



NATIONAL  
COALITION OF  
HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
DEFENDERS  
UGANDA

# ANNUAL REPORT 2020

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National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders Uganda

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## Acronyms

ACTV	African Centre for Rehabilitation of Torture Victims
BSM	Busoga Media Network
CRD	Civil Rights Defenders-Sweden
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DGF	Democratic Governance Facility
DPI	Defenders Protection Initiative
EHAHRDP	East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (Defend Defenders)
EU	European Union
FIDH	Federation for Human Rights
FHRI	Foundation for Human Rights Initiative
HRNJ	Human Rights Network for Journalists
HRC	Human Rights Council
HRCU	Human Rights Centre Uganda
HURIFO	Human Rights Focus
HRD/s	Human Rights Defenders
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Inter-sex
NCHRD-U	National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders Uganda
NTV	Nation Television
NBS	Nile Broadcasting Services
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
POMA	Public Order Management Act
SAF TESO	Shine Africa Ministries Teso
UHRC	Uganda Human Rights Commission
UDHR	United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders
UN	United Nations

## Acknowledgement

We are indebted to the Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) from across Uganda who enable our footprints to continue being visible. We salute their courage amid the adversity towards their good human rights work. On a daily basis, we advance our work through HRDs strategically located in nearly 80% of the regions in Uganda. This confirms that our work is informed typically by the lived realities of grass-root activists and human rights organizations.

Firstly, we are thankful for the financial and logistical support of our partners without which our ideas and innovations would be just a dream. We are grateful to the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN-OHCHR), Civil Rights Defenders, Frontline Defenders, Open Society Initiative of East Africa (OSIEA), Anonymous, The Royal Netherlands Embassy, and Defend Defenders.

We also acknowledge the support, strategic guidance, expertise, and technical support of the NCHRD-U Board, Technical Thematic Working Group (TTWG), key partnerships with stakeholders in the protection of HRDs including Uganda Human Rights Commission, Uganda Law Society, Uganda Police Force, Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF), NGO Bureau, and other stakeholders.

Without their superior knowledge and experience, the Project would lack in quality of outcomes, and thus their support has been essential.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the secretariat staff who devoted their time and knowledge towards advancing the protection of Ugandan Human Rights Defenders.



## Foreword



Looking back, 2020 seems like a year from a much harder era. But just like the decade it ended; it was a year of turbulence. Country by country, people came went into a lockdown as a preventative measure to the spread of the corona virus. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the consequences of building societies on the backs of people who have less; of weak health systems, tattered safety nets, violence against women and digital divides. It, like climate change, offers proof that all life on Earth is connected and human rights must be upheld. Last year, through an intense period of NCHRD-U reforms, we worked hard to support grass root HRDs from several regions in Uganda get on their feet and stay there to continue pushing forward the rights of several others in their communities. We continued to push the boundaries of how we think, deliver, invest and manage as to deliver on our Strategic Plan, reaffirming NCHRD-U's financial stability and taking steps to make the Coalition nimbler and more responsive. Today, as we support the system we have tirelessly built and help HRDs prepare, respond, and recover in the face of COVID-19, and the human rights challenges it brings out, our investments are proving their worth.

This report showcases the many ways in which we support HRDs at community, regional, national and international level to turn the SDG 16 "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels" of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into results for human rights defenders in Uganda, working closely with the state and a wide range of partners to realize rights and build resilience.

Around the country, empowered HRDs are achieving visible progress. In the period under review, we supported HRDs to claim their right to equal treatment under the law, to gain elected office, to draw on the power of innovation and technology, and to become leaders through sports, among many other initiatives. We also supported civil society and women's rights activists to inform and influence crucial policy discussions.

In our 8th year as a representative organization for all HRDs we have shown that we are an innovative jurisdiction that actively seeks out new and better ways of doing things. As you read this report you will see many examples of how we use our capability to serve HRDs and contribute to making NCHRD-U

a vibrant, inclusive and thriving organization. The Coalition is being shaped and supported through strategies to drive a more agile, responsive and innovative organization for the future.

This year has seen a comprehensive and collaborative approach to delivering on our commitment of providing safe and secure work environment for HRDs.

For the first time, we saw the launch of the Human Rights Defender Awards, designed to recognize and honor the work of human rights defenders, who through non-violent work is courageously making an outstanding contribution to the promotion and protection of the human rights of others, often at great personal risk to themselves. We congratulate the first winners of these awards and are grateful for the partnership with Defend Defenders.

We commemorated the 2020, International Human Rights Defenders Day in partnership with Defend Defenders under the theme "claiming spaces"

In October 2020, we were trusted with the leadership mantle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) CSO stakeholders' forum. The Stakeholders' Forum on the UPR, made of over 130-member organizations has come up with various initiatives to lobby and advocate for influential recommendations that could speak to the progress of human rights promotion and protection in Uganda. As the Coordinating entity, our core role is to provide strategic guidance throughout the process of CSO reporting for the third reporting cycle. We are grateful for the support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the DGF towards supporting meaningful collaborations between CSOs.

In Solidarity,



Robert. R. Kirenga

Executive Director





## Year in context

The National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders – Uganda is a registered membership Organisation that was established in 2013 and has gradually grown from a membership of 58 to 160 .....organisations and..... individuals. NCHRD-U works in all regions of Uganda and embraces all defenders regardless of race, colour, gender, religion, political affiliation or orientation. Its mission “to protect and promote the work of HRDs in a safe and secure environment through linkages with national, regional and international like-minded entities.” Its operations are cascaded through three inter-linked programmes, that is Advocacy and Networking, Capacity Building and Protection and Emergency Response. Throughout 2020, the Coalition continued to advance the protection of HRDs across Uganda in implementation of activities anchored on its 2019-2021 Strategic Plan.

The year of 2020 was also remembered for the Corona virus or Covid 19’ pandemic which was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a global pandemic and different countries including Uganda put in place different measures to curb the spread. The pandemic found literally everyone unprepared to handle the situation as it evolved. The State institutions were equally unprepared to handle its effects and thus appealed for local and international support. This explains the emergency situation called on by the state and imposing measures in a phased approach that culminated in a lockdown that affected most of us.

