



PROTECTION
INTERNATIONAL



**Reflecting
on progress,
looking ahead**

2023

ANNUAL REPORT

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We extend our gratitude to our colleagues in country offices across different continents for their unwavering dedication to supporting human rights defenders and their collectives, and for their efforts in gathering the testimonies and impactful stories from human rights defenders that enrich our annual report and inspire our mission. This report stands as a testimony to their abnegated work in championing the protection and empowerment of human rights defenders.

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FOREWORD

In recent years, **Protection International (PI)** has redefined its approach to supporting human rights defenders (HRDs), shifting from solely providing protection to standing by their side while protecting their right to defend human rights. This evolution, rooted in PI's 2019–2023 strategic cycle, has transformed how we work—decentralising decision-making, building regional hubs, and fostering localised, context-specific responses. As we transition into the 2024–2028 strategy, PI continues to champion preventive, collective, and intersectional protection measures tailored to the unique and diverse challenges HRDs face globally.

At the heart of this transformation is decentralisation. PI's journey began by transforming its Brussels head office into a Global Team and establishing Regional Hubs across Mesoamerica and Africa. This structural shift has allowed PI to act faster, forge stronger connections with HRDs, and better understand regional dynamics. By empowering local teams and aligning decisions with on-the-ground realities, PI has ensured that its support is not only timely but also deeply relevant.

This decentralisation has been complemented by an evolution in governance. The Global Governance Arrangement, introduced in 2019, alongside expanded leadership structures, has enabled more inclusive decision-making and strategic leadership. These advancements ensure that PI remains adaptive, resilient, and aligned with the needs of defenders and their collectives.

The realities HRDs face have also been evolving. PI has therefore refined key protection concepts to reflect these changes:

- **Preventive Protection** focuses on identifying and addressing risks before they escalate, keeping defenders safe through proactive measures.
- **Collective Protection** strengthens HRDs' ability to resist threats by fostering solidarity and collaboration within their communities.
- **Protection Networks** connect defenders with allies across sectors, ensuring safety and operational space through collective action.



Collective Protection Preventive Protection Protection Networks

These principles have become cornerstones of PI's work, ensuring that protection strategies not only shield defenders but also empower them to stand strong in the face of threats.

These past five years have also allowed us to recognise that **HRDs often face overlapping systems of discrimination**. This is why PI places intersectionality at the heart of its approach. Whether addressing the unique vulnerabilities of women defenders, Indigenous communities, or defenders with disabilities, PI's strategies are designed to tackle the interconnected challenges of marginalisation. Advocacy efforts amplify these perspectives, calling for the adoption of holistic and inclusive protection policies at every level.

PI's journey is one of growth, adaptation, and commitment to its mission. By combining decentralised structures, innovative protection concepts, and an intersectional approach, the organisation is contributing to the creation of environments where defending human rights is not just possible but sustainable. As we move forward, PI's work remains a testament to the power of collaboration and the unwavering resilience of HRDs around the world.



MEET THE BOARD¹

ALICE NAH – CHAIRPERSON

Besides her role as chair of PI, Alice Nah is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Durham University in the United Kingdom. In this role, she conducts research on the security and protection of HRDs at risk, and on asylum and migration in Asia.

Alice has worked as a consultant for organisations such as Médecins Sans Frontières, the International Labour Organisation, and Forum Asia. She has also published in peer-reviewed journals including the Journal of Human Rights Practice, the Australian Journal of Human Rights, and the Asian Journal of Social Science.

JEAN-PASCAL GABRIEL – TREASURER

Jean-Pascal Gabriel is a Belgian national based in Brussels with vast international experience in different-sized organisations such as the European Commission, European Agencies, the OECD, UN Agencies but also with many medium and small size civil society organisations (CSOs). He possesses more than 18 years of experience in financial management and financial control, grant management, audit, risk management and governance in international organisations and in the not-for-profit sector.

VITAL NSHIMIRIMANA – SECRETARY

Vital Nshimirimana is a Burundian human rights lawyer. In 2002, he became a member of the human rights League Iteka. In 2004, he created the Réseau des Citoyens Probes (RCP), a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) engaged in the fight against corruption. That same year, he joined the judiciary and became an active member of the Union of Magistrates (SYMABU), where he became chair in 2009.

Vital registered with the Burundi Bar Association in May 2013 and has prosecuted high profile cases as a recorded lawyer in the East African Court of Justice. He was elected to chair the main Burundi civil society umbrella organisation FORSC in 2013.

PAULINE ALVAREZ MARIN – MEMBER

Pauline Alvarez Marin is a British and Irish national currently living in Oxford. She has a Bachelor's in Spanish and has a Master's degree in Human Rights and Education from London University. She has over 35 years of professional experience working on human rights, refugee rights and social development issues with international NGOs including Oxfam, Action Aid and Just Associates (JASS). She lived in Latin America for 15 years. She has occupied a number of senior leadership and management roles at the international level, specialising in organisational development and working to strengthen women's agency and leadership.

¹The displayed list of member of the Board corresponded to PI's Board as per June 6, 2023.

MEET THE BOARD¹

BELÉN PAEZ – MEMBER

Belén Paez has a Master's in Ecology, and is a specialist in Climate Change and Forests. She leads implementation programs based on clean energy, ecotourism, bioeconomy, protection and conservation of tropical forests, legal actions to defend collective rights and the rights of nature, and maternal and child health.

Belén has contributed to several victories for the protection of tropical forests and indigenous territorial rights in the Amazon of Ecuador and Peru. She is passionate about a just, post-extractive transition that leads to a transition for life.

JOHNCATION MUHINDO – MEMBER

Johncation Muhindo is Ugandan national based in Uganda. He is the founder and Executive Director of Creations Forum Afrika (2016-present), which documents and advocates on human rights violations, and builds local spaces for education and dialogue on human rights. Johncation was a fellow at the Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York (2018-2019), and has been active in human rights for about 15 years. He brings a strong grassroots perspective of activism, as well as a long experience of community organising in rural areas and working with youth.

LISA MACARANI – MEMBER

Lisa Maracani is an Italian national based in London, working for Amnesty International Secretariat as a Research and Policy Advisor on HRDs (2017-present). She also worked for Peace Brigades International (PBI) in Mexico. She has some board experience with PBI and in steering groups for international coalitions (Women HRDs International Coalition and VUKA). Lisa brings a strong gender perspective, lengthy experience of working in international NGOs and doing policy advocacy on HRDs in international fora.

VANESSA GOSGINNY – MEMBER

Vanessa Goscinny is an Haitian and Belgian national based in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), currently working as the Executive Secretary of the Panzi Foundation. She has held management positions in finance, operations, and human rights in both for-profit and non-profit organisations in Haiti and in Europe, including OSF Haiti, for over a decade.

¹The displayed list of member of the Board corresponded to PI's Board as per June 6, 2023.

1 PI 2023 AT A GLANCE

IMPACT THAT MATTERS



PI supported **18,220 HRDs** in 53 countries from 2019–2023.



PI supported **450 communities and CSOs**.



PI provided assistance to over **5,000 HRDs in 2023, with more than 50% being women defenders**.



PI supported HRDs in Africa, Mesoamerica, South America, Eurasia, and Southeast Asia.



PI established **12 new global partnerships**.



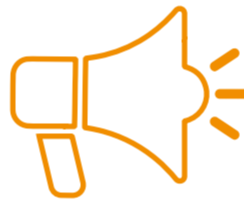
PI provided nine grants to grass-roots organisations.



PI's e-learning platforms reached **82 HRDs per session** across multiple regions.



PI's publications and tools were translated into **six languages**, including Russian and Swahili.



PI was mentioned in **international media outlets**, including DW (Germany), Animal Político (Mexico), TeleSur TV (Colombia), Bangkok Post (Thailand), and The Sun (Nigeria), helping to raise awareness about HRDs' issues globally.



PI's advocacy and outreach efforts reached **245,000 social media accounts**.



Regional hubs: PI expanded operations in Africa and Mesoamerica, with groundwork laid for Southeast Asia.



Website success: **246,708 unique visitors** in 2023.

Visitors returned to the site an average of **4.5 times**, reflecting strong engagement and interest. A platform upgrade improved website accessibility, resulting in a **15% increase** in visibility and an average session duration of nearly 4 minutes.

