

# ANNUAL REPORT 2012



**GLOBAL TRENDS IN 2011 FOR  
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

**f** FRONTLINE  
DEFENDERS

**Published by Front Line Defenders 2012**  
**The International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders**  
**Second Floor, Grattan House, Temple Road, Blackrock, County Dublin, Ireland**

Copyright © 2012 by Front Line Defenders

This report has been produced for the benefit of human rights defenders and may be quoted from or copied so long as the source/authors are acknowledged.

Copies of this report are available from  
[info@frontlinedefenders.org](mailto:info@frontlinedefenders.org)

To request a report please contact:  
Front Line Defenders  
Second Floor, Grattan House  
Temple Road  
Blackrock  
Co Dublin  
Ireland

Tel: 00 353 1 212 37 50  
Fax 00 353 1 212 10 01

[info@frontlinedefenders.org](mailto:info@frontlinedefenders.org)

# CONTENTS

<b>GLOBAL TRENDS</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>AFRICA</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>AMERICAS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ASIA</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA</b>	<b>8</b>

**This report highlights developments in the situation of human rights defenders in 2011. It illustrates some of the main global and regional trends as emerged from Front Line Defenders' work.**

**Over the course of 2011, Front Line Defenders issued 256 urgent appeals on 594 human rights defenders at risk in 70 countries; it provided 189 security grants and trained more than 470 human rights defenders. Overall, more than 1380 HRDs benefited from Front Line Defenders' protection support in 2011.**

## I. GLOBAL TRENDS

If each year could be associated with a right, 2011 was undoubtedly the year of **freedom of assembly**. The uprisings now collectively referred to as the Arab Spring, that began in North Africa in late 2010, spread throughout the region during the year. Well after the dramatic regime changes in Tunisia and Egypt, mass protests continued in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Syria, where a particularly brutal repression, still ongoing, attracted unanimous condemnation internationally as well as sanctions from the Arab League.

Inspired by the Arab Spring and exasperated by decades of corrupt authoritarian government, civil society mobilised in many countries in other regions of the world, particularly in **Africa**. Protests, either linked to elections or to high commodity prices, erupted in Angola, Malawi, Swaziland, and Uganda – to name but a few. In Angola, demonstrations started in March to protest against the 32-year rule of President dos Santos. The demonstrations, which continued with varied intensity throughout the year, were met with unnecessary and disproportionate force by the police, which also violently prevented journalists from covering the events.

Though protests did not develop as intensely in other regions, regimes in **Asia** were worried enough to restrict their laws and regulations. Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Malaysia were in the process of passing new restrictive legislation. In Malaysia, the House of Representatives passed the Peaceful Assembly Bill, which outlaws street protests and authorises police to impose conditions, including time, date, and venue. Organisers of unauthorised assemblies would face hefty fines. At the time of writing, the bill remained pending in the Senate. China responded to anonymous online calls for protests by disappearing up to two dozen human rights defenders and questioning and threatening scores of others.

Instances of violent dispersal of protests and refusal of permission to hold assemblies also occurred in many countries in **Europe and Central Asia**, including Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Serbia, and Uzbekistan. In the latter, faced with a *de facto* ban on protests, human rights defenders challenged the authorities and organised several small demonstrations: they were violently dispersed by the police, participants were arrested, questioned and sentenced to the payment of fines. Protests were also violently dispersed in **Latin America**. In Cuba, in particular, the authorities launched a crackdown reminiscent of the 2003 mass arrests of human rights defenders, pro-democracy and political activists.

Against this backdrop, the creation by the United Nations Human Rights Council of the new mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of assembly and of association was very welcome. It is hoped that it will contribute to better protection of human rights defenders worldwide, and that it will elicit more cooperation from states than the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders has so far enjoyed.

The Arab Spring also confirmed the essential role that the **Internet**, in particular social networking sites and blogs, play in disseminating information and facilitating mass mobilisation. However, the very same tools were monitored and used by governments to identify and target critical voices, as occurred during the uprisings in Syria. Governments also restricted the use of more traditional communications technologies to pre-empt protests: for example, SMS access to Twitter was suspended in Cameroon in March. Bloggers as well as HRDs and journalists using the Internet for their work were arrested or put under surveillance in Bahrain, Burma, China, Cuba, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kuwait, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Thailand, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Vietnam.

2011 also confirmed most of the trends identified last year, in particular with regard to the killing and criminalisation of human rights defenders. **Killings** continued unabated across all regions. Latin America continues to be of particular note in this regard. In Brazil, one of the few countries with a governmental protection programme for human rights defenders, five HRDs or family members were murdered as a result of their activism. HRDs and journalists were also killed in Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Uganda, and Yemen. These killings were across a broad range of human rights issues: those who lost their lives included environmentalists, trade unionists, journalists, HRDs working on sexual orientation and gender identity, indigenous issues, elections, corruption, women's rights, land, and community rights. The cases Front Line Defenders reported on represent only a fraction of the total number of individuals killed because of their involvement in human rights.