This meant that both state and non-state actors including the private sector and international organizations had to re-align their programs and prioritize in the face of the pandemic. The state exercised its full authority with minimal participation of Human Rights Defenders; civil society in coming up with drastic measures aimed at limiting the spread of the pandemic although some section of civil society; Uganda Law Society (ULS), Chapter Four Uganda, Legal Service Providers Network (LASPNET) challenged the legality of these measures in the courts of law.

With the coming of the Covid 19’ Pandemic, the context in which HRDs operate continued to narrow in 2020 as the government instituted measures or guidelines aimed at preventing the pandemic from spreading and these measures included dealing with crowded populations such as social distancing, use of sanitizers, washing hands with soap, closure of schools, entertain places such as bars, clubs, churches and mosques and subsequent measures that included banning of public transport, closure of non-essential item shops; banning all private vehicles and the

imposition of curfew hours beginning from 6:00 am to 7:00 pm and later 9:00 pm. The above measures have had an impact on the programming of the Coalition and most HRD organizations in a sense that they had to inform their development partners and local partners in the different regions of their inability to carry out certain planned activities that were due in that period and thus postponed them until further notice. At the Coalition, we embraced these changes by equipping our program staff mentally and also provided working tools such as laptops, data and airtime to be able to continue working virtually from wherever they are albeit the challenges.

Some of the program activities we have been involved in include the following; Sharing of program information and tools regarding our member's ability to carry out their core functions of monitoring and documenting human rights issues as they occur in their respective locations. We issued guidelines to our stakeholders indicating how our operations would continue remotely in spite of the lock down. We also shared a database tool for our members to be applied online to capture human rights issues affecting the general public and human rights defenders. We also facilitated them with some data and airtime including some minimal basic upkeep allowance.

We handled cases of human rights defenders that require support during the pandemic through a standby emergency fund. These are human rights defenders who were attacked as a result of doing their work in promoting and protecting human rights during the lockdown. We facilitated their needs using our mobile money facility and referring them to some service providers.

With other partners such as Advocats sans frontières, Chapter Four and Legal aid Service and Muslim Center for Law and Justice issued a joint statement to the Commissioner General of Uganda Prison and other Justice, Law and Order sector institutions calling and advocated for the decongestion of prisons and inmates in police cells as a way of mitigating the spread of the pandemic.

The Coalition secretariat continued to handle internal institutional matters aimed at strengthening our institutional mechanisms. These included setting up a Covid 19' task force, conducting virtual training for the staff and other stakeholders, finalize program reports, undertook staff performance appraisals, developed new proposals for grants from different funders. The Coalition also continued to reach out to our development partners and local partners by sharing updates on what is being carried out virtually on our side during the pandemic lock down. We continue to brainstorm among staff on the positive and negative effects of the corona pandemic at a personal and family level, this includes sharing tips on how to remain relevant during and post corona pandemic, tips on how to stay safe and alive with our loved ones as provided by health experts and government. Unfortunately, some HRD organization closed shop totally or had to conduct humanitarian work to their beneficiaries. HRDs were not prepared for the pandemic and subsequent measures from the state. All they had tried to do was to instill some measures such as social distancing which was also not very practical especially keeping the two meters' distance apart being in mind people sit in small spaces within their offices.

The emerging threats against HRDs working in the most remote areas and thematic areas considered sensitive across Uganda increased their vulnerability to threats from both state and non-state actors who took advantage of the situation to frustrate the work of most HRDs across the country.<sup>1</sup> 2020 saw significant advances in the work of HRDs but also presented situations that put them at risk especially with the COVID 19 pandemic; The security sector manned mainly by police and local defense units had an upper hand for increased violence with limited accountability checks. It also becomes difficult for us to follow up on some of the cases where perpetrators of such acts faced disciplinary actions as reported

by the media. With regard to service delivery, we witnessed attempts by the state to fulfill its obligation to provide; by distributing food to the vulnerable people however it was starting with two districts namely Kampala and Wakiso. However, the exercise had challenges in that they stopped distribution simply because they run out of an essential food item beans and had to halt the exercise. They were also allegations of fraud in the procurement process and some suspected staff were arrested have been paraded before the courts of law and interdicted. The role of civil society was under played by the state and was not effectively involved in formulating the guidelines save for having the NGO Forum represent the sector in meetings at the office of the Prime Minister. Access to justice has been challenge in some instances to HRDs especially in light of the lockdown. The courts have been closed and were not accessible by HRDs. Most Police stations and posts were understaffed as many were deployed to enforce the lockdown all over the country. Most Human rights defenders had been affected like any other citizens in terms of access to services like medical facilities. They require clearance from public offices that are partly responsible for their abuses and violations and it becomes difficult to face such persons for any assistance. And lastly Freedom of expression relating to writing articles that demand for state accountability in terms of the Covid measures that area affecting citizens' rights and freedoms including demands for accountability of the relief items is often equated to the work of opposition groups/propaganda, hence pushing HRDs into self-censorship to avoid the risks of unlawful arrests to which you cannot easily seek remedy.

The Coalition, however, continued to analyse the context in which HRDs operate and reflect on how together working as a coalition we would advance HRD protection in our tailored interventions both at a reactive and preventive level. The different members of the HRD Referral Network responded to serve the different needs of HRDs at risk and provided legal support, these included Uganda Law Society (ULS),Chapter Four Uganda, Legal Aid Service Providers Network (LASPNET), Network for Public Interest Lawyers (NETPIL, African Centre for Torture Victims (ACTV), Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) especially for the SOGI HRDs Other members to include Defend Defenders(DD) ,Defenders Protective Initiative (DPI), Security Working Group (SWG),ACTV also provided; relocation, financial support, psychosocial and other humanitarian support to the HRDs at risk

In 2020, the NCHRD-U working with over 85 members relentlessly continued pursuing a better work environment for HRDs in Uganda. Through collective efforts, collaboration, and evidence-based approach, we reached over 137 directly (56 Females, 67males and 14 others), and 150 (63 Females, 77 males and 10 others (includes SOGI and organisations) indirectly empowering them to gain control over their own lives as well as ensuring they have enough information and space to exercise their rights and get their voices heard. It was a major year when we deepened our influencing on various policy processes while supporting the grass roots to take the centre stage. Building on the momentum from the previous years, we pushed for the drafting of the protection bill, safety and security policies within organizations, and continuous engagements with duty bearers in several regions To ground our influencing work and our role as a knowledge broker, we produced several studies for advocacy including "Silencing Defenders": Context of HRDs in the oil and extractive industry as well as collaborated on global studies like 'Time to care' and others towards influencing several policies. It was also a major year of mobilization and creating awareness on the issues that continue to perpetuate injustices to HRDs. Through media work, we mobilized HRDs calling on the Government to address issues such as police brutality, increase awareness on the work of HRDs.



