lies with the state. At the same time, an enabling environment cannot be created and preserved without the active participation of civil society as a whole.

A safe and enabling environment can be built through the combination of effective legislations, policies, institutional structures and mechanisms that protect and promote the defence of rights and address the direct and indirect barriers obstructing such defence. In addition, it is shaped by social and cultural norms and practices, as well as economic factors and values promoted both by state and non-state actors, including CSOs.

✦ Grassroots (approach)

PI's focus has always been to act from the territories' perspective and for the HRDs' benefit, from the local to the international level, through a bottom-up approach. This grassroots approach aims to increase agency for the most vulnerable defenders while contributing to the creation of safe spaces for HRDs and their collectives to continue working on the ground.

✦ HRDs and their collectives

The term "HRD" refers to individuals and groups who carry out peaceful activities in the defence of human rights, regardless of their profession, gender, race, religion, ethnicity or group association.³ HRDs are defined by their actions and by the rights they are defending,

² For a detailed definition of the concept and actionable recommendations, see PI's publication [Towards a Safe and Enabling Environment for the Right to Defend Human Rights](#).

³ According to the [UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1998](#).

regardless of whether or not they self-identify as HRDs.⁴ The acronym “HRDs” encompasses many different identities and is therefore inclusive of women, LGBTQI+ individuals and indigenous defenders, among other groups. Some HRDs may face increased risks due to their race, age, disability, gender, religion, class, etc, because they are acting in particularly difficult contexts.

In PI, we always refer to HRDs and their collectives as we recognise that the defence of human rights is an inherently relational practice; defenders usually act in conjunction with other individuals or groups of individuals. For PI, the term “collective” includes all people who are closely living and/or working together and facing the same challenges, such as members of a grassroots community or members of (formal or informal) CSOs who are working together to defend and promote human rights.

✦ **HRDs who have been marginalised**

Marginalised HRDs encompass individual HRDs or collectives who face systemic discrimination, exclusion or oppression based on their intersecting identities, such as their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability⁵ or socioeconomic status, to name a few. These HRDs often face environments plagued with disabling factors and barriers to the exercise of their RDHR.⁶ The existence of marginalised HRDs and collectives is context-dependent and rooted in societal prejudices. It may include HRDs and collectives from minority communities, indigenous peoples, from the LGBTQI+ community, HRDs with disabilities, or HRDs from economically disadvantaged social classes.

✦ **Public policies (for the protection of HRDs and the RDHR)⁷**

States and their public authorities are ultimately responsible for the protection of HRDs and, more broadly, for guaranteeing the exercise of the RDHR. A wide range of standards and recommendations made by international and regional human rights bodies point out the obligation of States to adopt measures that guarantee that HRDs can defend rights without fear of threats and attacks. Public policies constitute complex arrangements of legislation, regulations, programmes and procedures by different state institutions and bodies that come together in a single overall objective: the protection of HRDs and their collectives at risk and, ultimately, the protection and promotion of the RDHR.

✦ **Right to defend human rights (RDHR)⁸**

The RDHR is an “umbrella right” as it does not grant new additional rights, but rather encompasses and reinforces a set of rights that are central to the defence of human rights, and that are recognised in various covenants, conventions and declarations. These rights include, for instance, freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, the right to access and communicate with international bodies, the right to access funding, the right to develop and discuss innovative ideas in the area of human rights, and the right to protection.

The exercise of the RDHR can be individual and collective: individuals participate at the individual level, collectives at the group level. Both the individual and the collective exercise of this right requires an environment that does not obstruct this right and that protects those who exercise it.

4 For a critical definition of who human rights defenders are, see PI’s publication *The Right to Defend Human Rights, From a Critical Approach*, pp. 5-7.

5 See PI’s publication *Strengthening the Inclusion, Protection and Wellbeing of Human Rights Defenders with Disabilities*

6 See PI’s publication *Towards a Safe and Enabling Environment for the Right to Defend Human Rights*

7 For more information, visit FOCUS Observatory, PI’s online resource dedicated to the monitoring and analysis of public policies for the protection of HRDs and the RDHR worldwide.