Virtually all abuses against human rights defenders were committed in a climate of absolute **impunity**, across all countries and regions. In Russia, two years after the killing of human rights defenders Natalya Estemirova, Zarema Sadulaeva and her husband Alik Dzhabrailov, no effective investigation has been carried out. Similarly, no justice has been delivered in Burundi for the murder of Ernest Manirumwa in 2009, despite an intense national campaign and the involvement of foreign experts in the investigation. A similar situation prevailed in Indonesia for the 2004 murder of Munir Tahib. Those who remained engaged in campaigning for justice in these murders were targeted and harassed. In Colombia, organisations have raised concerns regarding the lack of effective investigations into filed complaints, where the authorities failed to link multiple complaints or identify patterns of threat.

In some limited cases, domestic and international pressure forced governments to act. However, only the material perpetrators were tried while the intellectual authors of the crime remained unpunished. This is the case in the DRC, where five police officers were sentenced in June for the 2010 murder of Floribert Chebeya; however, former Chief Police Commissioner John Numbi, who invited Floribert Chebeya to the meeting where he was murdered, was suspended from duty but never investigated, called as a witness or charged.

While physical attacks continued to occur, the use of the legal system has become the favourite tool of governments in suppressing criticism and limiting the space for human rights activism. An increase in the adoption of **restrictive legislation**

affecting human rights defenders has been widely acknowledged in recent years. Restrictive legislation, be it on NGO regulation, media, public order, terrorism, or criminal defamation, provides the basis for the **criminalisation** of the work of human rights defenders. A quarter of the cases Front Line Defenders publicly reported on during the year concerned cases where HRDs faced criminal charges. The number of countries where this occurred indicates how widespread the phenomenon is. Cases were reported in Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Burundi, China, Colombia, Congo, Cyprus, Ecuador, Egypt, Honduras, India, Iran, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Oman, Peru, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tanzania, Thailand, The Gambia, Turkmenistan, UAE, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Western Sahara, and Zimbabwe.

In some cases, charges were related to the work carried out by the HRD, including defamation charges following the publication of articles, statements or reports, or the holding of unauthorised protests. At times the authorities brought charges unrelated to their work, as in the case of Ales Bialiatski, sentenced for tax evasion in Belarus, or in the cases of the many HRDs supportive of the Kurdish community who were arrested and charged in Turkey under anti-terrorism legislation. Delaying strategies were also used to involve the NGOs concerned in lengthy trials, as in the case of seven trade unionists on trial in Cameroon since 2010.

## II. REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

### 1. AFRICA\*

**Front Line Defenders issued 35 urgent appeals on behalf of human rights defenders at risk in 19 African countries, namely Angola, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritania, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, The Gambia, Uganda, Zimbabwe.**

The start of the year was marked by the killing of a prominent Ugandan HRD working on the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people. David Kato was murdered in his home in January 2011. His killer was eventually sentenced in November 2011 to 30 years in prison. The attack against Kato followed a deterioration of the security situation for all LGBTI rights defenders in Uganda, who saw their names and photos repeatedly published together with threats in the media. The so-called Anti-Homosexuality Bill, which had remained pending in 2010, was not tabled again after the February 2011 general elections. While in Uganda the violence against LGBTI rights defenders reached its climax, numerous instances of harassment were reported in 'Cameroon, Ethiopia, and Malawi.

Echoes of the Arab Spring reached, in the good and bad sense, several countries in Africa. Fuelled by high commodity prices or demands for good governance and democracy, **protests** erupted, among other countries, in Angola, Malawi (see box), Swaziland, and Uganda. In the latter, a peaceful walk-to-work protest initiated in April by the opposition against rising fuel prices was brutally suppressed by police. This caused events to escalate into violent clashes and riots which left at least five people dead. At times, governments acted pre-emptively. In Zimbabwe, 46 people, including trade unionists, student activists and political activists, were arrested and charged with treason in February for watching videos of the protests in Tunisia and Egypt; while the charges were dismissed for most of them, six remained on trial at the time of writing for a revised charge of conspiracy to incite and promote public violence. Numerous instances of the arrest of HRDs and disruption of civil society meetings and protests continued to occur throughout the year.

2011 witnessed an increase in **attacks at the home or the office** of human rights defenders. Front Line Defenders reported on such cases in DRC, Malawi, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Such instances included suspected undercover security officials visiting the office of an NGO, the illegal seizure by police of the building hosting an NGO, break-ins, stealing or destruction of equipment and documents. In one case, the security guard of an NGO was assaulted during a break-in to force him to disclose the home address of the director of the organisation.

**Judicial harassment** against HRDs remained a widespread pattern across the region and one of the most common violations against HRDs, second only to the issuing of threats. Threats of criminal charges, summonses, intimidation by the judicial authorities, including the office of the prosecutor, fabricated charges and unfair trials were reported in Burundi, Congo, The Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. In Burundi, human rights defenders and journalists received repeated summonses to appear before the prosecutor for questioning. In most instances, summonses were in connection with the ongoing campaign for justice for the murder of human rights defender Ernest Manirumwa in 2009, or in connection with raising human rights issues or reporting on the opposition. A prominent NGO received at least 28 summonses in the last few years, while a journalist with Radio Publique Africaine (RPA) was called in for questioning seven times between July and early November.