# Programme Achievements

## 1.0 Capacity Building

Under the capacity building department, the focus is to enhance the capacity of HRDs to improve their safety and working environment as specified under its strategic objective 2. The coalition strived to strengthen the protection, safety and security of HRDs in Uganda at an individual and organisational level. The Coalition, alongside its partners who provided technical expertise, undertook various interventions towards building the skills of specifically selected HRDs and HRDs organisations in Uganda and this included trainings in case management, monitoring, reporting and documentation, HRD Risk Assessment exercise and Retooling exercise. As a result of the various initiatives, the Coalition was able to extend capacity building initiatives to 207 HRDs drawn from across Uganda throughout 2020. Below are the capacity building initiatives implemented in 2020;



## 1.1 Trainings

### i. Trained the NCHRD-U regional Focal point persons in case management, monitoring, Documentation, reporting and referral management in electoral processes.

Under the theme: Enhancing protection strategies and synergy for HRDs during Electoral processes: Towards a safe and secure working environment in Uganda.

The Coalition trained 17 regional and sub –regional focal persons representing all regions across the country in case management, monitoring, documentation, reporting and referral management in the electoral process. The training was held from 03 – 5<sup>th</sup> February 2020 in Kireka at Sports View Hotel. The aim of training was to discuss protection strategies and

synergies for HRDs during the electoral process.

#### vii.Trained 23 police officers

The National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders (NCHRD-U) with support from the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF) and the Uganda police Force leadership conducted a training for 05 RPCs and 18 DPCs selected from the different regions and 08 persons from the police Headquarters. These were trained in the Human Rights concept, the HRD concept, the Human Rights enforcement act, the POMA and their roles and challenges in handling HRDs cases. The RPCs and DPCs were targeted because from the various trainings engagement that the Coalition has had, it was realized that these are so critical in the management of cases of Human Rights Defenders at risk. They play key decision-making roles in the management of human rights violations at Regional and district levels within the country.

#### vii.Trained 25 Uganda law society advocates

NCHRD continually receives cases of HRDs in need of legal support as a result of criminal charges levied against them. The Coalition signed a Memorandum of association with Uganda Law Society and one of the agreements therein is that ULS would work with the Coalition in providing pro-bono services to HRDs at risk. The pro-bono advocates however need to be equipped with relevant skills from time to time as they continue offering services. The Coalition in partnership with Uganda Law Society and with support from DGF therefore organized a training that attracted 25(14 men, 12 women) advocates who support the Coalition through provision of legal aid services to HRDs at risk. The Coalition believes that narrowing down the gap relating to human rights issues is critical in bringing meaningful and sustained responses in situations of human rights violations. It strengthens awareness regarding the possible remedies available and bolsters the utilization of the existing human rights protection mechanisms.

#### vii.Trained 30 HRDs from Teso sub-region in monitoring, documentation and reporting of human rights issues

As a buildup activity, following the capacity assessment conducted in Teso sub-region, the Coalition Trained 30 HRDs from Teso sub-regions (project beneficiaries) in response to safety & security, monitoring, documentation & reporting of human rights issues. The activity took place from 14-16/12/2020.

#### v. Trained 60 grassroot HRDs in safety and security management

Conducted 02 regional trainings in safety and security management for representatives of 60 grassroot organizations (Mbarara and Masaka).

In order to; share knowledge with HRDs in the Rwenzori and Masaka sub-regions in how to ensure physical and digital security; increase their understanding on the National Protection Mechanisms and to guide participants in developing security plans. The Coalition conducted trainings for 60 HRDs in safety and security management. During the trainings, pre and post assessment tests were conducted for participants to assess their knowledge gain. The evaluation showed that there was a considerable knowledge gain.

#### vii.Trained 30 HRDs in referral network management

Conducted regional training for 30 referral network members from Bugisu sub-region

In order to build an effective and efficient Regional Referral Network system for HRDs at risk within Bugisu sub- region. The coalition conducted a training in referral network management that attracted 33 HRDs.

#### Vii.Trained in NCHRD-U staff in how to use Virtual platforms

Conducted a baseline and trained 12 NCHRD-U staff in the use of virtual platforms.

In order to enable NCHRD-U secretariat to



integrate appropriate digital tools to ensure business continuity during crisis situation The National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders -Uganda NCHRD-U sought services of a consultant to provide technical support in the integration of digital tools that would provide service support to the member organizations. The current COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted on the operations of NCHRD-U secretariat but equally the service that it offers to its membership. The leadership of the organization was keen to integrate appropriate digital tools that would ensure continuity of support services to the member organizations and individuals. As a result, 12 Coalition staff were trained.

## 1.2 Risk Assessment Excises

### i. Conducted 03 risk assessment excises.

In order to assess the existing safety and security measures and protocols being used by HRDs, and to assess the existing risks, vulnerabilities and capacities and make recommendations, the Coalition conducted risk assessment excise for 73 grassroots HRD organizations (In the Rwenzori, Bugisu, Acholi and Lango sub-regions). The assessment targeted ethnic minorities, women HRD coalition, youth HRD organizations among others. The assessment assisted in redefining the protection and security measures for HRDs which in turn helped in improving on their safety and security.