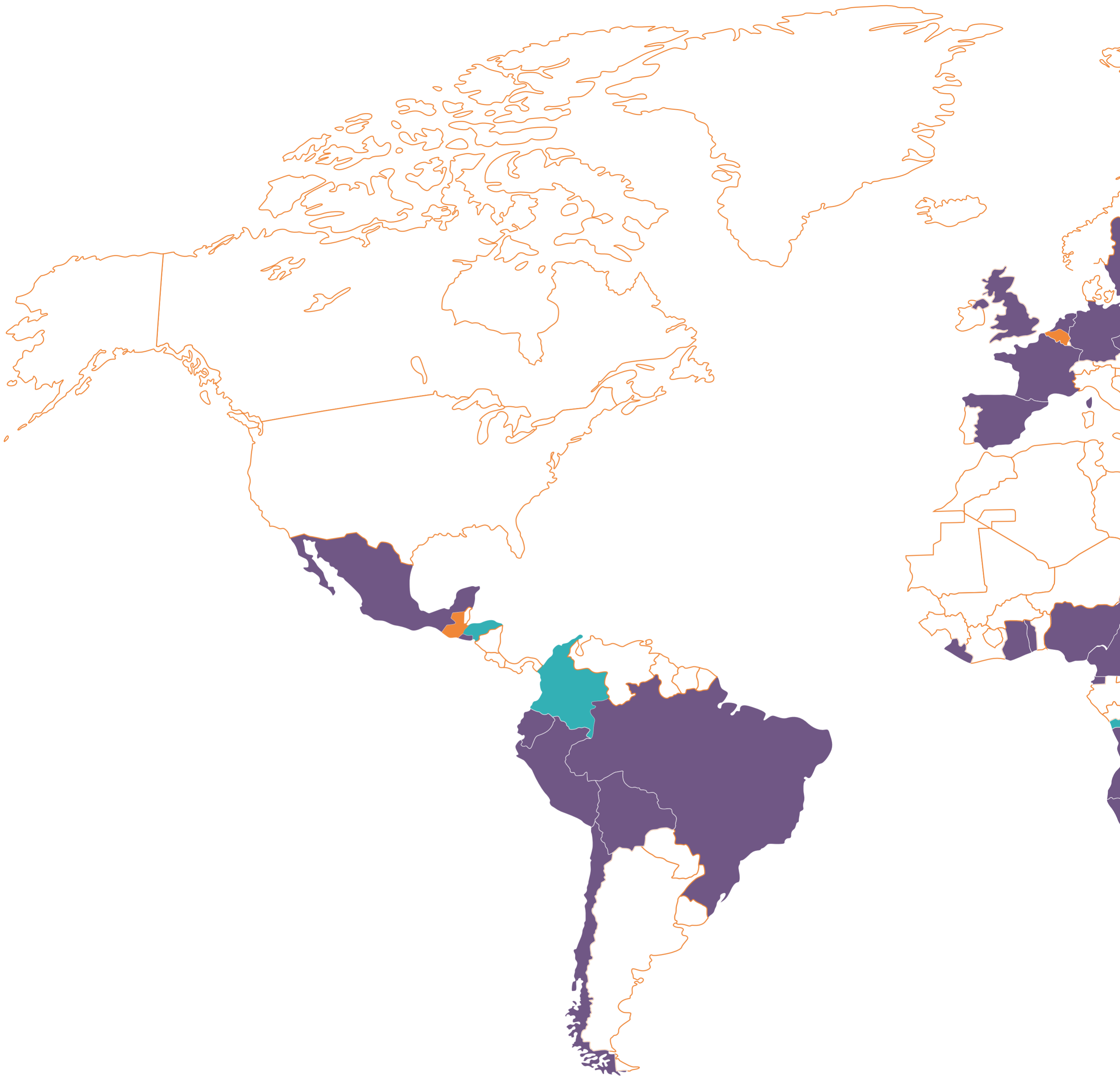
Between 2019 and 2023, we continued building on our long standing partnerships with human rights defenders and their collectives.

1 PI 2023 AT A GLANCE

MAIN STRATEGIES OF INTERVENTION



PI AROUND THE GLOBE



01

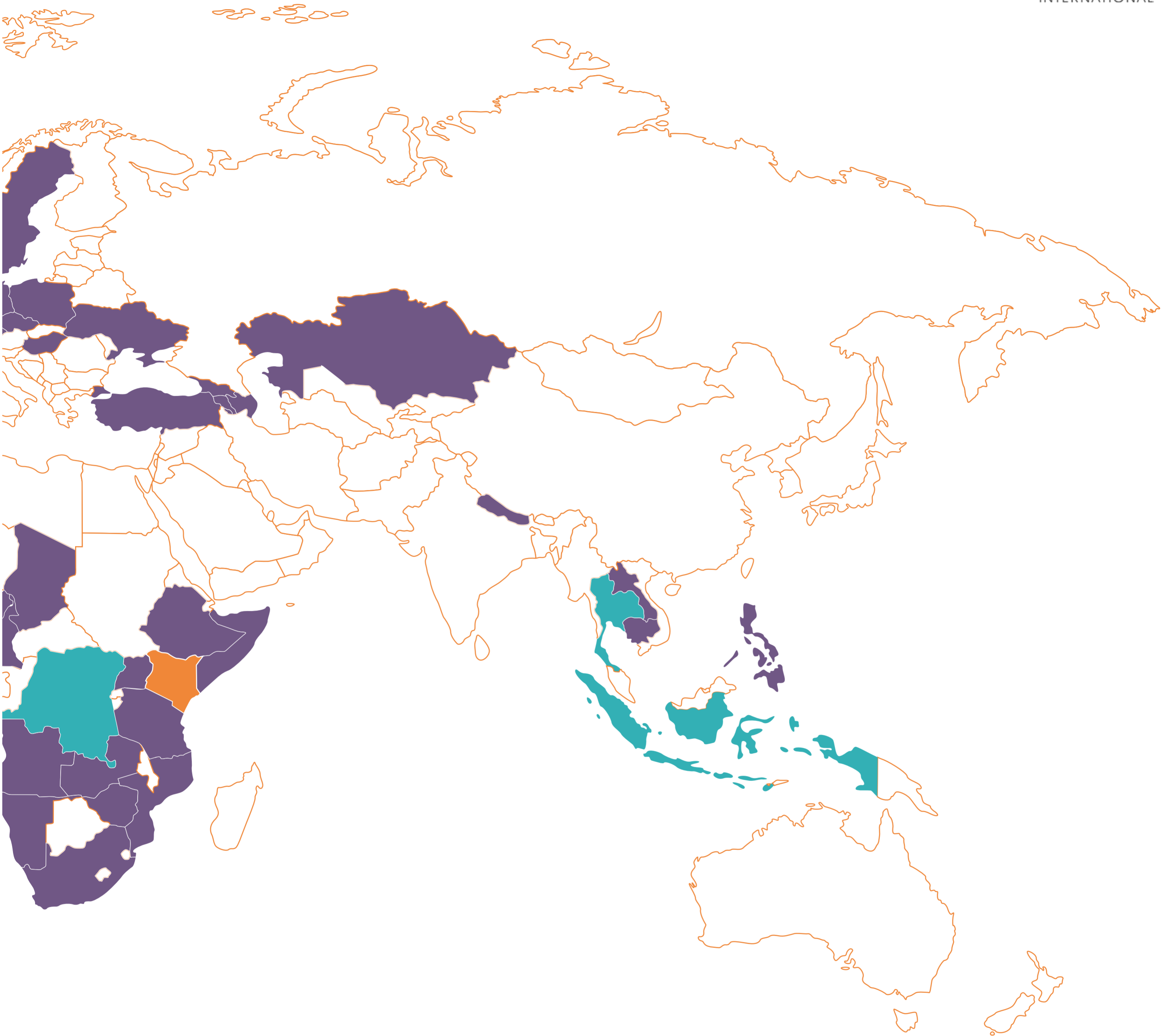
GT and Hubs

02

Country offices

03

Non-permanent presence



- 01** **GT and Hubs**
- 02** **Country offices**
- 03** **Non-permanent presence**



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3 STORIES OF IMPACT: PATHWAYS IN ACTION

The structure of this report is based on PI's 2019-2023 Global Strategy.

* Throughout this report, some of the names of the HRDs who shared their testimonies with us have been changed to protect them.

PATHWAY 1



Empowering HRDs and Their Collectives

PLANES DE VIDA: A Vision for Sustainable and Inclusive Indigenous Resilience

Since 2019, PI has worked alongside Indigenous communities in the Vichada department of the Orinoquía region of Colombia to develop and strengthen Planes de Vida (translated from Spanish as Life Plans). These plans serve as strategic tools to safeguard Indigenous culture, territory, and the environment while addressing structural challenges such as colonisation, land dispossession, and structural racism.



In 2023, this project saw significant milestones:

Six General Assemblies

More than 100 participants, including men and women, gathered to reflect on their historical and current realities, analyse threats to Indigenous territories, and engage in dialogue on the differentiated meanings of territory for men and women.

Focused Workshops for Women and Authorities:

Three autonomous gatherings of Indigenous women with an average participation of 25 women per meeting. These gatherings allowed women to address barriers to participation within and outside their communities.

One meeting with authorities

to adapt collective protection plans following security incidents in late 2022.

Planes de Vida: A Vision for Sustainable and Inclusive Indigenous Resilience

PI supports Indigenous communities from the **Sikuani, Kuiba, and Piapoco ethnic groups in settlements such as El Trompillo and in reserves like La Pascua and La Llanura**, fostering collective protection practices tailored to the unique challenges the communities face.

The **Planes de Vida** are more than just planning tools — they represent the community's vision of the future, prioritising their worldview and ancestral knowledge in the creation of medium- and long-term strategies. These plans weave traditional practices with the pursuit of rights such as health, education, and access to basic services, ensuring the subsistence and well-being of Indigenous peoples.

Ángela*, one community member from La Pascua said: ***“Designing this Plan de Vida allows us to protect and preserve our culture, territory, and environment. It strengthens our ability to demand our rights while intertwining our ancestral practices with access to essential services.”***



Advancing Gender Equality and Participation

Over the four years of collaboration with these women, the project has focused on addressing and dismantling barriers to women's participation. These efforts have resulted in greater individual and collective agency for women, enabling them to play a stronger role in developing and managing collective protection plans. This progress has fostered more inclusive environments for the defence of their rights and strengthened their leadership within the community.

Through this ongoing partnership, **PI remains committed to supporting Indigenous communities as they navigate the intersection of traditional practices and modern challenges.** By building collective resilience and fostering gender-inclusive strategies, the Planes de Vida are paving the way for a sustainable future for these communities.

Unveiling Challenges in the Defence of Human Rights in Guatemala

In 2023, PI published the comprehensive report "**Monitoring the Defence of Human Rights in Guatemala**," shedding light on the critical challenges faced by HRDs in the country. The report offers detailed insights into the systemic barriers hampering the work of HRDs and highlights patterns of repression, criminalisation, and stigmatisation.

The report identified major obstacles faced by HRDs, including:

- **Judicial harassment and misuse of laws to criminalise activism.**
- **Persistent threats against Indigenous HRDs defending land and environmental rights.**
- **Lack of effective governmental mechanisms to protect HRDs.**

By centring the voices of local HRDs, the report serves as a crucial advocacy tool for raising awareness and pushing for systemic change. It also facilitates HRDs with data and insights to strengthen their own advocacy efforts. PI has been using the findings from this report to advocate for stronger protection policies at the national level.