During the year, **elections** were held in several countries in Africa. Those in DRC, The Gambia and Uganda in particular had an impact on the security of HRDs and journalists. In DRC, many human rights groups reported being subjected to intensified surveillance in the run-up to the elections. Those involved in election monitoring or exposing irregularities were the subject of intimidation. In The Gambia, journalists were intimidated and in some cases arrested for their reporting on opposition rallies, while radio stations were ordered not to report on the opposition. In Côte d'Ivoire, human rights defenders and journalists were

\* For practical reasons, Front Line Defenders covers sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East & North Africa as regions. This does not reflect any political position.

targeted during the clashes that followed the contested 2010 elections. Several HRDs were forced to flee or to go into hiding, especially during the early months of the year. The media were used by both sides of the conflict to threaten and intimidate HRDs.

The situation remained appalling in **conflict-ridden** countries such as Sudan and Somalia. Human rights defenders and journalists continued to work in an extremely precarious situation and many of them had to flee or move to another area of the country to escape retaliation for reporting on the daily abuses. In Sudan armed conflict continued in Darfur and the Government launched attacks on opponents in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states following the independence of South Sudan. Repressive measures included the arbitrary arrest of human rights defenders.

More numerous instances of harassment of human rights defenders working on **slavery and forced labour** were reported in Mauritania and Ghana. Fifteen Mauritanian HRDs were sentenced in January and August on charges of assaulting a police officer, staging an illegal protest and belonging to an unregistered organisation. Their arrest and trial occurred in connection to sit-ins organised in front of a police station to protest against police inaction on cases of slavery. The authorities continued to refuse registration of their organisation, IRA-Mauritania. In Ghana, a human rights defender suffered repeated threats and abduction attempts against his family members in connection to his work on forced child labour.

### Country in Focus: Malawi

Once considered a country where civil society could express itself freely, Malawi descended into a spiral of authoritarianism in recent years. The situation deteriorated in early 2011 when civil society reacted to corruption scandals and high commodity prices with demands for reform and good governance. The Government, mindful of events in North Africa, reacted with force. The authorities made statements inciting violence against human rights defenders and civil society leaders. The president repeatedly called on supporters to fight all those opposing his views or criticising the Government, stating he would “smoke them out”. In reaction to demonstrations, local authorities banned protests in the main cities. A presidential decree restricted the right to freedom of assembly by requiring the payment of a fee of 2 million Kwacha (approx 12,000 USD). Mass protests on 20 and 21 July were violently suppressed by the police and resulted in the death of 19 protesters and injuries to hundreds. The day before, members of the ruling party took to the streets waving machetes, threatening members of the public not to participate in the demonstrations. In October, the Government announced an outright ban on protests.

Human rights defenders were directly targeted for their support of societal demands for reform and good governance. In March, the office of the Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR) was attacked by armed men and a security guard was badly injured; a week later, the home of CHRR director was visited by armed police. In August, the office and the home of two human rights defenders were set on fire. In September, Robert Chasowa, a student activist involved in the protest movement, was found dead in circumstances that were never clarified; in October, five HRDs were arrested and charged for staging a small and peaceful protest demanding a proper investigation into his death. Virtually all HRDs involved in the pro reform movement received serious threats, including phone calls to family members asking for the location of the offices or homes of their HRD relative. To date, a UN-backed attempt to bring the Government and civil society to the same table failed, and no one has been held to account for the numerous instances of intimidation, threats and physical attacks against human rights defenders.

## 2. AMERICAS

**Front Line Defenders issued 53 urgent appeals on behalf of human rights defenders at risk in 12 American countries, namely Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela.**

2011 saw little reprieve for human rights defenders at risk in Latin America. HRDs continued to report being subjected to death threats, surveillance, harassment of family members, raids on offices and homes, and violent attacks including enforced disappearance and killing. HRDs also faced the constant challenge of being forced to establish or defend their own legitimacy and that of their non-violent work. Criminalisation and stigmatisation were on the increase. Campaigns vilifying or discrediting the activities of HRDs, often teamed with unfounded criminal accusations, were coordinated by state officials, media agencies or other non-state actors such as transnational corporations.

Many human rights defenders continued to engage in activities seeking **truth, justice and reconciliation** for the victims of past crimes. While in many countries perpetrators were tried and truth commissions established, the relationship between HRDs providing legal representation to victims and their governments, old or new, were often tense. In Guatemala, the election as president, of a candidate who had been a general during the civil war was a cause of concern. In Colombia, despite a changed discourse in relation to HRDs under the new presidency and the dismantling of the scandal-marred *Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad* (DAS), little has changed in terms of a secure environment for HRDs, with reports of continued systematic attacks. Honduras has not yet recovered from the 2009 coup d'état, and impunity and the excessive use of force continued to be the cause of great danger for human rights defenders.

Many HRDs were killed because of the threat their work was perceived to pose to interested parties. In 2011 Front Line Defenders reported on the **killings** of 11 human rights defenders and family members in Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. In Brazil, Sebastião Bezerra da Silva was murdered in February for his work on extrajudicial killings; land activist Adelino 'Dinho' Ramos and environmentalist José Cláudio Ribeiros da Silva and his wife were killed in May; environmentalist and community leader Joao Chupel Primo was murdered in October. In El Salvador, Juan Francisco Duran Ayala, who worked on the environmental risks of cyanide contamination as a result of gold mining, was killed in June. Also in June, community leader María Margarita Chub Che was murdered for her work on illegal evictions in Guatemala. In Honduras, journalist Héctor Francisco Medina Polanco was killed in May, followed in August by Secundino Ruiz, Pedro Salgado and his wife Reina Mejía. An increased number of killings was reported in Colombia.