### ii. Conducted capacity assessment excise in Teso sub-region

Because of what happens with in the HRD's working context, HRDs ought to be in position to assess their security gaps, protection needs, but also monitor, document, report human rights violations/ issues as they happen within their areas. This however cannot be possible because of capacity gaps, especially in safety and security assessments but also in monitoring, documenting and reporting of human rights issues especially

during and after elections. Aware of this, the Coalition with support from OSIEA mapped project beneficiaries, conducted capacity assessment on selected beneficiaries in response to safety & security, monitoring, documentation & reporting of human rights issues in Teso sub-region. The activity was conducted on 24-28/11/2020

## 1.3. Hrd-Organisational Re-Tooling Exercise

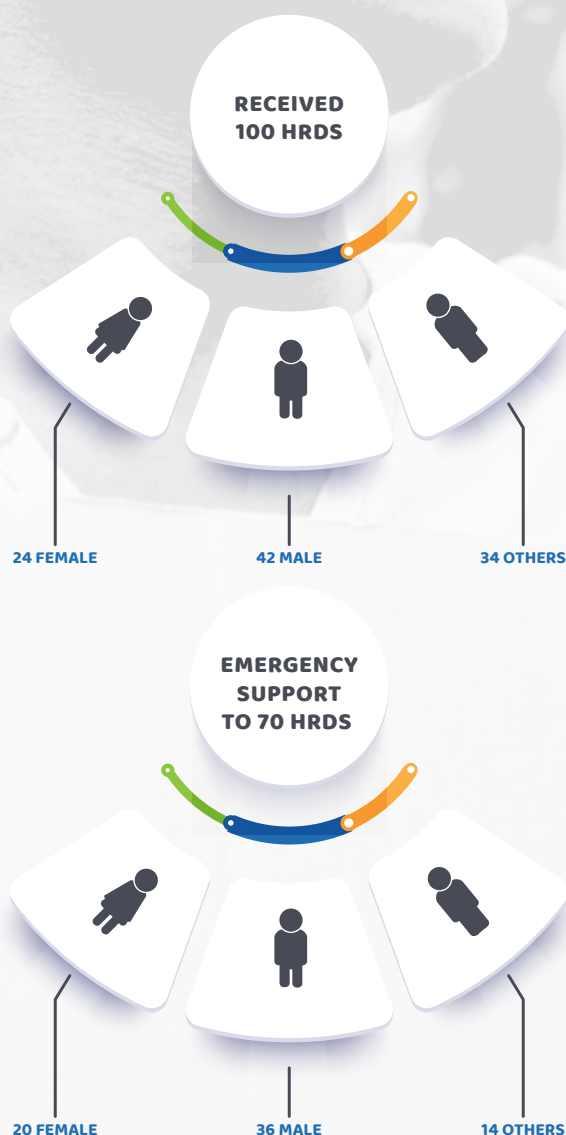
### i. Retooling of 28 organizations with equipment to enhance their safety and security

Based on the results from the risk assessments which indicated several gaps in the management of both physical and digital security by several grassroots organizations, the Coalition with support from Civil Rights Defenders (CRD) retooled 28 organizations based in Albertine, Lango and Acholi sub-regions with security equipment and other Personal Protective Equipment to encounter safety challenges brought about by COVID 19 Pandemic.

## 1.2 Risk Assessment Excises

During the year 2020, the NCHRD-U under the protection and emergency response program undertook several initiatives to include: disbursement of the Urgent Protection Fund to support HRDs at immediate risk through the protection desk, conducted solidarity visits to several HRDs at risk, held 1 referral network meetings with the case handlers of the member organizations, the Rapid Response meeting, case handlers of the member organizations, the Executive Directors meetings of the Referral Network, attended security working group meeting for the Sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), two days welfare workshop.

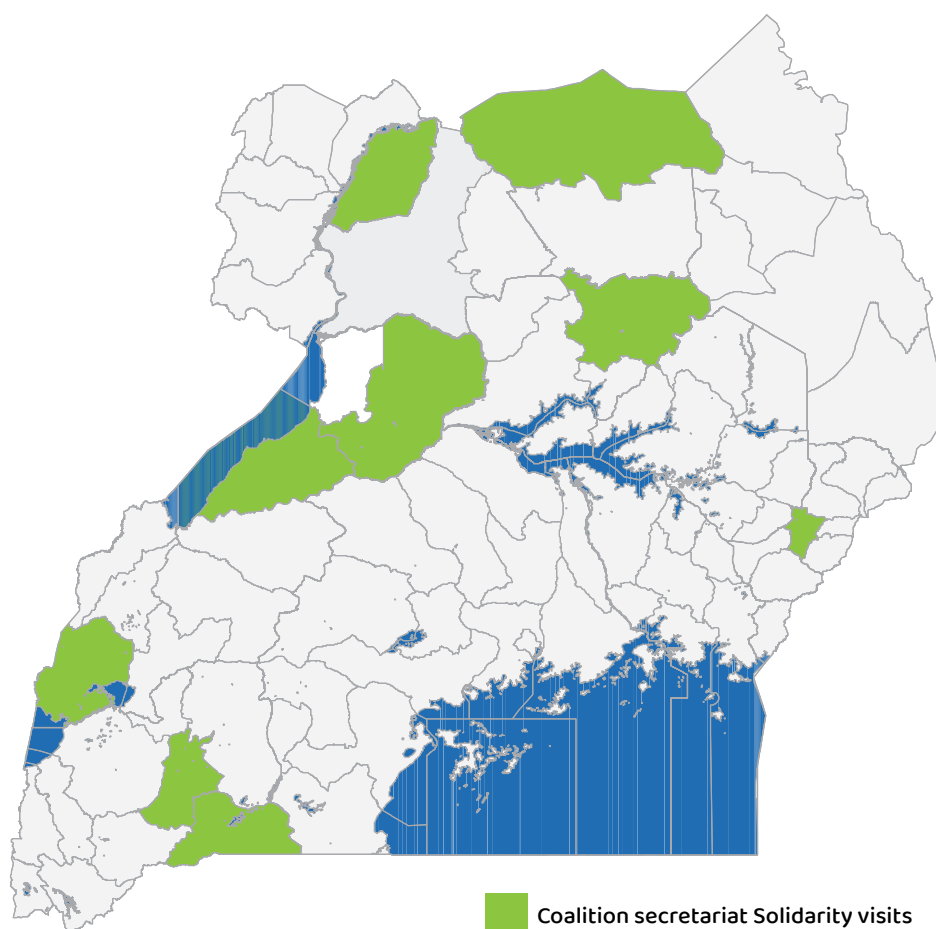
### 2.1 Protection desk:



The HRD Protection desk received 100 HRDs (24 female, 42 male and 34 others) and provided emergency support to 70 HRDs (20 female, 36 men and 14 others) at risk countrywide to access psycho-social, medical, relocation, up keep, safe transport, legal representation and counsel, referrals, rest and respite, security guard services, transport to enable the HRDs continue their human rights work in their communities. The threats experienced include; unlawful arrest and detention, intimidation through verbal threats, cyber harassment, smear campaigns, surveillance physical and digital, tramped up charges, torture, intimidation, kidnaps. The categories of HRDs affected in this period include; Land and Natural resources HRDs, environment HRDs, social media influencers, journalists, women HRDs, LGBTI HRDs, youth HRD especially those in advocacy, women HRDs, LGBTI HRDs in governance and accountability, human rights lawyers. The HRDs are a point of reference of the existence of the HRD protection fund to support any HRD at risk who needs help. The HRDs have reintegrated into their communities and continue defending human rights especially at the grass-root level.

CAPTION FROM HRD SUPPORTED

## 2.2. Solidarity Visits:



Solidarity visits are strategic protection initiatives where the Coalition responds to the issues affecting HRDs. It is also an Advocacy tool used to verify information to ensure accurate reporting on the situation of HRDs in a given place and situation. It gives an opportunity to engage other stakeholders to ensure protection of HRDs when in need.

Thirty-seven (37) solidarity visits were conducted in the regions of Mbale (5), Kampala (1), Wakiso (1), Lira(2), Palabek(1), Hoima(5), Kikube(3), Kasese(10), Kiryandongo(4), Adjumani(1), Isingiro(1), Mbarara(3) districts. The visits were conducted by the Coalition secretariat, focal persons, Referral Network Members, Protection service Providers and members of the Coalition like Human Rights Network for journalists, Uganda Law Society, Defenders Protective Initiative, Defend Defenders, Security Working Group, Women Human Rights Defenders Network. Most of these HRDs were enabled to resume their human rights work, are more aware of available interventions in case of risk and are more vibrant in their human rights work in their communities. There is also increased visibility and awareness about the protection mandate of the NCHRD-U. This was also an opportunity for the Coalition to follow up on the other engagements it has conducted in the Regions.

### **2.3 National HRD Referral Network reflective meetings with case handlers of the member organizations, Rapid Response and Executive Directors meeting:**

The NCHRD-U maintained active participation of the referral network where 3 reflective meetings of the case handlers of member organizations, Rapid response meeting, Executive Directors meeting which were held respectively on; 16<sup>th</sup> October, 21<sup>st</sup> October and 21<sup>st</sup> October 2020 under the theme "Building resilience of HRD Referral Network members in preparation for 2021 Election Period". In the meetings, the different case handlers of the member organizations discussed ; the progress of the Referral Network system, the effects of Covid on response, mental health well-being shared updates on the HRD cases handled through the referral, agreed to consider the membership and participation of state institutions such as the Police, Uganda human rights Commissioner, shared emerging trends of threats against HRDs especially pre,during and post elections, agreed on the rapid response task force team and strategy for the elections period ahead in 2021,reviewed the developed a risk matrix to be used by the case handlers in preparation of the election period. These meetings also provided a good platform for the referral members to share information, share experiences and best practices, enhance networking, and create better strategies for strengthening HRD emergency response and also challenges faced in the referral network system.

### **2.4. Established of the Rapid Response Task for the Election Period**

On 21<sup>st</sup> October 2020, the NCHRD-U setup the Rapid Response Task force for HRDs for the Election Period at Golf Course Hotel Kampala. The event was under the theme "Building resilience of HRD Referral Network members in preparation for 2021 Election Period".

It attracted 35 participants comprised of all the protection service providers, Technical

Thematic working group and focal persons from the grass-root organizations who were actively going to respond to HRD issues in the election period and in reflection of the effects and changes the Covid 19 pandemic had on the working environment of HRDs.

The purpose was to discuss the developed rapid response strategy for HRDs at risk, the purpose and agree on roles of the established rapid response task force team to respond to HRDs at risk during the election season/period and also how the Coalition will support in the coordination and look at the developed a risk matrix tool in preparation of the 2021 elections, identify the HRDs that will be most affected or with a high probability to be affected, agree on the time frame of the task force, identify hot spots in the country, modalities for joint initiatives

## **2.5. Conducted 4 Regional Referral Network Committee Meetings in 4 Regions**

In an effort to improve effectiveness and efficiency in the provision of emergency support and case management especially at the grass root level, the NCHRD-U Established 6 Regional Referral Networks with 6 Regional Committees in; Northern Uganda, South western, Busoga ,Karamoja sub regions. The meetings were conducted in 4 regions of Busoga, south western Uganda, Northern region and Karamoja. The purpose of the Regional Referral networks is to coordinate response, have a rural based support system when faced with attacks and bring services closer to the HRDs at the grass root level. The Regional Network meetings are platforms for the grass root HRDs to network, share experiences, progress and updates of the network system, popularize the HRD concept in their communities, discuss contextual issues, draw strategies of resilience and capacity gaps. The meetings also foster accountability especially when handling cases of HRDs at risk and collaboration of the grass root HRDs.

In each Regional Referral network established, a committee was selected with a representation from the districts in the region to take on the leadership role of steering the regional networks to function and enable sustainability. The meetings oriented the committee members to their roles, enabled the discussions on the role of the selected committee members (especially in view of the upcoming election period), case management for HRDs, the share experiences of the Covid period, change in trends of threats and risks, the changes in the election road map-scientific elections vis a vis the post Covid period in preparation of the 2021 elections.