8 See PI’s publication *The Right to Defend Human Rights, From a Critical Approach*

✦ **Staff well-being and psychosocial support**⁹

We understand the psychosocial approach to be a lens through which we pay attention to the impact of the social and political context on the emotional well-being of HRDs, their collectives and PI staff. This approach seeks to identify the emotional impacts that can be felt at both the individual and collective levels, and strengthen the coping mechanisms that individuals and groups can activate when confronted with fear, stress and traumatic experiences. Instead of diagnosing and pathologising reactions that stem from a traumatic situation, these reactions are contextualised and considered to be part of the social and political context in which they occur.

✦ **Workspace of HRDs**¹⁰

The workspace of HRDs and their collectives can be represented by two axis: the first goes from tolerance to acceptance, while the second goes from deterrence to persuasion. A sound protection strategy should aim to expand HRDs' workspace by seeking to increase tolerance and acceptance by state authorities and the general public, while increasing deterrence and persuasion of potential perpetrators against harming HRDs.

9 See PI's publications *The Psychosocial Approach, Applied to the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Protection of HRDs with disabilities*

10 See PI's *New Protection Manual*, Chapter 1.6, pp. 68-70

GLOSSARY OF TERMS – ON PROTECTION

✦ Protection of HRDs

According to international human rights standards, State authorities have the duty to respect the rights of HRDs and their collectives, and to protect them from harassment or aggression – either by state or non-state actors – due to their exercise of the RDHR.¹¹ States have four specific duties they should fulfil in order to protect the lives and security of HRDs: a) to provide the necessary means for HRDs to conduct their activities freely; b) to protect them when they are subject to threats, in order to ward off any attempt on their lives or physical integrity; c) to refrain from imposing restrictions that might hinder them from performing their work; and d) to conduct serious and effective investigations into any violations committed against them.

✦ (Collective) protection¹²

PI understands collective protection as a set of actions and social practices (organisational, cultural, communal, economic and individual) aimed at increasing collective HRDs' capacity to act, and to transform the balance of power against the backdrop of threats, denial of rights, violence and different systems of oppression (e.g. due to their gender, race, class).

From a results-based perspective, collective protection can be understood as the actions (and the results of those actions) intended to make others respect a collective HRD's use of a territory because of property rights or other rights over the territory, dwelling and livelihoods needs, and environmental, cultural and religious reasons, among others.

11 According to the UN Declaration on HRDs of 1998 (see link in footnote 3), each State has a responsibility and duty to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of everyone against any violence, threats, retaliation, discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate work in promoting and defending human rights.

12 See PI's paper [A Critical Approach to Collective Protection: Taking Stock of Protection International's Experience](#).

The protection paradigm has been based on the protection of individuals, through the provision of emergency funds, relocation, protection measures assigned by state protection mechanisms, etc. While these measures are needed, their downside is that they tend to cut off the HRDs from their families and communities, and are not suited to HRDs who are part of collectives living in remote rural areas. More importantly, human rights defense, as well as environmental and climate justice defence, are collective endeavours and struggles, and the protection of those who carry out this defense should reflect this. However, collective protection cannot be equated to the sum of the protection of the individuals in a group.

✦ Collective protection can be approached by work around two key dimensions

- i. Spatial-territorial: communities maintain the control of their territory (and others respect their territory – their dwellings and livelihoods, as well as their cultural and spiritual uses of the territory); and
- ii. Interactions-networks: the bonding ties and cohesion of the collective are internally reinforced, and dense relations and interactions with other external actors (at the local, national and international levels) are built.

✦ (Comprehensive) protection

Comprehensive protection requires adopting an all-encompassing approach to safeguarding the physical, digital, psychological and organisational well-being of HRDs and their collectives in the face of risks, threats and attacks. It involves a combination of preventive and reactive measures that are situated in the contexts and realities where HRDs live and work. PI's comprehensive protection approach looks at physical security measures aimed at protecting individuals and assets, as well as digital security measures, such as encryption and secure communication tools, to protect against surveillance and cyberattacks. Moreover, our approach includes psychosocial support to

address the emotional impact caused by threats and aggressions. It also involves strengthening the resilience and organisational capacity of the collective HRDs and their networks.