**Impunity** for these and previous killings remained pervasive. The authorities also failed to protect witnesses. In Mexico, a key witness into the December 2010 killing of Marisela Escobedo Ortiz was gunned down in his home in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua together with two family members, just before his court appearance in March.

HRDs have survived **physical attacks** on their person across the region. The year began and ended with two brutal attacks: in January, a human rights defender from Honduras was kidnapped and tortured by a group of unidentified individuals, before managing to escape. He had been actively defending the rights of campesinos in the Aguán region. In December, a woman human rights defender was shot five times in Ciudad Juárez as a result of her work fighting for justice for the victims of femicide and their families in the State of Chihuahua, Mexico.

The **homes and offices** of human rights defenders were also often targeted. 2011 saw break-ins reported in Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico where confidential and sensitive information regarding human rights violations was stolen and property damaged. In a particularly vicious attack Front Line Defenders Award nominee Jackeline Rojas Castañeda was bound and gagged and a gun was held to her daughter's head, during a break-in at her home in November, in Colombia. The assailants asked for the whereabouts of her son and her husband, stole two laptop computers, USB memory sticks, cellular phones and documents. In Mexico, in February, the home of a WHRD was set on fire as she attended a hunger-strike and protest in front of the offices of the Chihuahua State Attorney General in Juárez.

There were numerous instances of the **criminal justice system** being used against HRDs in order to prevent them from carrying out their work. Cases of unfair trials and fabricated charges were reported in Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, and Peru. Peruvian HRD Estinaldo Quispe Mego was sentenced to two four-year prison terms, charged with two counts of usurping public office, in connection with two separate boundary disputes in which he acted as intermediary. In Ecuador, a complaint was filed against two HRDs linking them to the disappearance of a sign relating to a community meeting, an allegation made on the basis that they were the two who had opposed a mining company operating in their area.

Human rights defenders were subjected to **smear campaigns** or labelled as **terrorists or rebels** in Colombia, Honduras and Venezuela. In the latter, the director of an NGO working on prison conditions was defamed in a number of media outlets following statements made by the Government that accused him of instigating violence in prisons. In Colombia, HRDs were publicly called accomplices or sympathisers of armed groups, while at the same time they continued to receive threats from those armed groups and paramilitary structures, leading to a severe risk of attack from either side. In October, old charges were revived against Principe Gabriel González, who was arrested for rebellion and association with the FARC armed group. Security laws were used in Honduras, where Miriam Miranda Chamorro was arrested in March and then provisionally released on charges of sedition.

## Country in Focus: Cuba

Human rights defenders, journalists, and other members of civil society who criticise the Cuban Government continued to face severe restrictions and violations to their rights of freedom of assembly, association, expression and movement. The authorities continued to legally and physically prohibit peaceful activities such as reporting on human rights violations and promoting democratic reforms. However, in stark contrast to the media attention given to the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, the reality for HRDs in Cuba was virtually unreported and unknown. Under Raúl Castro, the Government continued to be as repressive as under his brother Fidel: the media remained tightly controlled and laws against anti-government speech carry hefty penalties for those who do not acquiesce.

2011 witnessed a severe crackdown on civil society throughout the island with weekly reports of threats, violent beatings, arrests and arbitrary detentions, house arrests, and the use of tear gas against peaceful gatherings. Cuban HRDs were also regularly victims of so called *actos de repudio* (acts of repudiation), when pro-government mobs acting as “Rapid Response Brigades” harassed, threatened, insulted and attacked them in particular as they carried out peaceful protest actions. HRDs operating outside Havana faced additional challenges as a result of limited access to very limited support structures.

Internet use was severely restricted and those who have access to it are under heavy surveillance. Whilst an increasing number of HRDs used social networking sites to inform on violations, self-censorship was often applied as a result of the disproportionate penalties that exist for political dissent.

In October 2011 the human rights community in Cuba lost a brave leader when Laura Pollán, founder of Damas de Blanco (Ladies in White), died in Havana.

## 3. ASIA

### Front Line Defenders issued 59 urgent appeals on behalf of human rights defenders at risk in 12 Asian countries, namely Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The past year was a difficult one for human rights defenders in Asia. Their rights under the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders continued to be infringed upon by state and non-state actors alike. HRDs were monitored and intimidated by the authorities in many countries across the region.

Draconian **security laws** were used to target HRDs working on issues viewed as controversial or political by the authorities. In Malaysia, the Emergency Ordinance was used to arbitrarily detain HRDs associated with the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections. In Vietnam, charges of attempting to overthrow the Government under Article 79 of the Penal Code, which provides for capital punishment, were used against HRDs critical of the Government. Minor criticism or criticism on non-political issues was also met with the same severity. Prof. Pham Minh Hoang, who criticised the Government’s environmental policies, is currently serving a 17-month jail term and will be under house arrest for another three years after his release.

Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Malaysia and Thailand were in the process of passing **new laws** which would further hinder the work of HRDs. In Cambodia, a draft Law on Associations and NGOs (LANGO) was being reviewed by the Council of Ministers. The text has drawn widespread criticism as it provides for mandatory registration and criminalises unregistered groups. It requires NGOs and community-based organisations to provide regular financial reports to the authorities; organisations that fail to do so would be considered illegal. Bangladesh was also in the process of drafting an NGO bill which may be used to target critical human rights organisations. Under the current set-up, NGOs receiving funding from abroad have to obtain prior approval from the government controlled NGO Affairs Bureau.

**Bloggers and media activists** using the internet to raise human rights awareness or expose abuses were harassed, arrested and under heavy surveillance in Burma, China, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Websites of human rights organisations were blocked or hacked. Paulus Le Van Son, a prominent Vietnamese blogger, was arrested and held without access to his family and lawyer since September for writing about human rights.

Ongoing **armed conflicts** in Afghanistan, Burma, India, Pakistan, Southern Thailand, and the Philippines continued to affect the safety of human rights defenders. HRDs working to expose abuses by security forces and militant groups found themselves vulnerable to attacks by both sides in the conflict. In these countries, HRDs documenting extra-judicial killings and torture were labelled as agents of the armed opposition. In the Philippines, the human rights groups Linundigan and Community-based Health Service in Northern Mindanao had to evacuate their staff due to security concerns after they were branded by the authorities as sympathisers of the communist party. In post conflict Sri Lanka, HRDs continued to be branded and vilified as supporters of the currently inactive Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Sunanda Deshapriya and his family received death threats after participating in a UN Human Rights Council side event on Sri Lanka. He was the victim of a smear campaign by government officials and the state-run media that branded him as an LTTE supporter.

**Killing** of trade unionists and HRDs working on community rights, indigenous peoples, and corruption were reported in India,

Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand. In August, Right to Information campaigner Shehla Masood was shot dead in India for demanding an end to corruption. Thongnak Sawekjinda, a local community leader in Thailand was gunned down in August for his work on coal mining factories. In October, Petrus W. Ajamiseba and Leo Wangdegau, members of the All Indonesia Labour Union were shot dead by Papua police for leading a demonstration demanding better working conditions. In the same month, Father Fausto Tentorio was murdered in the Philippines after advocating for the local government to respect community rights.

No progress was recorded into the investigations on killings that occurred in previous years. The persons behind the murder of labour rights activist Chea Vichea in Cambodia and human rights defender Munir Thalib in Indonesia remain unpunished. The investigation regarding the enforced disappearance of Thai human rights lawyer Somchai Neelaphajit has equally stalled, showing a lack of political will to shed light on his disappearance and those responsible.

**LGBTI rights defenders** continued to face harassment and strong opposition to their work. In November 2011, Seksualiti Merdeka, a coalition of LGBTI defenders in Malaysia, was forced to cancel their sexuality rights festival after the police issued a ban on their event.

HRDs in Asia were still looking forward to the prospect of having a credible regional human rights mechanism in their sub-regions. The ASEAN Inter-governmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), set up in October 2009, remained non-operational as the initial two years were spent on the drafting of the ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights. Despite disappointment at the lack of progress, many HRDs remain engaged and hopeful that the AICHR may evolve into a fully fledged mechanism with both promotion and protection mandates. Positively, several governments in South Asia expressed interest in the development of a similar mechanism.

### Country in Focus: China

The Arab Spring provided the Chinese Government with both the motive and the opportunity to launch a crackdown on HRDs working in a variety of different areas. With the attention of the world elsewhere, and partly in response to anonymous online calls for a 'Jasmine Revolution' to take place in China, the authorities took the chance to target scores of HRDs who had been at the forefront of human rights defence in China. Up to 200 HRDs were questioned, harassed, severely threatened, beaten, detained, or simply disappeared. At least 24 HRDs, including 11 human rights lawyers, were forcibly disappeared for time periods ranging from a few days in some cases to over six months in others. While many of the disappeared, on their release, declined to disclose details of their treatment, a number of HRDs to whom Front Line Defenders spoke described being beaten, forced to go days without sleep and being made stay in the same position without moving for hours on end.

In a worrying development, draft amendments to the Criminal Procedure Law published in August 2011, if passed, will effectively legalise enforced disappearances for up to six months in cases where suspects are held on charges of, amongst others, 'endangering state security'. This charge is often used against HRDs, and 2010 Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo remains in prison on such a charge, while his wife is still under (illegal) house arrest. Also under house arrest is blind human rights lawyer Chen Guangcheng. Chen, along with his wife, mother and six-year old daughter, is being kept prisoner in his own home. Chen and his wife have been severely beaten, and all attempts by fellow HRDs to visit him have been unsuccessful and many have been met with violence. Notwithstanding this, the organisation of an online grassroots campaign by HRDs to visit Chen and to raise greater awareness of his case and the injustices involved was an encouraging development. This campaign has highlighted the increasingly important role that social media are playing in the defence of human rights in China.

## 4. EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

**Front Line Defenders issued 45 urgent appeals on behalf of human rights defenders at risk in 10 countries, namely Azerbaijan, Belarus, Cyprus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.**

The human rights situation in Eastern Europe and Central Asia did not show signs of improvement in 2011. Absence of the rule of law, centralisation of power in the executive and a weak judiciary remained common characteristics across the region.