IMPACT IN NUMBERS

Coverage of **three Indigenous territories** across Guatemala, focusing on areas with heightened risks for HRDs.

The report **employed participatory action research** with HRDs and legal actors in the three territories, capturing their experiences and systemic issues affecting their defence of human rights.

"Criminalisation is a strategy designed to demoralise us, but reports like this reveal the truth behind the attacks we face." —

Rosalina*, woman HRD from San Marcos.

Building Collective Narratives and Strategies in West Africa

In April 2023, Protection International Africa (PIA), in collaboration with the West African Human Rights Defenders Network (WAHRDN), hosted a ground-breaking workshop for 16 collectives of HRDs from 16 West African countries. The workshop focused on deconstructing dominant narratives in their regions and building solidarity to amplify positive narratives around the work of HRDs.

During the workshop, participants:

Analysed harmful narratives affecting HRDs and their work.

Discussed joint solidarity actions to counter negative stereotypes and build support for HRDs.

Developed and launched in May 2023 a regional campaign titled "Defending and Protecting HRDs in West Africa".

This initiative showcased the power of collective action and highlighted the importance of equipping HRDs with tools to challenge negative narratives and foster support for their vital work.



In August 2023, **ten of the original participants from the April workshop expanded its impact by organising additional sessions on "Protection and Security of Human Rights Defenders"** in the provinces of Kinshasa, Kasai Central, Kongo Central, Sud-Kivu, and Nord-Kivu in the DRC. **These sessions reached a total of 150 HRDs**, demonstrating the multiplier effect of PI's workshops. By fostering collaboration and strengthening participants' advocacy capacities, these efforts laid the groundwork for impactful regional initiatives that continue to build solidarity and amplify the voices of HRDs across Africa.

Strengthening Advocacy and Wellbeing: Workshops for HRDs in Nigeria



PIA, together with Partnership for Justice and ZIVIK (Germany), **conducted two impactful workshops in Nigeria aimed at bolstering the capacity and resilience of HRDs.** These workshops addressed critical aspects of HRD protection, focusing on advocacy strategies and psychosocial support:

Regional and International Advocacy Strategies:

This workshop equipped HRDs with tools to effectively engage with global stakeholders, enhancing their ability to advocate for stronger protections for HRDs and enabling environments for defending human rights.

Psychosocial Approaches in working with HRDs:

Recognising the immense mental and physical toll that human rights work can have on HRDs, this workshop focused on self-care and stress management strategies, to provide participants with tools to help sustain their efforts in high-risk environments.

PARTICIPANT VOICES

The workshops resonated strongly with participants, many of whom expressed how the sessions transformed their perspectives and provided practical skills:

- **Hannah Omokhaye** highlighted the importance of prioritising mental and physical well-being to face ongoing challenges.
- **Ore-ofe Oluwajobi** shared that the training deepened their understanding of conflict resolution strategies and their link to effective human rights advocacy.
- **Okeleye Ayomide** praised the opportunity to network with fellow HRDs, fostering collaboration and solidarity toward shared goals.

These workshops reinforced PI's commitment to providing holistic support for HRDs. By combining advocacy training with psychosocial care, the sessions helped HRDs in Nigeria strengthen their resilience and build collective strategies to advance their vital work in human rights defence.

SEEDS School Strengthens Women HRDs in Myanmar

In 2023, PI launched the **Southeast Asia Experimental Defenders' School (SEEDS) in Myanmar**, a pioneering initiative designed specifically for **women HRDs**. The school provided a safe and interactive environment where women HRDs could enhance their advocacy, leadership, and protection strategies.

SEEDS focused on equipping women HRDs with the skills to navigate the unique risks they face, including gender-specific threats such as sexual harassment and online abuse. The curriculum combined advocacy training with modules on physical, digital, and psychosocial security.

The school created a sense of solidarity among participants, fostering networks for mutual support and collaboration. It also encouraged women HRDs to take collective action in advocating for systemic change. **These HRDs have since expanded the school's impact by conducting workshops for their peers**, amplifying PI's efforts to build safer environments for the defence of human rights.

IMPACT IN NUMBERS

12 women HRDs completed the first cohort of training.

50 WHRDs were reached thanks to the peer-to-peer strategy.

Participants represented diverse groups, such as Indigenous leaders, environmental defenders, and LGBTQI+ advocates.



"It was way more than just a training. Without the childcare and the safe environment, I couldn't have been here. It made me feel valued and understood."

— Irawati K.*, a Burmese woman HRD and journalist.

Monitoring and Countering Disinformation with VERIFICO

PI partnered with *Verdad Abierta* to launch **VERIFICO**, an innovative platform designed to **monitor and counter disinformation targeting social leaders and HRDs in Colombia**. This initiative responded to the alarming rise in misinformation campaigns used to delegitimise and stigmatise HRDs, particularly those working in post-conflict zones.

Since its launch in July 2023, VERIFICO has supported HRDs by providing tools to identify disinformation trends, analyse their sources, and **develop responses tailored to their local contexts**. With real-time alerts and a user-friendly interface, the platform enables HRDs to safeguard their reputations and advocate effectively despite targeted attacks.

VERIFICO's success lies in the collaboration between PI, VerdadAbierta.com, and local HRDs. The initiative builds on VerdadAbierta's expertise in investigative journalism and PI's longstanding commitment to working alongside HRDs.

“Disinformation makes our work harder by eroding trust within our communities. VERIFICO gives us the evidence and tools to push back with truth,”

– said Camila A.*, a grassroots leader in Vichada.

The platform's development over the past two years has enabled us to engage more closely with rural communities and HRD collectives. Building on these insights, **PI has conducted workshops in Bolívar, Cauca, Huila, Vichada, and Putumayo** departments, as well as with other PI offices and partner organisations. Recognising the profound impact of negative narratives on the right to defend human rights, PI remains committed to fostering safe spaces for defenders to thrive



A Long-Term Vision for Inclusion and Intersectionality for HRDs

PI deepened its commitment to promoting inclusivity within human rights movements by calling for the voices of Indigenous defenders, LGBTQIA+ HRDs, and HRDs with disabilities to be heard. Through webinars, interviews, and targeted discussions, PI worked to break barriers and ensure these defenders are included in broader human rights dialogues.



KEY ACTIONS

Amplifying LGBTQIA+ HRDs

PI engaged with LGBTQIA+ defenders in restrictive contexts like the DRC, where they face systemic discrimination, even within human rights spaces. This is highly important as Germaine O.*, a LGBTQIA+ HRD shared that *“There are organisations working on LGBTQIA+ rights, but we can’t even put it on public platforms. [...] These efforts remain*



Challenging Ableism in Advocacy:

PI emphasised the need for HRDs with disabilities to be included across all human rights movements. A speaker at the November webinar organised by PI stressed that: *“Ableism disappears when we are understood and included. The broader human rights movement must work with us to understand our needs.”* PI has been working to ensure that its activities and publications are accessible to people with disabilities.



Through these initiatives, PI has strengthened the visibility of marginalised HRDs and laid the groundwork for inclusive protection strategies. By amplifying their voices, PI ensures that defenders can actively shape the policies and programs that affect them.

Fostering Resilience: The Impact of Collective Protection in Guatemala

In Guatemala, HRDs face constant threats, particularly in rural Indigenous and peasant territories. PI has integrated collective protection into its work, empowering HRDs to safeguard themselves and their communities by fostering solidarity and shared responsibility.

KEY ACTIONS

- **Enhancing Preparedness:** PI worked closely with Indigenous and peasant communities to identify risks and implement preventive measures, reducing immediate threats and creating safer environments for HRDs.
- **Fostering Solidarity:** Through collective protection, HRDs formed strong networks that provided mutual support and emotional resilience, enabling them to withstand threats and continue their vital work.
- **Strengthening Advocacy:** Protection networks amplified defenders' voices, drawing attention to their causes and increasing their visibility at local, national, and international levels.

IMPACT

- **Safety through Collective Action:** Preventive measures allowed HRDs to avoid harm, with defenders citing specific incidents where timely and coordinated efforts helped them mitigate threats.
- **Claiming Power:** Collective protection fostered a sense of shared responsibility, enhancing defenders' confidence and enabling them to advocate more effectively.
- **Transformational Change:** Protection networks not only shielded HRDs but also elevated their advocacy efforts, helping to challenge systemic injustices and secure a more sustainable environment for their work.

PI's commitment to collective protection transforms how HRDs defend their rights and communities. **By fostering networks of solidarity and resilience, PI ensures HRDs have the tools and support needed to stand against threats and advocate for change.**



PATHWAY 2



Holding State Authorities Accountable

21 Overcoming SLAPP Attacks: PI Leads Efforts to Protect WHRDs in Thailand

23 Advocating for Human Rights and Independent Media during Elections

26 Reflecting on 25 Years of HRDs Protection Policies in Colombia

27 Advocating for a Stronger HRDs Protection Law in the DRC

28 Laying the Foundations for Regional Networks in the Great Lakes Region:
Regional Conference for HRDs in Africa

30 Strengthening Public Policy through the Focus Observatory



Overcoming SLAPP Attacks: PI Leads Efforts to Protect WHRDs in Thailand

After four years of relentless advocacy and legal battles, **PI achieved a significant milestone in the fight against Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPPs) in Thailand.** These lawsuits, often weaponised by businesses to silence women and environmental HRDs, have created significant barriers to participation and imposed legal, financial, and emotional burdens on defenders and their communities.

“It was way more than just a training. Without the childcare and the safe environment, I couldn't have been here. It made me feel valued and understood,”
— Irawati K.*, a Burmese women HRD and journalist.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2023

Setting landmark Legal Precedent:

- PI supported women HRDs in **three defamation and SLAPP cases, all of which resulted in not guilty verdicts.** These outcomes set an important precedent for combating judicial harassment and emboldened women HRDs to continue their advocacy efforts.
- PI supported the family of late young Indigenous HRD Chaiyaphum during its appeal to the Supreme Court for his extrajudicial killing. In November 2023, the court held the Thai Army accountable for his killing.