## **Key Achievements of the National HRD Referral Network**







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## 3.0 Advocacy and Networking Programme

### 3.1 Dialogue Forums: Regional Town Halls with close to 143 state and non-state actors

2 Regional town halls were organized and held in Rwenzori and West Nile

The Idea of these forums is to bridge the gap between state actors and HRDs at regional level towards their protection

### 3.2 Annual General Assembly- 28<sup>th</sup> August,2020

Organized and held our COVID-19 circumstances attracting close to 160 HRDs

Overhauled the structures; Adopted two thematic working groups TTWG

Increase in Membership subscription and interest

Adopted 2019 coalition progress report and Financials.

### 3.3 Strategic Advocacy Mission: Lived realities

Adjumani; Undertook one advocacy mission with stakeholders in Adjumani district on the protection threats;

Joined; Risk Assessments- Rwenzori and Northern Uganda to understand advocacy issues but also enrich the team in January and February 2020 respectively

### 3.4 Strategic Advocacy Meetings on the UPR: Then, Now and the Way Forward

Revitalize the UPR stakeholder's forum towards an inclusive, coordinated National Process

Seek Consensus on the leadership of the Forum towards Uganda's third cycle review

Discuss and agree on re-constitution of the UPR CSO National Stakeholders' Forum.

### 3.5 Claiming Spaces

Convening Capacity-established itself as a thought leader with capacity to convene actors on emerging HRD issues

Strategic Workshops and dialogues on elections

Pioneered Human Rights Defenders Impact Awards; reward resilience

Two Strategic Meetings with Youth conveners and NUDIPU; National Youth Council and UYONET; Tap into the youth DIVIDEND and the PWDs movement

Instituted the thematic working groups on the same issues at the Annual General Assembly

### 3.6 Research

Research on context of HRDs working in the context of the extractives industry; "Silencing Defenders!" –evidence base for engagement with policy makers in 2021

2 Bi-annual submissions to the African Commission for the 66<sup>th</sup> & 67<sup>th</sup> Sessions on Uganda: Discussion and deferring of our observer status submission

Mid –Term assessment of UPR recommendations on Uganda-launched and springboard for further engagement

### 3.7 Policy Influence

1 Regional consultative meeting on the Human Rights Defenders Protection Bill in Western Uganda.

1 National meeting with two parliamentary committees

4 Collaborators meeting on the HRD law

First Reading of the bill on the floor of parliament

### 3.8 Media Campaigns on HRD protection; Popularization of the HRD mandate and space for duty bearers to articulate their mandate towards protection of HRDs



E-conference on Human Rights Defenders and Elections



05 radio talk shows across the country; Kasese, Adjumani, Kampala, Soroti, Kabarole



Held a live stream informative discussion on HRDs and Elections



Social Media Campaigns: Growth in following; Twitter 2580 Facebook 9000 Instagram 101 LinkedIn-71



Held one joint televised talk show on International HRD day



Successful campaigns; #IHRD20 #RespectRights #TogetherWeDefend



4 Press Conferences on state of human rights Defenders



Wide coverage of HRD issues in print and electronic media

#### Summary of department achievements



2020

Annual Report

## 4.0 Networking and collaboration with partners

### 4.1 Partnership Engagement and events:



#### **(a) Pro-bono day celebrations The Uganda Law Society 4<sup>th</sup> December 2020**

The Uganda Law Society organized and invited the Coalition to the Pro bono day celebrations held at both the Law Development Centre and Mengo Chief Magistrates Court under the theme: "The Transformative Potential of Probono Work: Creating a climate for change" The event was graced by the Chief Justice of Uganda Owiny Odollo who encouraged the advocates to always interest themselves in helping out the indigent persons to also access justice. He also launched the Pro bono basket that is a fund for collection of financial support towards Pro bono work.



#### **(b) Security working group meetings organized by Defenders Protective Initiative (DPI)**

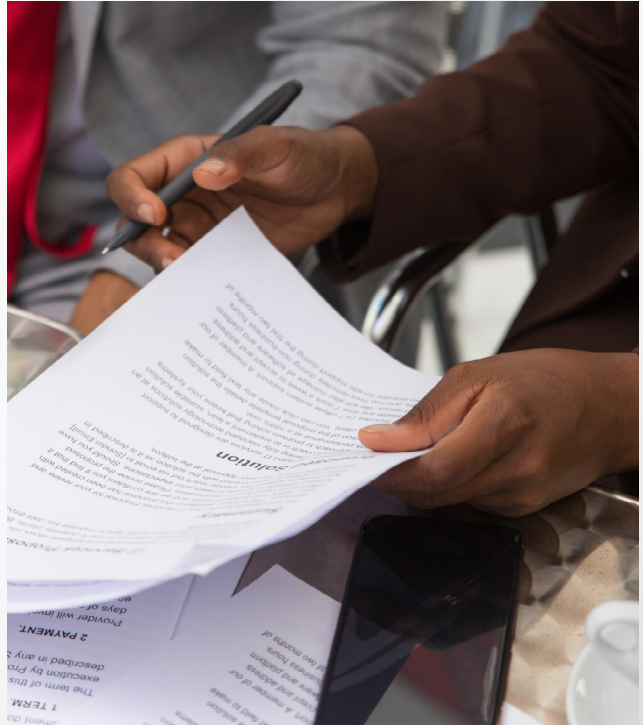
The Coalition is part of the Security working group hosted by DPI which is an initiative towards addressing issues affecting LGBTIQ HRDs and response strategies that are all inclusive of even the SOGI HRDs. The SWG provides a platform to coordinate response among the SOGI community, keep abreast of the security incidents and avoid duplication of services.