The **judicial system** was used to persecute dissenting voices and punish those who denounced human rights abuses. In Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, human rights defenders faced fabricated charges initiated by local authorities or law enforcement officials whose abuses had been exposed. Even when ending with an acquittal, the trials hindered the work of human rights organisations by diverting time and resources.

**Impunity** continued to be pervasive in many countries. In the North Caucasus, law enforcement officials continued to target those exposing their abuses. In Chechnya, HRDs involved in the investigation of torture, enforced disappearances or extrajudicial killings were openly threatened by state officials. Several human rights organisations experienced harassment, questioning and inspections but decided not to report publicly about these instances due to fear of retaliation. State officials approached family members of human rights defenders to channel their message that their work should stop. In Dagestan, human rights defenders and lawyers continued to face threats, intimidation and judicial harassment because they defended individuals accused under anti-terrorism legislation.

Attacks and persecution against **defenders of economic, social and cultural rights** were on the increase. In many countries, human rights were depicted as an obstacle to economic development. In Kazakhstan, trade unionists and those supporting the demands of workers of the oil and gas industry in the Mangistau region were subjected to judicial harassment, unlawful detention, physical attacks and the violent dispersal of protests. In Uzbekistan, HRDs denouncing the use of forced child labour in the cotton fields were threatened, questioned and detained. In Azerbaijan, HRDs who protested against forced evictions in Baku were intimidated and the office of an NGO was bulldozed.

**LGBTI** rights defenders faced threats, attacks, intimidation and smear campaigns in all countries of the region. In Central Asia, North Caucasus and Azerbaijan, the atmosphere of intolerance was such that LGBTI rights defenders could not operate openly because of fear of being targeted. In the Russian Federation, gay parades continued to be banned on grounds that the authorities could not ensure the safety of participants. Derogatory language continued to be used by the authorities in the public discourse, which affected the work and public legitimacy of LGBTI rights defenders. In St Petersburg, an LGBTI international festival was attacked by members of religious organisations and, in November, the Legislative Assembly adopted provisions that effectively criminalise the work of LGBTI NGOs. Events organised by LGBTI rights defenders were also banned in Serbia.

Freedom of **peaceful assembly** continued to be restricted in many countries in the region, and the organisation of peaceful rallies was submitted to a regime of prior authorisation. Cases were reported in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Serbia, and Uzbekistan. Demonstrations in defence of Article 31 of the Constitution, which protects freedom of assembly, continued to be held in different cities of the Russian Federation. They continued to be systematically dispersed by the police and the participants arrested.

Human rights defenders fighting against **xenophobia and racism** continued to operate in extremely hostile environments throughout the region including in Western Europe. Some progress was observed in the Russian Federation, where the authorities seemed to have become aware of the danger represented by uncontrolled far right paramilitary groups. In a welcome development, the killers of human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and journalist Anastasia Baburova were sentenced, and so were other individuals responsible for physical attacks and killings of immigrants. However, nationalism and negative attitudes towards people from the Caucasus and Central Asia continued to grow. In Kyrgyzstan, the lack of a serious investigation into violent ethnic clashes that occurred in the southern part of the country in 2010 continued to affect human rights defenders. Those who continued to assist people of Uzbek origin were depicted as unpatriotic, intimidated and physically attacked. In numerous cases, human rights lawyers were intimidated and targeted even inside courtrooms.

In Uzbekistan, the release of human rights defenders Maxim Popov, Yusuf Juma, Norboy Kholjigitov and Jamshid Karimov was welcome news. However, other HRDs continued to be arrested, serve long term sentences and to be subjected to torture in detention, worsened by the lack of medical assistance. Front Line Defenders received reports that prison authorities forced detained HRDs to sign statements on their well-treatment in prison, possibly to counter future claims of ill-treatment; HRDs who refused to do so were subjected to torture.

In Turkey, a number of human rights defenders, lawyers, trade unionists, politicians, intellectuals and academics engaged in peaceful activities in support of the rights of the Kurdish minority were targeted during successive waves of arrests in April, September and November, under the guise of the fight against terrorism. Four prominent members of the Human Rights Association (IHD) were charged with "membership of an illegal organisation", and several others remained in pre-trial detention, including IHD General Vice-Chairperson Muharrem Erbey.

## Country in Focus: Belarus

After the wave of violence that followed the presidential election of December 2010, the human rights situation deteriorated rapidly. The human rights community was branded as politically motivated, accused of being the conduit of western funding to domestic 'radical opposition', and subjected to repression on an unprecedented scale: arrests, searches at home and in the office, confiscation of electronic devices and documents, police surveillance and an intense smear campaign on state-owned media became a daily occurrence. Human rights lawyers were disbarred because they represented detained opposition activists, denounced their conditions of detention and the violation of fair trial guarantees. Demonstrators were arrested en masse. Widespread impunity for law enforcement officers contributed to an increase in human rights violations including the use of torture in detention against political opponents and human rights defenders.