Publishing “Silencing Justice”

- PI launched the report **“Silencing Justice: Battling Systematic SLAPP Attacks on Women and Human Rights Defenders in Thailand.”** The report provides critical analysis of SLAPP cases, highlighting the disproportionate impact on women HRDs and calling for urgent systemic reforms.
- PI documented that over the past six decades, **62 environmental HRDs have been killed in Thailand while protecting our planet.**
- Since 2014, **PI has documented 570 SLAPP cases in Thailand,** highlighting the systematic use of such lawsuits to intimidate HRDs.

Shaping the National Dialogue

- Following these legal victories, PI **organised a high-impact press conference** titled “Recommendations from Women Human Rights Defenders to the New Government: Combating SLAPP against the Public.”
- The attendance of **Thailand’s Minister of Justice demonstrated the growing recognition of WHRD issues** and PI’s influence in shaping public policy discussions.

Overcoming SLAPP Attacks: PI Leads Efforts to Protect WHRDs in Thailand

PI's leadership in combating SLAPPs has not only supported women HRDs with tangible legal victories but also catalysed broader discussions about judicial reform and HRD protection in Thailand. **By creating platforms for advocacy, such as the press conference and report launch, PI ensured that the voices of women HRDs were heard and included in policy-making processes.**

As **Angkhana Neelapaijit**, Representative of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, said: *"Among the barriers to meaningful participation seen in the Thai context is the systematic use of SLAPPs by businesses to silence HRDs and whistleblowers who publicly report on business-related human rights abuses. [...] Women and environmental HRDs are facing prison sentences and heavy fines just for exercising the right to freedom of expression and opinion."*

This statement, shared widely during PI's campaigns, underscores the importance of PI's work in addressing these systemic issues.

PI's work in Thailand continues to lead the way in combating SLAPPs and advocating for legal and systemic reforms.



Advocating for Human Rights and Independent Media during Elections

Elections in 2023 presented critical challenges to HRDs and independent media in countries like Guatemala, Thailand, and the DRC). PI actively worked to support HRDs and journalists facing heightened threats, calling for their protection and amplifying their voices during these pivotal moments.

Guatemala: An Emblematic Case

KEY ACTIONS

Advocacy Against Attacks on Independent Media

- PI issued joint statements with national and international **NGOs condemning the forced closure of El Periódico** and other attacks on press freedom. **1**
- PI **disseminated the report** from the International Mission on Freedom of Expression and the Press, in which PI Mesoamérica participated.

2. Defending HRDs Under Threat

- PI highlighted **cases of criminalisation, including those of Judge Virginia Laparra and her lawyer Claudia González**, and supported legal teams like UDEFEGUA's. **2**
- PI published a **joint statement in defense of UDEFEGUA's director**, calling attention to the risk of criminalisation.

Collaborating with Red Rompe el Miedo Guatemala

- PI supported this coalition to protect journalists and HRDs during the electoral period, sharing their actions and statements with key regional and international stakeholders. **3**

Extensive Advocacy at the International Level

- PI amplified calls to the International Criminal Court and the Organization of American States (OAS) on the dire human rights and democracy situation in Guatemala. **4**
- PI promoted advocacy statements by Guatemalan NGOs and networks such as FONGI, chaired by PI Mesoamérica.

The Guatemalan elections were marked by increasing hostility towards HRDs and independent media. PI played a central role in advocating for their safety and promoting transparency during the electoral period.

Thailand: Promoting Transparent Elections

Ahead of the elections in Thailand, PI released statements emphasizing the critical role of HRDs in ensuring transparency and accountability during the democratic process.

- **Ahead of the elections:** PI disseminated a statement based on PI's briefing on the important role HRDs play during electoral periods.

After the elections: PI called for the continued protection of HRDs and journalists in the post-election period.



DRC: Collaborative Advocacy for Fundamental Freedoms



As an active member of the European Network for Central Africa (EurAc network), PI paid attention to the elections in the DRC to look at whether fundamental freedoms were upheld:

- PI contributed to and published a statement by EurAc titled **“Elections in DR Congo 2023: The EU must do everything possible to guarantee fundamental freedoms”**.
- PI issued a statement, sent directly to EU interlocutors, calling on them to help ensure transparent, credible, and peaceful elections in the DRC.

Regional and International Impact

Brussels Event on Kenyan Elections: In April 2023, PI participated in an event in Brussels that examined the challenges faced by women candidates during Kenya's recent elections, including gender-based violence and systemic barriers to political participation. Drawing on its work in the DRC, PI highlighted how similar risks and challenges were anticipated for Congolese women HRDs in the context of the upcoming elections.

PI's electoral advocacy reflects its commitment to creating enabling environments for HRDs. **By amplifying voices, countering attacks on independent media, and fostering international collaboration, PI continues to push for transparent, inclusive, and democratic electoral processes worldwide.**



Reflecting on 25 Years of HRD Protection Policies in Colombia

2023 marked 25 years since the first protection mechanism for defenders at risk was introduced in Colombia. This governmental decree was the first national policy worldwide applicable to the protection of HRDs. PI decided to document the evolution and challenges of these policies in a comprehensive online infographic. This resource serves as a vital tool for understanding the progress made and the gaps that remain in protecting HRDs in Colombia.

The infographic offers accessible and detailed insights to identify the growing deterioration of civic space to policymakers and civil society organisations. It also equips HRDs to better advocate for stronger, more inclusive protection mechanisms.

The project involved consultations with HRDs, legal experts, and civil society actors, ensuring a well-rounded perspective on the impact of current legislations on HRD protection in Colombia.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- The platform provides an in-depth review of legislative advancements, including the establishment of Colombia's national HRD protection mechanisms.
- It reports critical figures of attacks against HRDs and human rights violations in the past 25 years separated by presidential periods.
- It analyses persistent challenges, such as inadequate implementation, lack of resources, and continued threats to HRDs, particularly those in rural and conflict-affected areas.



Advocating for a Stronger HRD Protection Law in the DRC

In 2023, the DRC adopted the **Law on the Protection and Responsibility of Human Rights Defenders** — a landmark step in recognising the importance of protecting HRDs. However, the law also raised concerns due to vague definitions and inadequate enforcement mechanisms, prompting calls for critical amendments to align it with international standards, such as the UN Declaration on HRDs.

PI actively engaged in local advocacy efforts surrounding the law, both independently and in collaboration with other organisations. In November 2023, **PI participated in discussions with NGOs to map out advocacy strategies. While no consensus was reached on whether to call for an amendment or repeal of the law, PI decided to move forward independently.**

In December 2023, PI released its own statement, highlighting both the law's positive aspects and its problematic provisions, and called for its amendment. The statement emphasised:

- The importance of aligning the law with international standards to strengthen its impact.
- Recommendations to address gaps in the law's definitions and enforcement measures.

While the adoption of the HRD Protection Law in the DRC is a step forward, PI continues to advocate for its improvement. By amplifying the voices of Congolese HRDs and calling for amendments, PI remains committed to ensuring a robust legal framework that ensures that the right to defend human rights aligns with global standards.



Laying the Foundations for Regional Networks in the Great Lakes Region:

Regional Conference for HRDs in Africa

In October 2023, PIA hosted the **Regional Conference on Public Policies for HRDs in Nairobi, Kenya**. This gathering brought together HRDs, policymakers, civil society representatives, and international partners from across Africa to strengthen protection frameworks and address emerging challenges in the region.

The conference stood out for its **intersectional approach**, ensuring the inclusion of sometimes overlooked groups, such as HRDs with disabilities. Accessibility measures were implemented to ensure their full participation, underscoring the event's commitment to creating an inclusive space for dialogue and action.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Intersectional Inclusion:

The event welcomed HRDs from diverse contexts, including defenders with disabilities, whose participation was made possible through intentional accessibility efforts. This approach enriched discussions with varied perspectives, fostering a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by different groups of HRDs.



Holistic Activities for Wellbeing and Connection:

Beyond formal sessions, the conference featured activities like dancing, designed to foster stronger networking opportunities and encourage participants to take care of their mental health. These moments allowed attendees to connect on a personal level, building trust and solidarity.



Laying the Foundations for Regional Networks in the Great Lakes Region: Regional Conference for HRDs in Africa

KEY ACTIONS

Laying the Foundation for Regional Collaboration:

The conference laid the groundwork for the formation of protection working groups in Kenya, the DRC, Uganda, Burundi, and Tanzania.

These groups aim to:

- Coordinate regional advocacy.
- Facilitate rapid responses to emerging threats.
- Share information on HRD security trends with key stakeholders.

By fostering these networks, the event contributed to a broader advocacy strategy, influencing regional protection frameworks and national human rights coalitions. event's commitment to creating an inclusive space for dialogue and action.

Focus on Emerging Threats:

Discussions centred on critical issues, such as shrinking civic space, criminalisation of HRDs, and barriers to implementing existing protection policies, paving the way for actionable recommendations.



Rose N.*, an woman HRD from Uganda, reflected on the conference's significance:

"This conference is not just a gathering; it is a driving force for change. The collective advocacy will spotlight effective public policies at every level. I can feel like we are shaping the future."

The conference represented a significant step forward in promoting inclusive and holistic protection strategies for HRDs across Africa. **By fostering meaningful dialogue, integrating mental health practices, and ensuring accessibility, the event underscored the power of intersectional approaches in creating safer, more resilient environments for defenders.** The establishment of protection working groups promised to sustain these efforts, driving coordinated advocacy and rapid responses to challenges faced by HRDs in the region.

PI remains committed to supporting these initiatives, ensuring HRDs have the tools, networks, and advocacy platforms they need to thrive.

Strengthening Public Policy through the Focus Observatory

IMPACT IN NUMBERS

The Focus Observatory attracted 28,431 unique visitors in **1** 2023, who collectively made 52,852 visits, exploring 214,809 pages of content.