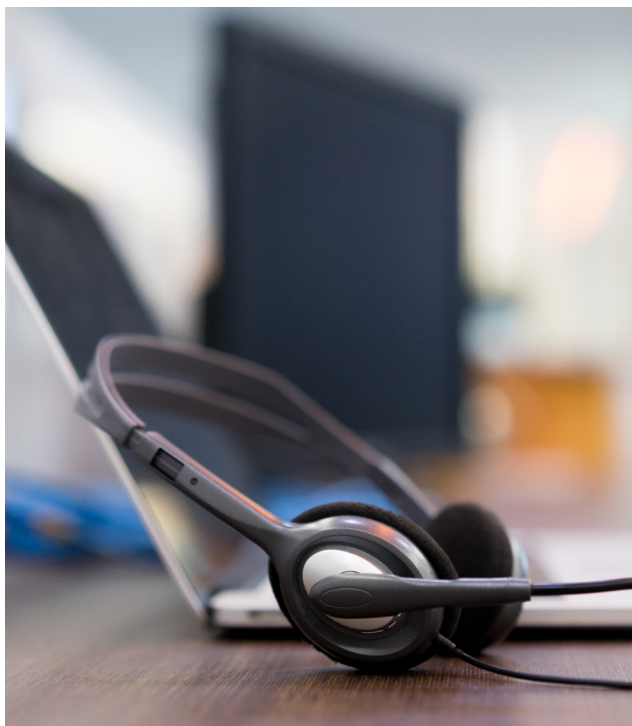
### **(c) Trainings of the Advocates under the Rapid Response Scheme organised by Network of Public Interest Lawyers**

The NCHRD-U in June 2020 entered into an MOU with NETPIL to provide support to HRDs especially under the Freedom of Expression and Assembly. NETPIL organised two trainings (30<sup>th</sup> June and 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 for the advocates under their Rapid Response Scheme at Makerere Guest House Training Hall. The NCHRD-U through the Executive Director Robert Kirenga and Protection Officer Dorothy Esther Kiyai facilitated in both trainings. The purpose of the training was to raise awareness and conscience of the lawyers on the areas of the Concept of HRDs, Lawyers misconceptions (insecurities), their needs as HRDs, defending of HRDs, handling clients and discuss a strategy for work.



### **(d) Training in Monitoring, Reporting and Documentation of Freedom of Expression and Assembly threats and violations organised by NETPIL**

The NETPIL on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2020 organised a one day skills training for legal practitioners, media persons and CSOs with interest in FoE &A. The Coalition was invited to participate in the training whose purpose was to empower the participants with capacities and skills to monitor, report and document as well as act on the results regarding violations of FoE &A to better protect the rights of individuals, groups and organisation which have traditionally faced violations of such rights.



**(e) Launch of the Rapid Response and Emergency Support Policy organised by NETPIL**

On 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020 at Golden Tulip Kampala, NETPIL organised a reflective meeting for the Rapid Response Advocates to share the Rapid Response status report, their experiences on case handling, has a psychosocial session and launched the Rapid Response and Emergency Support Policy which was done by the Uganda Law Society President Pheona Wall.



**(f) The third women HRDs conference 2020**

The NCHRD-U female staff attended a virtual women's conference organised by HRCU in collaboration with Phenomenal Women Global and Defend Defenders from 19 -20 November 2020 under the theme; "Women Rising Above COVID-19: Paving The Path Ahead."

**Other Partners and Networking Events;**

**DGF Partnership Conference**

The NCHRD-U participated in the DGF 2020 Partnership Conference with the theme "The Halfway Point: Reflecting Back and Looking Forward". This was a virtual engagement that entailed looking back on our common experience of the first half of DGF II - reflecting on it - and then jointly brainstorming the path forward for the remainder of DGF II.

## 5.0 Institutional Development

### Board of Directors Meetings

The Board actively provided guidance to the secretariat especially following the hard times brought about by COVID-19. Four and one emergency meeting Board meetings were conducted and the Annual General Meeting.

### Staffing

During 2020 the NCHRD-U had a total of 13 staff, supported by 2 interns who managed to steer the great successes highlighted in this report.

### Organizational Development Workshops

The NCHRD-U staff undertook a virtual tools training on the integration of digital tools to enable provision of service support to the member organizations following the COVID-19 pandemic impact on the operations of NCHRD-U secretariat and the services offered to its membership. This was helpful in enabling NCHRD-U secretariat to integrate appropriate digital tools for business continuity.

One of the staff undertook a management course in Thailand aimed at improving management of violence among Women with a focus on Humanitarian settings.

### Staff Barazas

Initiatives were undertaken to encourage staff on how to cope during the Covid-19 pandemic and most of the barazas were about sensitizing staff on safety measures and current prevention guidelines.

Conducted a baseline and trained staff in the use of virtual platforms.

In order to enable NCHRD-U secretariat to integrate appropriate digital tools to ensure business continuity during crisis situation The National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders -Uganda NCHRD-U sought services of a consultant to provide technical support in the integration of digital tools that would provide service support to the member organizations. The current COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted on the operations of NCHRD-U secretariat but equally the service that it offers to its membership. The leadership of the organization was keen to integrate appropriate digital tools that would ensure continuity of support services to the member organizations and individuals. As a result, 12 Coalition staff were trained.





## 6.0 Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning

### 6.1 Monitoring Visits

Conducted two (2) monitoring visits to project implementation in areas in the Southern, Western and Rwenzori sub-regions. A total of 35 organizations were visited.

### 6.2 Documentation of change stories

The documentary shows the impact the Coalition has made on the lives of different HRDs in the Albertine and Northern regions.

### Challenges, Lessons learnt and forging forward through 2020

Despite the achievements made across 2019, some challenges were encountered that the NCHRD-U will strive to overcome, in close collaboration with members and partners. Some of these challenges are chronic, and the Coalition will continue to undertake targeted technical cooperation to develop, adjust, and refine relevant policies and strategies, based on the lessons learned.

#### Challenges

The concept and definition of who a Human Rights Defender is still a contentious issue



that needs in-depth and continuous discussion among HRDs and other stakeholders.

HRDs had diverse protection needs to be addressed which go beyond what the current protection fund covers; legal and medical support and hence offering limitations. The diverse needs included security enhancement, family support up on relocation, gadget replacements, short courses, and development of skills, short courses and temporary work areas.

There were changing trends in the threats and strategies of attack on HRDs especially those working on governance, accountability and land rights which also called for new strategies of response to be included in the protection fund.