Faced with the systematic denial of permission to hold public meetings and police repression of unauthorised protests, civil society engaged in so-called 'silent demonstrations', spontaneous gatherings often organised through social networking sites. These protests were also eventually met with violence and arrests. In the absence of any applicable criminal offence, participants were sentenced for the administrative offence of hooliganism. In November, the Law on Public Gatherings was amended so as to permit the use of criminal charges against silent demonstrations. The amended law also required organisers to disclose financial sources and prohibited any promotional activity, including through social networking sites, until official permission is granted.

Further legislative amendments made it illegal for NGOs to hold funds abroad and established criminal liability for receiving foreign grants or donations 'in violation of the Belarusian legislation'. These changes were adopted in connection with the case of Ales Bialiatiski, chairman of the Human Rights Centre Viasna. He was arrested in August and accused of tax evasion on account of holding personal bank accounts in Poland and Lithuania, which in fact served to fund Viasna's work. He was sentenced in November to four and a half years and the confiscation of all his properties.

## 5. MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

**Front Line Defenders issued 62 urgent appeals on behalf of human rights defenders at risk in 17 countries in the Middle East and North Africa, namely Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, UAE, Western Sahara, Yemen.**

2011 was an historic year for the Middle East and North Africa. Following the dramatic changes of regime in Tunisia and Egypt, mass peaceful uprisings against authoritarian governments continued in many parts of the Arab world, including Algeria, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen. Protests forced some governments to make concessions. This eventually proved a successful strategy in Algeria, where demonstrations continued on a lesser scale. In Saudi Arabia protests were met with arbitrary arrests and repression. In Syria protests were met with extremely brutal repression which left thousands of civilians dead. In Libya, protests quickly descended into violence leading to a protracted conflict which prompted international military intervention. In the Gaza Strip, Hamas police forces dispersed several demonstrations throughout the year, arresting protesters and preventing journalists from covering the events.

In Tunisia, where the Arab Spring originated, historic democratic elections were held in October. Human rights defenders played a leading role in the electoral process and were working for the establishment of a transitional justice system to redress past human rights abuses. In Egypt, the ousting of President Hosni Mubarak was eventually marred by the fact that a ruling military council took control of the country.

A common feature of the **uprisings** across the region was that HRDs became the target of repression due to their involvement in monitoring human rights violations. In Syria scores of human rights defenders were forced to go into hiding or flee the country to escape persecution (see box). Governments resorted to smear campaigns to undermine the integrity of human rights NGOs and individuals. These included mobilising sections of the media and the public to target HRDs under the pretext that they were serving foreign interests or receiving funds from abroad. In Egypt 36 HRDs were investigated by the office of the prosecutor for receiving illegal funding. The Cairo Criminal Court ordered the disclosure of bank details as well as information on domestic and international transactions and transfers. In what appeared to be a politically motivated campaign by the ruling military council, existing legal restrictions were compounded by additional constraints on the work of civil society organisations including the opening of an administrative inquiry into a number of NGOs by the Ministry of Justice.

In several countries including Jordan and Israel, there were proposals to adopt similar **restrictive legislative measures**. In Israel, a new NGO law was tabled before parliament and remained pending at the end of the year. In Iran, new legislation further restricting the right to freedom of association was tabled in parliament despite national and international calls for the draft law to be dropped. It remained pending at the time of writing.

The rate and frequency of **malicious prosecutions, judicial harassment, and unfair trials** in the region increased during the year. This was particularly evident in Iran where several HRDs including women HRDs were sentenced to long-term imprisonment on politically motivated charges such as propaganda against the government or membership of illegal groups. Imprisoned

human rights defenders were excluded from an amnesty which led to the release of dozens of political prisoners. In Bahrain human rights defenders and bloggers suffered incommunicado detention, torture, malicious prosecutions and unfair trials. Among them was former Front Line Defenders staff member Abdulhadi Alkhwaja, who was sentenced by a special military court to life imprisonment on charges including belonging to a terrorist organisation. The crackdown on HRDs came in earnest after a state of emergency was declared allowing for repressive measures to be used against peaceful protesters demanding political and social reform.

The use of **harassment, intimidation, forced disappearance, incommunicado detention and torture** continued across the region. Among the countries affected were Algeria, Morocco, and Yemen. In the latter, HRDs were also the victims of armed attacks both by government and militias belonging to opposition groups. The same actors were also behind forcible disappearance of HRDs.

As **Internet, social networking sites**, and other electronic communication systems played an essential role in the uprisings, they also became the object of a crackdown and increased surveillance, especially targeted against HRDs. In Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and UAE bloggers were imprisoned for using internet media to criticise the authorities. The modalities of the crackdown lead to believe that Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members states may have developed a coordinated approach to exchange information on HRDs and bloggers and facilitate the identification of those critical of the authorities.

**Restrictions on freedom of movement** including travel bans were used in a number of countries including Morocco, Iran, Palestine, and Syria. In Morocco a number of HRDs were prevented from travelling to attend human rights related activities inside and outside the country. Moroccan occupied Western Sahara bore the brunt of these restrictions.

**Journalists** in the region paid heavily in their endeavour to expose the truth. In addition to severe restrictions imposed on freedom of expression and the press, journalists sacrificed their life in countries including Iraq and Yemen where five journalists were reported to have been killed. In Oman and Morocco editors and journalists were imprisoned for publishing material critical of the authorities, and the Omani newspaper Al Zaman was ordered to cease publication for three months.