On average, each visitor viewed approximately 7.6 pages per visit, reflecting strong engagement with the platform's resources.

Engagement peaked in December 2023, with 4,635 unique visitors and 17,879 visits, driven by updates and new publications.

In 2023, PI's Focus Observatory continued to serve as a resource for HRDs, policymakers, and civil society, supporting the development of effective public policies to protect HRDs globally. As an online platform, the Focus Observatory bridges research and advocacy to advance evidence-based approaches for HRD protection.



KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

Facilitating Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues

PI promoted cross-regional learning **1** and policy development through interviews and discussions with key stakeholders

Publications and Evidence-Based Analysis

PI published content on topics such as judicial harassment, restrictive legislation, and gender-specific vulnerabilities affecting HRDs.

Publication of a case study on public policies for HRDs in the DRC

PI published a case study that analysed 23 testimonies of HRDs from the provinces of North and South Kivu to provide **5** an in-depth understanding of the impact of public policies on their work and agency. The publication is available in French and English.

ACTIONS IN 2023

Interviews with HRDs:

- **DRC:** Interview with Olivier Ndoole, focusing on public policies for HRD protection in Africa (Read more).
- **Uganda:** Interview with Robert Mugisa on the state of HRD protections (Read more).
- **Kenya:** Discussion with Catherine Mbui from the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (Read more).



Launch of HRD Network in Nigeria:

PI supported the creation of a national network of HRDs to improve coordination and advocacy (Read more).



The Focus Observatory remains a vital tool in PI's efforts to support HRD protection globally, providing resources that inform policy innovation and amplify the voices of defenders in high-risk contexts.

PATHWAY 3



Mobilising Influential Stakeholders

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Marking 25 Years of the UN Declaration on HRDs:

PI's Role in the Dec+25 and Bilbao Declaration

PI played an active role in two key initiatives marking the 25th anniversary of the 1998 UN Declaration on HRDs: the Declaration +25 project and the AHRI Conference in Bilbao. These efforts aimed to evaluate the Declaration's impact, address its shortcomings, and chart a path for enhancing HRD) protection in today's evolving contexts.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

The Declaration +25 is an authoritative, civil society-led document that supplements the UN Declaration on HRDs. Throughout 2023, PI contributed to the development of this instrument by:

1 Organising Consultations with HRDs:

PI facilitated two key consultations with over 200 HRDs during the AHRI Conference in Bilbao (September) and the Nairobi Conference (October). These sessions gathered input on the Declaration's gaps and explored ideas to include in the supplement to address contemporary challenges that HRDs face.

2 Supporting Advocacy Events:

PI provided logistical and financial support for events in Geneva to call for the update of the Declaration in front of the UN.

3 Developing Communication Campaigns:

PI created infographics and social media materials featuring quotes from HRDs, broadly disseminated the survey, and raised awareness of the Declaration's shortcomings and the importance of updating it.



The AHRI Conference and Bilbao Declaration

During the AHRI Conference in Bilbao, PI contributed to the drafting and dissemination of the Bilbao Declaration, which critically analysed the implementation gaps in the 1998 UN Declaration on HRDs. This document proposed actionable recommendations to improve HRDs protection frameworks.

WHY THIS MATTERS

PI's involvement in the Declaration +25 project and in the Bilbao Declaration underscored the importance of updating the UN Declaration on HRDs to address the realities faced by HRDs today, including:

Digital Threats:

1 Acknowledging the increasing risks HRDs face online.

Shrinking Civic Spaces:

2 Advocating for stronger protections against repressive state policies.

Intersectional Vulnerabilities:

3 Highlighting the unique challenges of marginalised HRDs, such as women, Indigenous defenders, and defenders with disabilities.

As one participant from the Nairobi consultation expressed:
"This process has shown us that our voices are heard. Updating the Declaration is not just symbolic—it's a lifeline for HRDs around the world."

Advancing Shared Priorities: Elevating HRDs Protection at the EU-CELAC Summit

PI contributed to advocacy efforts aimed at ensuring that the protection of HRDs was included in discussions during the renewed partnership between the European Union (EU) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). This partnership, focused on strengthening cooperation on shared priorities such as human rights, democracy, and sustainable development, offered a crucial opportunity to amplify HRDs concerns at the international level.

During the EU-CELAC Summit, PI collaborated with CSOs to emphasise the need for bilateral cooperation to address the growing threats faced by HRDs in contexts marked by violence, impunity, and restrictive laws. By working collectively, these efforts aimed to ensure that the voices of marginalised defenders were heard and systemic barriers to their work were acknowledged.



KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

Pre-Summit Dialogues:

1 PI participated in consultations to bring HRDs' concerns to the table, advocating for their inclusion in discussions at key decision-making levels.

Statements:

2 PI collaborated with other CSOs to draft a statement highlighting the urgent need for strengthened HRD protections across Latin America. PI also published its own statement highlighting a list of recommendations to better protect HRDs.

Focus on Thematic Issues:

3 PI advocated for protection frameworks in policy outcomes, particularly those addressing HRDs working on climate justice, Indigenous rights, and anti-corruption.

PI's work was part of a broader coalition effort, reinforcing the role of civil society in shaping international human rights commitments. This collaborative approach ensured that the outcomes of the summit reflected diverse and inclusive perspectives.

Standing with Environmental Defenders: PI's Engagement with the Escazú Agreement

PI actively promoted the ratification and implementation of the Escazú Agreement, a pivotal treaty aimed at ensuring environmental rights and safeguarding environmental HRDs in Latin America and the Caribbean.

KEY ADVOCACY ACTIONS

Open Letter to the Brazilian Government:

In March 2023, PI, alongside Brazilian and international CSOs, addressed an open letter to Brazil's Minister of Foreign Affairs. The letter urged the government to submit the Escazú Agreement to the National Congress for approval and subsequent presidential ratification. **It emphasised the treaty's significance in protecting environmental defenders and ensuring public access to environmental information.**

Event on Development Banks' Role:

In April 2023, during the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP2) of the Escazú Agreement in Buenos Aires, PI co-organised a side event titled **"Zero Tolerance for Reprisals: The Role of Development Banks and Escazú in Protecting Defenders"**. The event focused on the implementation of zero-tolerance policies against reprisals by development banks and discussed the progress of the Action Plan on Defenders under the Escazú Agreement. It put forward concrete examples for Development Financial Institutions (DFIs) to address reprisals in their projects.

These initiatives underscored the critical role of the Escazú Agreement in fostering transparency, public participation, and justice in environmental matters. By engaging with governmental bodies and financial institutions, PI aimed to create a safer environment for environmental HRDs and promote the effective implementation of the treaty's provisions.

Bringing Guatemalan HRDs' Voices to International Platforms

In 2023, PI organised and coordinated advocacy tours for Guatemalan HRDs so that they could share their experiences with key international stakeholders and interlocutors. These tours provided the Guatemalan HRDs with a platform to raise awareness about the specific risks they face in Guatemala, a country where defenders often contend with high levels of impunity and repression. During the meetings they had with key international stakeholders and interlocutors, the HRDs shared their stories, highlighted the challenges they face and advocated for stronger international support and protection mechanisms.

Juan*, an Indigenous land defender, reflected:
“These opportunity was more than just meetings—they were lifelines. Sharing our stories abroad brings hope for real change at home.”

KEY ADVOCACY EFFORTS

1 PI facilitated meetings between Guatemalan HRDs and international decision-makers, including policymakers in the EU and representatives of global human rights organisations.

2 PI showcased cases of judicial harassment, threats, and violence targeting defenders, especially those working on environmental protection, Indigenous rights, and freedom of expression.

3 PI ensured that HRDs could advocate directly for actionable commitments, such as stronger international oversight and the implementation of protection frameworks.



The tours fostered greater solidarity between international stakeholders and local defenders, ensuring that the latter's struggles gained visibility and support on a global scale. PI also provided training to HRDs, equipping them with the skills to effectively engage in advocacy at international level.

Amplifying Women HRDs Vulnerabilities in Myanmar

In 2023, PI launched targeted advocacy campaigns to highlight the vulnerabilities of women HRDs in Myanmar, a country grappling with escalating violence under military junta rule. These efforts focused on exposing the systemic risks women HRDs face and mobilising international stakeholders to demand accountability.

PI advocated for independent investigations into companies supporting the junta, emphasising the impact of these economic ties on women HRDs and other vulnerable groups. The campaigns also pushed for stronger measures from regional and global bodies, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the United Nations.

KEY ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Exposing Complicity:

PI's campaigns shed light on the complicity of corporations **1** supplying resources to the military junta, amplifying calls for divestment and sanctions.

Highlighting WHRD Struggles:

PI worked closely with women HRDs to document their experiences, emphasising the intersectional threats they face, including gender-based violence and persecution for their activism. **2**

Engaging Global Actors:

PI's advocacy efforts targeted international stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, and businesses, urging them to prioritise women HRD protection in their Myanmar strategies. **3**



Participating in key events to Mobilise Influential Stakeholders on HRD protection

PI actively participated in key international fora in 2023, including the **EU-NGO Forum**, the **EU-LAC Summit**, the **EU-ASEAN human rights dialogue**, and the **Sakharov Prize** to name a few. These platforms provided critical opportunities to advocate for the protection of HRDs and to influence international agendas.

PI's contributions to these fora reinforced the importance of centring HRD protection in global policymaking. By collaborating with civil society networks and international organisations, PI ensured that the voices of defenders from diverse contexts were amplified and integrated into key discussions.