HRDs also had high expectations and demands of the protection fund to address their other protection needs in a holistic manner and also address their social needs beyond their protection needs which has made attending to some of these cases hard.

The popularization of the protection fund also attracted fraudulent cases of HRDs claiming to be at risk who are not in eminent danger, with high demands and have no genuine reasons.

The outbreak of Covid-19 caught us an aware, it jeopardised our operations and most activities were put on standstill and some were cancelled. It further restricted our movements which reduced our face to face interactions with HRDs, this led to the use of internet for communication which in some cases was not favourable to some remote grass root HRDs with poor network infrastructures

### Recommendations:

- ▲ The NCHRD-U continue to create platforms that allow the HRDs and other stakeholders to have in-depth discussion on the HRD concept especially the grass root HRDs
- ▲ NCHRD-U will continue referring cases to partner organizations and members of the referral network to enable us address the other needs of HRDs not supported under the protection fund and endeavor to popularize the referral network.
- ▲ The NCHRD-U Protection desk will continue to conduct thorough assessments and refer cases to partners.
- ▲ Under our protection desk, we realize that there is need to have a flexible protection fund with emergency funds to cater for the diverse emergency situations of HRDs for holistic and timely response.

- ⬆ With the changing trends in the threats and strategies of attack on HRDs, there is need to venture into more preventive strategies that will equip the HRDs when at risk.
- ⬆ The NCHRD-U Protection desk will continue to conduct thorough assessments and refer cases to partners.
- ⬆ Under our protection desk, we realize that there is need to have a flexible protection fund with emergency funds to cater for the diverse emergency situations of HRDs for holistic and timely response.
- ⬆ With the changing trends in the threats and strategies of attack on HRDs, there is need to venture into more preventive strategies that will equip the HRDs with several survival skills especially when at risk and as a sustainable strategy.
- ⬆ There is need for more trainings for HRDs in MDR human rights violations within regions.
- ⬆ There is a need to create regional databases for all HRD organizations in the different regions, this will also enable HRD organizations collaborate with one another after understanding who does what and from where.
- ⬆ There is need for a digital and cyber security training for HRD organizations in the different regions.
- ⬆ There is need to create platforms to discuss the security issues arising from duty bearers within regions
- ⬆ Need to conduct targeted trainings for HRDs across all thematic groups to be empowered and enable them understand the HRD concepts, current legal and institutional frame works.
- ⬆ There is need to equip some of the HRD organizations in the different region with basic safety and digital gadgets since most of them are facing funding challenges.
- ⬆ There is need to train HRDs in legal compliance and other trainings like resource mobilization.
- ⬆ There is need to introduce the Coalition in some of the sub- region since most organization were not aware of our mandate.

## Forging forwards in 2021

The commitment to protect HRDs and promote a safe work environment, as specified in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (SDG 16); "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all level", requires the Coalition to set specific, attainable targets for reducing human rights inequities, establish functional HRDs inequality monitoring systems. The coalition must commit to investing in documentation, reporting, monitoring and evaluation systems to attain this.

Information systems for HRDs must be conceived as an integrated mechanism of interconnected accountability between HRDs and duty bearers or the State. Activities to develop these frameworks should be participatory, with the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders including parliamentarians, local leaders, HRDs, civil society during planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases to obtain "buy-in" and commitment to action.

## 2020 Financial Statement

### Board of Directors

NAME		ORGANISATION	DISTRICT
<b>Margaret Sekaggya</b>	Chairperson	Human Rights Centre	Kampala
<b>Robert Sempala</b>	Vice-Chairperson	Human Rights Network for Journalists Uganda	Kampala
<b>Yona Wanjala</b>	Treasurer	Defenders Protection Initiative	Kampala
<b>Biira Nasa</b>	Member	Midwestern Anti-Corruption Coalition	Hoima
<b>Margret Elem</b>	Member	Lango Female Clan Leaders Association (LFCLA)	Lira
<b>Clare Byarugaba</b>	Member	Chapter Four Uganda	Kampala
<b>Hassan Shire</b>	Member	Defend Defenders	Kampala
<b>Moses Okwalinga</b>	Member	Uganda Law Society	Kampala
<b>Gerald Kankya</b>	Member	Twerwaneho Listeners Club	Kabarole

## Technical Thematic Working Group

No.	Name	Organisation	Area of work	Region
1.	Jane Frances Oling	Women in Development Uganda	Women Rights	Oyam
2.	Bikeke Saimon	Umbrella Journalists of Kasese	Journalists	Kasese
3.	Jenipher Baitwamasa	Navigators for Development Association	Oil, extractives and natural resources	Hoima
4.	Real Raymond Twinamatsiko	Mbarara Rise Foundation	Sexual and Minority Rights	Mbarara
5.	Gad Semajeri	Batwa Development	Indigenous people	Kabale
6.	Winifred Mugambwa	Rights for Uganda Limited	HRDs	Central
7.	Ssenyonjo Suleiman	Kalangala Human Rights defenders	HRDs	Kalangala and greater masaka
8.	Makweta Yusuf	Mbale Human Rights Defenders	HRDs	Eastern
9.	Jovia Matsiko	Kakyeeka Womens Group	women rights	Western
10.	Anyolitho William	Life Concern Uganda	Governance & Accountability	Northern
11.			Youth	
12.			PWDs	

## Secretariat Staff

Name	Designation
Robert. R. Kirenga	Executive Director
Sharon Nakanwagi	Program Manager
Andrew Lubanga	Finance Manager
Elizabeth Doreen Namuyanja	Monitoring and Evaluation officer
Prossy Babirye Wandera	Capacity Building Officer
Edward Serucaca	Advocacy and Networking Officer
Dorothy Esther Kiyai	Protection Officer
Joanitah Nabbaale	Administrative Officer
Frank Kigoye	Programme Assistant
Richard Engot	Transport Officer
David Muganwa	Care Taker
Jennifer Alum	Administrative Assistant

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This publication is available at [www.hrdcoalition.ug](http://www.hrdcoalition.ug)

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Government of the Netherlands





NATIONAL  
COALITION OF  
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RIGHTS  
DEFENDERS  
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