### Country in Focus: Syria

Peaceful protests calling for the removal of the Ba'th Party Government have been raging across the country since the beginning of the year. Thousands of civilians were killed as a result of the use of excessive and lethal force by the police. Opposition groups established a Transitional National Council in exile in August, while inside the country defections within the army led to the emergence of an armed opposition group. HRDs were the main source of information on grave human rights abuses: dozens were arrested and detained. At least eight HRDs remained in detention at the time of writing on charges of spreading false information or involvement in racial and sectarian acts. It is feared that the authorities may resort to assassinations to punish HRDs for monitoring and reporting human rights abuses. Many of them received death threats. In October, a prominent opposition figure was murdered.

HRDs also continued to suffer travel bans and other restrictions on their movement despite a presidential decree in March ordering the lifting of previously imposed restrictions. A number of HRDs had their homes raided, their families intimidated, and were forced to leave the country or go into hiding. Abdulkarim Rihawi, held incommunicado for 11 days in August and tortured, went into exile upon his release to escape further persecution. Razan Zaytouneh, winner of the 2011 Sakharov Prize and Anna Politkovskaya Award, was forced to go into hiding to escape arrest: her home was stormed and her husband and brother-in-law were detained for several weeks. Four prominent human rights defenders were released from jail. Anwar Al-Bunni, a Front Line Award winner, Muhannad Al-Hassani, a Martin Annals Award winner, and Kamal Labwani were released in May, June and November respectively, after serving prison sentences imposed after unfair trials. Haytham Al Maleh was released in March following a Presidential amnesty.

THE INFORMATION PROVIDED IN THIS REPORT IS BASED ON URGENT APPEALS, GRANTS AND OTHER ACTIONS TAKEN BY FRONT LINE DEFENDERS IN 2011. FOR MORE DETAILED INFORMATION OR TO JOIN FRONT LINE DEFENDERS' CAMPAIGNS, VISIT [HTTP://WWW.FRONTLINEDEFENDERS.ORG](http://www.frontlinedefenders.org)

# Thank you

FRONT LINE DEFENDERS IS GRATEFUL FOR THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF THE FOLLOWING CONTRIBUTORS:

IRISH AID  
THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION (EIDHR)  
THE DUTCH MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
THE AMERICAN JEWISH WORLD SERVICE  
THE BELGIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
THE FORD FOUNDATION  
FOUNDATION OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE  
FREEDOM HOUSE  
THE EMBASSY OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY IN DUBLIN  
HIVOS  
THE FINNISH NGO FOUNDATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS - KIOS  
THE IRIS O'BRIEN FOUNDATION  
THE IRELAND FUNDS  
THE JOSEPH ROWNTREE CHARITABLE TRUST  
THE MICHAEL JACKSON FAMILY FOUNDATION  
THE NORWEGIAN ROYAL MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
THE OAK FOUNDATION  
THE OVERBROOK FOUNDATION  
SIGRID RAUSING TRUST  
THE SWISS FEDERAL DEPARTMENT FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
THE TAIWAN FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRACY  
THE TIKVA GRASSROOTS EMPOWERMENT FUND  
THE VIOLET JABARA CHARITABLE TRUST  
PARTICIPANTS OF THE 2011 FRONT LINE DEFENDERS GOLF CLASSIC  
ROTHCO ADVERTISING INTEGRATION

WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK THE MANY INDIVIDUAL DONORS WHO HAVE KINDLY MADE DONATIONS TO THE ORGANISATION THROUGHOUT 2011.

PLEASE HELP US TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS BY DONATING TO FRONT LINE DEFENDERS AT **[WWW.FRONTLINEDEFENDERS.ORG/DONATE](http://WWW.FRONTLINEDEFENDERS.ORG/DONATE)**

FRONT LINE DEFENDERS GUARANTEES THAT 100% OF YOUR DONATION WILL GO DIRECTLY TO HELP HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS WITH THEIR PROTECTION.

To learn more about this and other Front Line Defenders activities please visit us at [www.frontlinedefenders.org](http://www.frontlinedefenders.org) or contact Charlie Lamson at + 353 1 212 3750 [charlie@frontlinedefenders.org](mailto:charlie@frontlinedefenders.org)

“THE SALVATION OF THIS HUMAN WORLD LIES NOWHERE ELSE THAN IN THE HUMAN HEART, IN THE HUMAN POWER TO REFLECT, IN HUMAN MEEKNESS AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY.”

VACLAV HAVEL

1936 - 2011 RIP



# ANNUAL REPORT 2012

## GLOBAL TRENDS IN 2011 FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

FRONT LINE DEFENDERS  
(Head Office – Dublin)  
Second Floor  
Grattan House  
Temple Road  
Blackrock  
Co. Dublin  
Ireland  
Tel: 00 353 1 212 37 50  
Fax 00 353 1 212 10 01  
info@frontlinedefenders.org

FRONT LINE DEFENDERS  
(EU Office – Brussels)  
Front Line Defenders  
Square Marie-Louise 72  
1000 Brussels, Belgium  
Tel: 00 32 2 230 93 83  
Fax: 00 32 2 230 00 28  
euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org



**WWW.FRONTLINEDEFENDERS.ORG**