These engagements were part of PI's broader strategy to build alliances and mobilise influential stakeholders. Through partnerships with NGOs, HRDs, and regional bodies, **PI strengthened global solidarity and action for HRD protection.**



KEY ENGAGEMENTS

1. EU-NGO Forum

- **PI was part of the forum's core organisation group**, ensuring that HRD protection was at the centre of the discussions.
- PI led the **organisation of a protection session** focusing on the needs of children and youth HRDs:
 - PI facilitated a breakout group discussion on the protection needs of children and youth HRDs engaged in environmental activism.
 - **Mae Ocampo, PI's Executive Director**, moderated the protection session's plenary. This session featured prominent speakers, including representatives from the European Parliament, **European Commission, European External Action Service**, as well as a civil society representative, a child HRD, a youth HRD and an advisor to the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs.

2. EU-LAC Summit

- PI participated in the **Civil Society Forum steering group and moderated a session on Civic Space** at the forum, highlighting challenges faced by HRDs in Latin America.
- **PI co-organised the screening of the documentary "The Illusion of Abundance"**, which showcases systemic threats to environmental defenders. Following the screening, PI participated as speakers in the colloquium, fostering dialogue on solutions for the protection of environmental HRDs.

3. EU-ASEAN Human Rights Dialogue

- PI attended the pre-dialogue **ASEAN-EU CSOs Forum** where tensions arose after it was revealed that the Myanmar Ambassador to Belgium, linked to the Myanmar Junta, had been invited to attend the dialogue.
- In response, **PI and other CSOs collectively refused to participate in the dialogue and drafted a public statement condemning the decision to invite him**. This action reinforced the importance of holding states accountable for violations against HRDs and underscored the collective power of civil society advocacy.

4. Sakharov Prize

- PI attended the Sakharov Prize ceremony at the European Parliament in Strasbourg and had the opportunity to meet with the laureate and finalists.
- Through social media posts, PI amplified the voices of defenders, such as representatives of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in Iran, but also Vilma Nuñez and Monsignor Rolando José Álvarez Lagos from Nicaragua, as well as Dr. Colleen McNicholas from the US.

By engaging in these key fora, PI reaffirmed its commitment to supporting HRDs and influencing policy outcomes to create safer, more supportive environments for their work. These collaborative efforts illustrate the transformative potential of collective advocacy in advancing HRD protection globally.

PI's Key Networks and Collaborations

PI actively collaborates with a diverse array of networks and organisations to advance the right to defend human rights worldwide. Below is a non-exhaustive list of PI's key partnerships and impact during 2023:

ProtectDefenders.eu:

In June 2023, PI participated in the Temporary Relocation Platform Annual Meeting and collaborated on a campaign advocating for EU visas for HRDs.

European Network against Racism (ENAR):

PI delivered a workshop on civic space to ENAR members during their annual conference. PI also published an interview with Mahmoud Abu Rahma, ENAR's Programme and Donor Relations Manager and former PI Board member, and disseminated a position paper resulting from the 2022 conference co-organised by ENAR, PI, and Front Line Defenders.

Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN):

PI participated in advocacy efforts countering the backlash against NGOs in the aftermath of the Qatargate scandal at the European Parliament. We also joined Civil Society Europe and 230 organisations in calling for a review of the EU Foreign Interference Law.

European Network on Central Africa (EurAC):

PI contributed to EurAc's 2023 statements, including a statement denouncing the EU's renewed Great Lakes strategy as a missed opportunity for human rights, and a statement calling on France to put human rights and democracy at the center of its foreign policy in the DRC.

ALLIED

PI participated in an Amicus Curiae submission to the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC) during its consultative process on climate emergency and human rights, contributing to the development of legal standards that protect HRDs in environmental contexts.

PI's Key Networks and Collaborations

Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL):

We collaborated on an Amicus Curiae brief, supporting legal actions that uphold the rights and protections of HRDs in Latin America.

Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB):

PI presented its work to students of the Master in Law programme, fostering academic engagement and awareness of HRD protection issues.

Nobel Peace Conference 2023:

We endorsed the Sunflower Declaration on HRDs at risk, aligning with global efforts to recognise and protect the work of HRDs.

International Civil Society Centre (ICSC):

PI participated in a two-day Civic Space & Foresight seminar organised by ICSC in Berlin, contributing to strategic discussions on the future of civic spaces and HRDs protection.

These collaborations enhance PI's capacity to advocate for HRDs, influence policy, and provide direct support, reinforcing our mission to create environments where defenders can operate safely and effectively.



Global Actions for the Right to Defend Human Rights:

Key Advocacy Statements in 2023

PI called on the **Brazilian** government to approve and ratify the Escazú Agreement, highlighting its significance for environmental defenders. PI also condemned the killing of woman HRD Bernadete Pacifico, drawing attention to the growing risks faced by women defenders in the country.

In **Colombia** PI disseminated statements from local NGOs addressing the humanitarian crisis in Chocó department, where violence by armed groups has endangered entire communities. These statements emphasised the urgent need for humanitarian interventions and accountability.

PI urged the **Indonesian** National Human Rights Institution to investigate allegations of companies supplying weapons to the Myanmar Junta and called on the government to enhance protections for women HRDs. This statement was part of broader campaigns during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence and International Women HRDs' Day.

In 2023, PI issued numerous advocacy statements addressing human rights violations and breaches of the right to defend human rights. Below is a selection of these impactful calls to action, highlighting PI's commitment to creating safer and more enabling environments for HRDs, including initiatives in countries where PI does not have a permanent presence.

Together with 750+ CSOs, PI signed a statement calling for a ceasefire in **Gaza** to address the escalating violence and protect civilians. The statement urged immediate international action to mitigate the humanitarian crisis.

PI issued multiple statements advocating for the protection of HRDs in **Honduras**, including:

- A call for the protection of Tocoa, Guapinol and San Pedro communities, following the killing of HRD Oqueli Domínguez;
- A call for the protection of HRD José Ramiro Lara in Copán;
- A call for justice for woman HRD Miriam Miranda after a violent attack;
- An ad-hoc request of amnesty for HRDs Abel Antonio Pérez and Santos Hernández Ortiz, highlighting systemic risks faced by defenders in the region.

Marking the second anniversary of the **Myanmar** coup, PI joined a call to ASEAN states and the UN to address ongoing human rights violations in the country. This statement underscored the urgent need for accountability and action.

Key Advocacy Statements in 2023

PI joined a coalition demanding justice for journalist Arshad Sharif in **Pakistan**. The statement called for an independent investigation and highlighted the systemic risks faced by media professionals in exile.

In a joint open letter, PI urged the government of **Rwanda** to conduct an independent investigation into the death of journalist John Williams Ntwali. The statement emphasised the importance of press freedom and accountability for violence against media workers.

PI signed a joint letter condemning the harassment, criminalisation, and deforestation in the Ekuri forest in **Uganda**. This call highlighted the urgent need for protecting environmental defenders and preserving Indigenous lands.

PI called for the immediate release of environmental HRD Dang Dinh Bach in **Vietnam**, who remains imprisoned for his environmental advocacy. This statement highlighted the need to safeguard HRDs working under repressive regimes.

PI's advocacy statements in 2023 reflect a global commitment to safeguarding HRDs, stand for their right to defend human rights, and addressing systemic barriers to justice. Through targeted calls for accountability, protection, and reform, PI reinforced its mission to create safer and more enabling environments for HRDs worldwide.





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4 PUBLICATIONS AND RESEARCH

In 2023, PI strengthened its role as a leading source of research and analysis on HRD protection. By publishing impactful reports, developing tools for both HRDs and policymakers, hosting insightful webinars, and fostering collaborations with academic institutions and advocacy networks, PI advanced global understanding of HRDs' challenges and opportunities.

Insights and Tools: 2023 Publications for HRD Protection

PI released a range of publications that shed light on critical issues affecting HRDs and provided actionable recommendations for policymakers and advocates:



1. The Right to Defend Human Rights, Not for All?

this case study on public policies for HRDs in the DRC examines the impact of these policies on HRDs in North and South Kivu provinces, highlighting barriers such as accessibility and cultural constraints that limit the effectiveness of protective edicts. It emphasises the need for structural reforms to ensure inclusive protection in light of the newly adopted HRD Protection Law (Available in French and English).

[Click here](#)

2. Mujeres Indígenas y Cambio Climático

(translated from Spanish as Indigenous Women and Climate Change): over the past few years, PI has explored the intersection of Indigenous women's knowledge and climate change in the Orinoquía region of Colombia. This publication emphasises the role of gender and cultural heritage in environmental protection.

[Click here](#)

3. Monitoreo sobre la situación del deber estatal de garantizar el ejercicio de defensa de los derechos humanos en Guatemala

(translated from Spanish as Monitoring the State's Obligation to Guarantee the Exercise of Defending Human Rights in Guatemala): this publication provides an in-depth analysis of the state's obligations to protect HRDs in Guatemala, focusing on municipal level challenges and opportunities for improvement.

[Click here](#)

4. Silencing Justice: Battling Systematic SLAPP Attacks on Women and Human Rights Defenders in Thailand

the report provides critical analysis of SLAPP cases, highlighting their disproportionate impact on women HRDs and calling for urgent systemic reforms.

[Click here](#)

Insights and Tools: 2023 Publications for HRDs Protection

5. Psychosocial Approach for Human Rights Defenders in Russian

(translated to Russian as Психосоциальный подход для правозащитников): to enhance access to critical protection strategies for HRDs in Eurasia, PI translated and published its psychosocial approach guide in Russian. This initiative aimed to address the growing demand for psychosocial tools tailored to the unique challenges faced by defenders in the region, including stress, burnout, and security threats.

[Click here](#)

6. Innovation and Other Paradigms for Public Policies for HRD Protection:

this comprehensive paper explores innovative approaches to designing and implementing public policies for HRDs, available in English, Spanish, and French.

[Click here](#)

7. Position Paper: Racialisation and Shrinking Space:

this paper summarises the issues related to shrinking space and the threats to HRDs who work with racialised people in Europe that were raised during a seminar co-organised by ENAR, together with Front Line Defenders and PI.

[Click here](#)



Sparking Global Discussions on HRDs' Challenges and Solutions: Highlighted Events

PI's webinars in 2023 sparked meaningful conversations, mobilised diverse audiences, and advanced knowledge-sharing on critical issues impacting HRDs globally.