✦ **Intersectionality (linked to protection)**

Intersectionality allows us to recognise and address the interconnected nature of various gender and social identities, and the overlapping systems of oppression that individuals may face. HRDs can experience multiple layers of discrimination and marginalisation based on multiple intersecting identities – e.g. gender, race, sexual orientation or class. Such simultaneous forms of exclusion affect their enjoyment of rights. When applied to HRD protection, intersectionality involves understanding and addressing the unique challenges faced by individuals at the crossroads of these identity markers. It emphasises the need to ensure that protection strategies account for the presence of intersecting forms of oppression, as well as the interconnected nature of diverse threats and risks faced by HRDs due to their work.

✦ **Protection plans**

PI's support to partner HRDs and collectives seeks to build comprehensive protection plans aimed at expanding their workspace and allowing them to continue defending rights within acceptable levels of risk. The strategies take into account two main areas of intervention:

- i. developing security plans and protocols to reduce the level of exposure to threats (i.e. by reducing vulnerabilities and increasing capacities); and
- ii. addressing the sources of threats by advocating for state authorities to fulfil their protection duties by deterring aggressors from attacking HRDs and tackling impunity of threats and attacks.

The development of protection plans can be initiated as a reactive measure after a serious threat has been received, or as a preventive measure prior to expanding human rights work. Protection is a process, consisting of a step-by-step and iterative progression for assessing the work context, analysing risks, preparing and

implementing protection protocols for different risk situations, assessing the results and informing any changes to the ways of working of the HRDs and collectives. The process aims at going beyond the individual HRD's knowledge and personal behaviour and moving towards operationalising a collective/organisational culture in which protection activities are a daily practice.

✦ **Protection vs Security**

The distinction between protection and security of HRDs and their collectives lies in their scope and focus. Security generally refers to the measures taken to ensure the physical safety and well-being of individuals and to safeguard them against direct threats. In contrast, protection includes comprehensive measures aimed at preventing and addressing a range of risks and challenges faced by HRDs: it aims to address not only immediate threats but also systemic issues. Protection strategies involve creating an enabling environment for the defense of human rights, and addressing the root causes of risks faced by HRDs. In PI's risk formula, security addresses the vulnerabilities and capacities of HRDs and their collectives, while protection goes beyond to address the sources of threats to the work of HRDs. Protection implies a more comprehensive and proactive approach to support HRDs in the exercise of the RDHR.

✦ **Preventive protection**

Preventive protection involves the safeguarding of HRDs and collectives by proactively identifying and anticipating potential threats before they escalate and risks before they materialise. Preventive protection strategies may include capacity-strengthening sessions for assessing contexts and risks, adopting protection plans that incorporate a protection lens to the HRDs' and collectives' practices – including protocols to react to protection incidents and aggressions – as well as developing and expanding protection networks, and carrying out advocacy for the adoption and implementation of policies for protection, which address the root causes of threats.

✦ Protection Networks

The term “protection networks” refers to a collective’s broader network of partners and allies who advocate for their case and provide support in case of protection incidents or aggressions. These partners and allies may include lawyers, the media, national authorities, international organisations/movements, diplomatic missions, donors, researchers, etc. A protection network reflects the whole range of support needed for a comprehensive protection approach. It is also a key dimension of collective protection (i.e. interaction-networks).

Protection networks for HRDs and their collectives are collaborative and interconnected systems established to enhance their safety, resilience and overall well-being. Protection networks foster solidarity and cooperation. They carry out coordinated efforts, involving civil society groups and institutional actors, and act at the local, national and international levels. They work collectively to identify, assess and respond to the diverse risks faced by HRDs and their collectives. Support can be manifold, and include emergency response, legal aid, psychosocial assistance and advocacy, to name a few.







Read the Global Strategy Framework 2024 - 2028 online at:
www.protectioninternational.org/global-strategy