1. Public Policies for the Protection of HRDs in Africa

With over 140 attendees, this webinar brought together public policy experts, HRDs, and civil society representatives to evaluate whether current legal frameworks effectively protect defenders in Africa and the Great Lakes region.

2. Inclusion, Protection, and Wellbeing of HRDs with Disabilities

Held in the framework of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, this webinar addressed the invisibility of HRDs with disabilities in traditional protection mechanisms. With 210 registered participants, the session promoted inclusive approaches and featured HRDs with disabilities sharing their experiences alongside insights from experts. The event was complemented by a video highlighting key challenges and recommendations.

PI remains committed to research and knowledge-sharing as a cornerstone of our work, ensuring that HRDs and policymakers have access to tools and insights needed to advance global HRD protection.



PROTECTION
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5 FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

PROTECTION INTERNATIONAL

AISBL BALANCE SHEET EVOLUTION

2018-2023 (€)

In 2023, PI continued to strengthen its financial sustainability, maintaining a balance between operational needs, programmatic growth, and responsible resource management. **The financial report reflects a significant increase in total assets compared to the previous year, underscoring PI's ability to mobilise resources effectively and sustain its mission to support HRDs globally.** Below is an overview of PI's financial evolution, highlighting assets, liabilities, and reserves over the past five years.

ASSETS

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Fixed Assets	16,957	18,936	35,829	24,123	18,881	14,156
Cash & Cash Equivalents	1,229,155	871,357	1,351,297	2,280,647	1,224,766	1,815,016
Debtors	109,558	97,287	98,594	95,277	100,973	160,662
Deferred Expenses	0	5,472	585	30,907	15,452	25,525
Grant Receivable - Governmental	141,392	110,692	71,800	77,669	472,221	238,035
Grants Receivable - Non Governmental	42,711	23,273	1,000	7,011	0	53,003
Total Assets	1,539,773	1,127,017	1,559,105	2,515,634	1,832,294	2,306,398

LIABILITIES

Current Liabilities	174,788	155,791	149,737	299,369	380,173	391,088
Provision	0	0	0	16,500	60,000	145,119
Deferred Grants	786,579	360,211	542,686	1,129,133	845,137	1,231,666
Total Liabilities	961,367	516,002	692,423	1,445,002	1,285,309	1,767,873

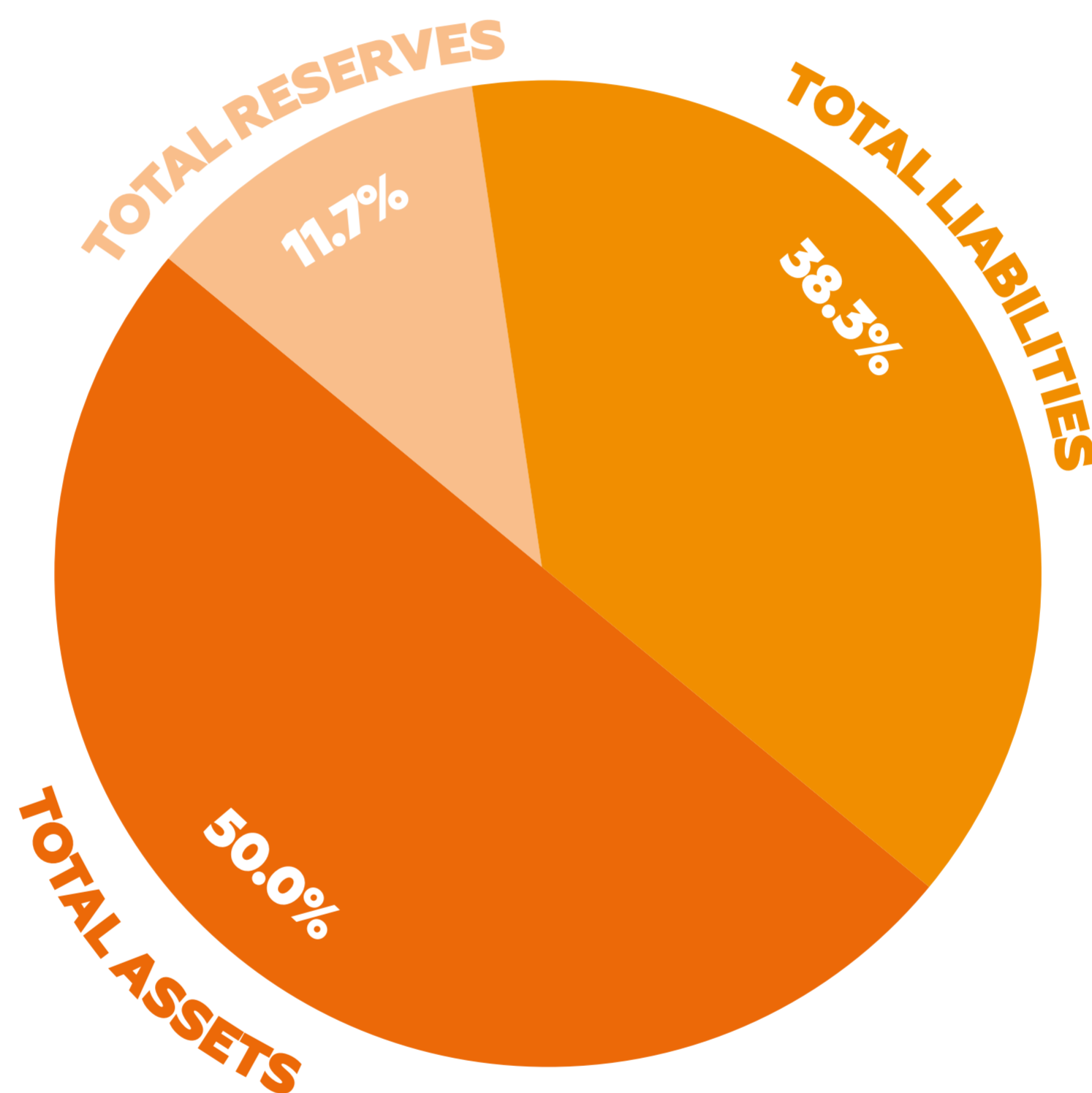
RESERVES

Social Liability Funds	87,262	97,044	113,744	114,930	114,930	423,595
Reserve Funds	491,145	513,969	752,937	955,703	432,055	538,524
Total Reserve	578,407	611,013	866,681	1,070,633	546,984	

Total Liabilities and Reserves	1,539,774	1,127,015	1,559,104	2,515,635	1,832,294	2,306,398
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PROTECTION INTERNATIONAL AISBL BALANCE SHEET EVOLUTION 2018-2023 (€)

The pie chart illustrates the proportional distribution of PI's financial components for 2023. Total assets represent half of the financial structure, while liabilities account for 38.3%, and reserves make up the remaining 11.7%. **This distribution highlights PI's prudent financial management and the emphasis on maintaining sufficient reserves to ensure operational stability in an unpredictable funding environment.**

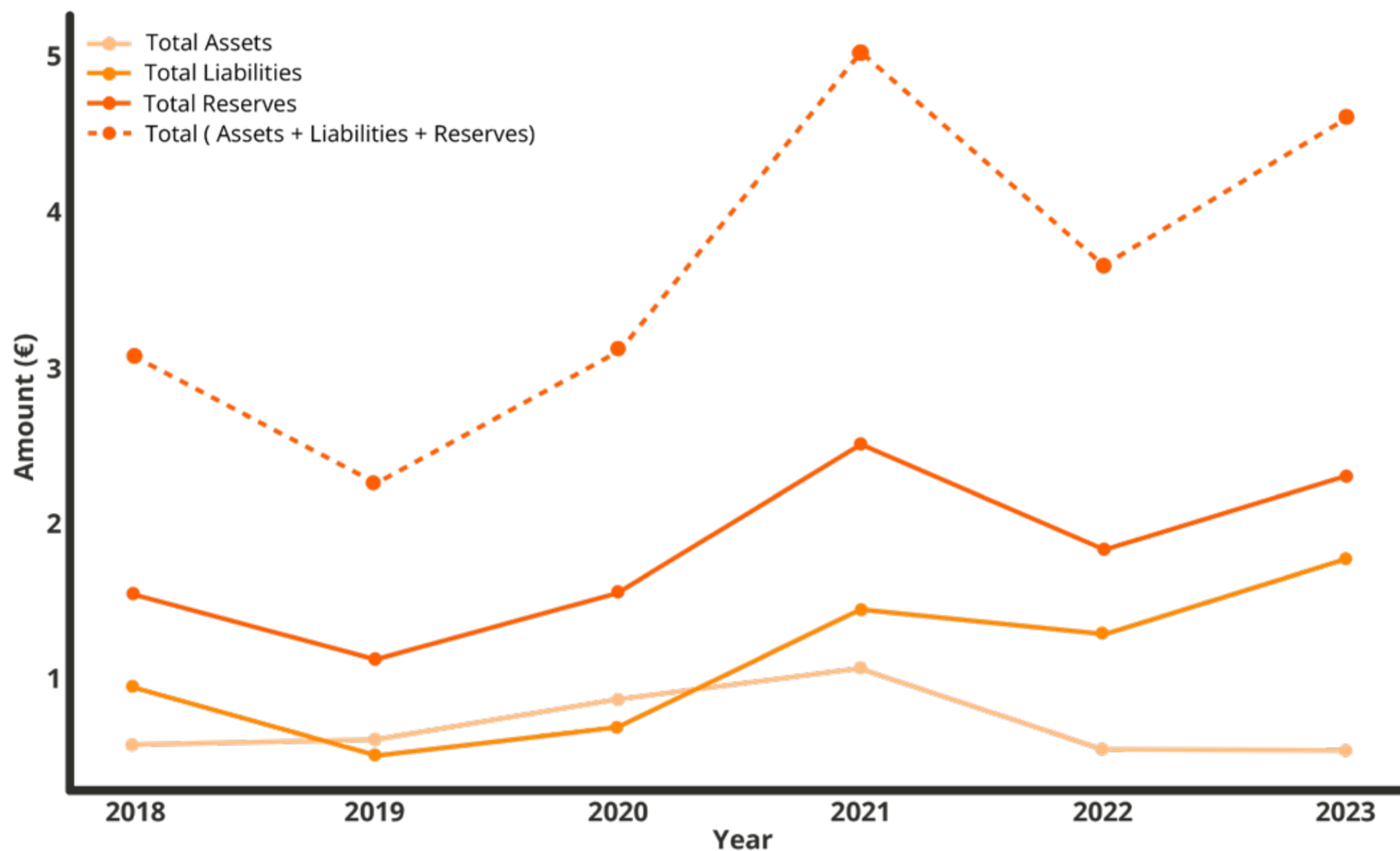


Distribution of reserves, liabilities and assets in 2023

Over the last five years, PI has demonstrated resilience and adaptability, as seen in the trend analysis of assets, liabilities, and reserves. A notable peak in 2021 reflects strategic resource mobilisation and programme expansion that was feasible to achieve before the invasion of Russia to Ukraine and other geopolitical issues that have emerged since then. **Despite a dip in reserves in 2022 and 2023, total assets and liabilities reflect a gradual recovery, showcasing PI's commitment to long-term financial health and impact delivery**

PROTECTION INTERNATIONAL AISBL BALANCE SHEET EVOLUTION 2018-2023 (€)

PI's 2023 financial performance is a testament to PI teams' commitment to transparency, sustainability, and maximising resources to strengthen the right to defend human rights across the globe. **These trends not only highlight the organisation's financial stability but also underscore the importance of continued support from donors, stakeholders, and allies.** With strong financial foundations, PI remains dedicated to supporting and accompanying HRDs. Together we can address the challenges HRDs face worldwide.



Comparison of reserves, liabilities and assets in 2023



**PROTECTION
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6 CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS

The last five years have presented significant challenges to the work of PI and HRDs globally. However, they have also been a period of growth, reflection, and adaptation, leading to critical lessons that inform PI's future strategy.

Navigating Barriers to HRD Protection

Shrinking Civic Space:

In many regions, HRDs have faced increasingly hostile environments, marked by restrictive NGO laws, judicial harassment, and heightened surveillance.

- **Impact:** HRDs are increasingly criminalised, isolated, and at risk of physical and digital attacks, making their work more dangerous and less visible.
- **Response:** PI has had to navigate these challenges by providing HRDs with advanced security tools, fostering networks for collective protection, and advocating for international accountability mechanisms.

Economic and Geopolitical Crises:

The COVID-19 pandemic, rising inflation, and ongoing geopolitical crises, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the escalating violence against the Palestinian population, and the global rise of right-wing governments, have significantly impacted financial and operational stability.

- **Impact:** Rising costs have constrained budgets, while the pandemic disrupted travel, in-person training, and grass-roots mobilisation.
- **Response:** PI adopted hybrid models for capacity-building, combining online tools with localised in-person support, ensuring continuity despite global disruptions.

Technology Gaps:

Limited internet connectivity and digital infrastructure in rural or conflict-affected areas posed significant barriers.

- **Impact:** HRDs in remote regions struggled to access resources, participate in training, or implement digital protection strategies.
- **Response:** PI invested in low-tech and offline tools, alongside efforts to improve digital literacy and create localised solutions for HRDs.

Building Resilience through Strategic Lessons

Decentralisation Works

PI's efforts to decentralise its operations have demonstrated the value of regional autonomy in enabling faster, context-specific responses.

Outcome: The establishment of two regional hubs (Mesoamerica and Africa) and multiple country offices (DRC, Thailand, Indonesia, Colombia-Brazil, Honduras) enabled local decision-making and strengthened PI's ability to respond effectively to regional challenges.

Consideration: Decentralisation requires robust internal systems, including streamlined communication, resource allocation, and clear decision-making structures.

Enhanced HR Frameworks

A comprehensive HR framework was developed to improve staff wellbeing and organisational inclusivity.

- **Outcome:** Toolkits for talent acquisition, staff wellbeing, and people development were rolled out globally. Feminist leadership and other training programmes launched in 2023 further strengthened a supportive work environment.
- **Consideration:** Ongoing investment in staff development is critical to sustaining a strong, inclusive organisation.

PI remains committed to addressing these challenges while building on its lessons learned. As the organisation transitions to its 2024–2028 Global Strategy, these insights will shape its priorities, ensuring a more resilient and impactful approach to protecting HRDs worldwide.

Improved Governance Structures

The implementation of PI's Global Governance Arrangement (GGA) in 2019, fully operational by 2022, has enhanced collaboration and decision-making across offices.

Outcome: The creation of key teams, such as the Global Management Team (GMT) and Strategic Leadership Team (SLT), was planned to further improve operational decisions and strategic planning during the new cycle.

Similarly, the **Financial Governance Arrangement (FGA)**, rolled out in 2023, improved financial accountability and introduced updated policies, including the PI Reserves Policy and PI Services Policy.

Narrative-Driven Advocacy

Storytelling and narratives have proven to be powerful tools in enhancing HRD visibility and fostering public and policymaker support.

- **Outcome:** Campaigns highlighting WHRDs, Indigenous defenders, and other marginalised groups have shifted perceptions from victimhood to resilience, fostering global solidarity.
- **Consideration:** Incorporating diverse and intersectional stories ensures inclusivity and reaches broader audiences.



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7 **TRANSITION TO THE** **2024–2028** **FRAMEWORK**

Transition to the 2024–2028 Framework

In 2019, PI embraced a transformative shift in its mission, and moved from focusing on the protection of HRDs to supporting them to exercise their **right to defend human rights**. Over the 2019–2023 strategic cycle, we centred the right to defend human rights in our work while committing internally to a decentralised structure through the establishment of Regional Hubs.

This journey laid the groundwork for the new strategic framework, which builds on these foundations to deepen our impact and responsiveness. **At the end of 2023, we convened a gathering in Tanzania, bringing together our teams from around the world, partners, and key stakeholders to align on future priorities and chart a path forward.** This event marked the transition to PI's 2024–2028 Global Strategy, which was developed through extensive consultations and strategic planning. The new strategy is guided by three strategic objectives, each addressing critical dimensions of HRD protection and advocacy:

1. Strengthening Preventive and Collective Protection for HRDs

PI's focus is on contributing to the continued strengthening of the safety, capacity, and agency of HRDs and their collectives, and to support them in dismantling power imbalances and levelling the playing field.

2. Creating Enabling Environments for Defending Human Rights

PI aims to compel power-holders to acknowledge their roles and obligations in the protection and promotion of the right to defend human rights and to urge them to take concrete action to create and uphold an enabling environment.

3. Building a Resilient and Sustainable Organisation

PI's goal is to achieve this through institutional strengthening by improving its internal systems, and by investing in its people and putting them at the core of its operations.

KEY INITIATIVES

- **Expanding our culture of learning and accountability.**
- **Enhancing the quality and responsiveness of our work through streamlined operations.**
- **Prioritising resilience and sustainability in all aspects of our organisation.**

PI has also taken this opportunity to refresh its brand identity. This is a statement of PI's renewed commitment to the right to defend human rights safely around the world. As we evolve, our visual identity and logo evolve with us.

Our Vision for the Future

The new strategy reflects PI's commitment to responding to the evolving needs of HRDs and the dynamic global context in which they operate. It centres on three core principles:

Intersectionality

Addressing the overlapping vulnerabilities HRDs face, such as those tied to gender, race, socioeconomic status, and regional contexts. Embedding an intersectional lens across PI's programming to ensure tailored and effective interventions.

Inclusivity

A continued focus on marginalised and under-represented groups, including women HRDs, Indigenous defenders, and defenders with disabilities. Ensuring that diverse voices are heard and integrated into advocacy, programming, and leadership at all levels.

Resilience

Strengthening HRDs' capacity to respond to risks, whether digital, physical, or psychosocial. Supporting the sustainability of HRDs' work through collective strategies, resource access, and policy engagement.

The World We Envision

The 2024–2028 strategy *“An Enabling Environment for the Right to Defend Human Rights”* represents not just a continuation but a deepening of PI's commitment to HRDs protection. By fostering inclusivity, intersectionality, and resilience, PI aims to ensure that defenders around the world have the tools, support, and solidarity they need to thrive in their vital work.

**Protection International stands for the right to defend human rights.
By supporting human rights defenders, we are protecting your rights too.**

8 OUR DONORS AND PARTNERS

We deeply appreciate our donors and partners whose generous support has been instrumental in our mission to support HRDs, uphold the right to defend human rights, and safeguard civic space. Our supporters' unwavering commitment enables us to confront the growing challenges in a world increasingly shaped by inequalities, racial discrimination, authoritarianism, conflicts, insecurity, and the proliferation of misinformation about the critical work of HRDs.

Amid these complexities, we call on our donors to embrace adaptable and forward-thinking strategies that address the dynamic and often urgent needs of HRDs and their collectives. To this end, we highlight the importance of:

- **Providing flexible core funding** that allows human rights organisations to respond effectively to shifting contexts and priorities.
- **Recognising defenders as key partners** in the grant-making process, ensuring their voices and lived experiences guide funding strategies.
- **Implementing defender-centric and risk-based approaches**, including secure and confidential communication channels when engaging with human rights actors.
- **Reducing administrative burdens on defenders**, enabling them to dedicate more time and resources to advancing human rights rather than meeting excessive reporting requirements.

Your support continues to play a vital role in ensuring holistic support for HRD protection and strengthening global efforts to promote, respect, and protect the right to defend human rights.



Thank you for standing with us.

Our work is generously supported by



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2023

ANNUAL REPORT

*Reflecting on progress,
looking ahead*