

# Annual Report 2023

Promoting human rights internationally by providing support to human rights defenders locally



NORWEGIAN  
HUMAN RIGHTS FUND

# Human rights work on the ground is essential in difficult times



**Ingeborg Moa,**  
Executive Director



**Marit Sørheim,**  
Chair of the Board

## Word from the Chair of the Board and the Executive Director

**Human rights defenders are ‘the people who breathe life into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights’**, as UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor, has put it. Despite them playing this important role, or exactly because of it, many of them are threatened, persecuted and even killed every year. At the same time, global human rights norms are being disregarded by those in power to such an extent that we must ask what validity they will have going forward.

To counter these attacks on human rights and those who defend them, we need to be courageous and work in flexible ways to ensure that local human rights work is supported. We need to make sure that we conduct our work not as an act of charity but as an act of solidarity.

**The NHRF supports more than 130 local human rights organisations around the world.** We hope you will enjoy reading about their achievements in 2023. Thank you for continuing to support our work in the year to come!



**Courage**



**Flexibility**



**Solidarity**

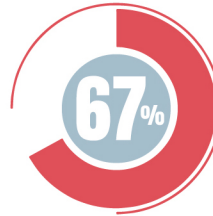
*We aim to be a courageous and flexible donor and partner, acting in solidarity with grassroots human rights organisations and human rights defenders around the world.*

*In this report, we highlight how these values are manifested in our work.*

# 2023 at a glance

**153** projects supported in 2023

**131** grantee partners supported in 2023



of our grantee partners are women-led organisations



## Number of grantee partners

We work in **7** priority countries

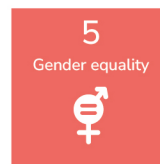
|           |    |
|-----------|----|
| Colombia  | 83 |
| Mexico    | 11 |
| India     | 10 |
| Indonesia | 6  |
| Pakistan  | 6  |
| Thailand  | 4  |
| Sri Lanka | 3  |



**16,072** human rights defenders supported

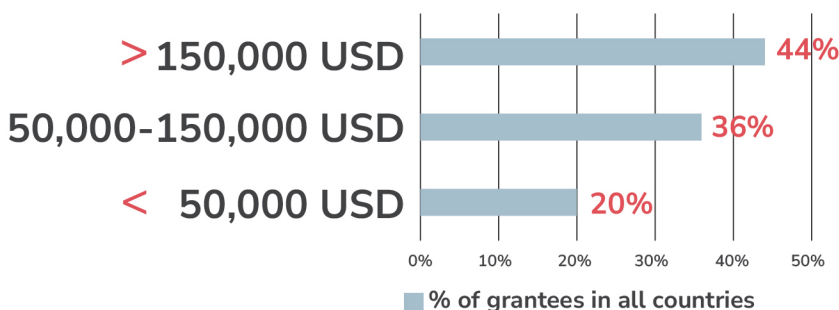
of which at least **56%** were women human rights defenders.

Our grantee partners' work is most strongly aligned with these three Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):



In addition, we support projects focused on the protection of human rights defenders also in non-priority countries (**8 grantee partners**).

## Annual budget size for supported organisations in US dollars



# Highlights from our grantee partners

The Norwegian Human Rights Fund directs its support to human rights through three interlinked thematic areas. Below we present success stories that show the strength and resilience of organisations and networks working in various ways to promote and protect human rights.



## 1 The fight against impunity and for access to justice

NHRF's grantee partner Human Rights Office Kandy (HROK) in Sri Lanka has represented the family of a victim who was killed by Sri Lankan police and **succeeded in having the case properly investigated as a crime in court**, which was not initially reported as a criminal case. HROK also supports families of disappeared persons during the Sri Lankan civil war, who have demanded independent mechanisms to seek truth and justice, as well as involving international actors in investigations of missing persons.

## 2 Dismantling discrimination, inequality and marginalisation

The population living on the banks of the San Juan river in **Colombia** is in a high-risk situation. The internal armed conflict has provoked insecurity and incidents of violence and human rights violations. After a long struggle, our grantee partner, the **Afrodescendant general community council of the San Juan River (ACADESAN)** - made up of 72 Afro-descendant communities - **achieved that the Colombian government approved 50 collective protection measures with an ethnic and community approach** to be implemented by 23 different public institutions. This achievement sets an important precedent for transforming prevention and protection policies for ethnic communities who demand that these should be focused on economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, be implemented by civilian and not military institutions, as well as considering the reality of the territory and the characteristics and needs of its population.



**In different regions, many of the grantee partners' efforts against discrimination also mean addressing the impact of extractive projects such as mining, on human rights and the rights of local communities.**

Our grantee partner in **Thailand**, the **Center for Protection and Revival of Local Community Rights (CPCR)**, **successfully obtained a temporary protection order preventing the granting of a mining license**. This is the result of efforts led by young indigenous women, and the community, supported by CPCR, who have been working to document and raise awareness about the impact of mining projects on the local land and environment along with legal action.

Similarly, in **Indonesia**, grantee partner **Yayasan Kompas Peduli Hutan (KOMIU)**'s efforts including documentation, advocacy and legal interventions **have resulted in a temporary suspension of the license for a gold mine** in Donggala, Central Sulawesi furthering the promotion and protection of land and forest management rights of the indigenous and local communities.

In **Colombia**, grantee partner **Chocó Interethnic Solidarity Forum (FISCH)** and Socio-legal Centre for Territorial Defence Siembra, have been working on the **recognition and implementation of the first judicial sentence in Colombia - and third worldwide - to declare the river Atrato as subject of legal rights**. The T-622 Sentence was the result of the community legal work requesting the fundamental rights to life, health, water, food security, a healthy environment, culture, and territory, because the ethnic communities were experiencing negative health effects due to illegal mining activities. As a result of the advocacy work of these organisations, the T-622 Sentence was included in the National Development Plan of Colombia 2023-2026.



Many of our Asian grantee partners are committed to strengthening the rights of women workers, especially those in vulnerable positions, such as domestic workers.

In **Pakistan**, our grantee partner **Women in Struggle for Empowerment (WISE)** has contributed to the legal registration of a female domestic workers' union at the provincial level: the Women Domestic Workers Union - Punjab. It is the second union of its kind in the region. WISE has also been successful in demanding minimum wage for domestic workers.

In **India**, the advocacy work of grantee partner **Tamil Nadu Domestic Workers Welfare Trust (TNDWWT)** has led to important victories for the rights of domestic workers. The organisation strengthened cooperation with the Ministry of Labor, the State Human Rights Commission and the State Women's Commission, **which resulted in the drafting of a bill for domestic workers, and the government's review of the minimum wage for domestic workers**.

### 3 *Protecting human rights defenders and the right to defend rights*

**Mexico and Colombia** are amongst the most dangerous countries in the world for human rights defenders, and their protection is a central focus of NHRF's work in both countries. Through our 10 women-led grantee partners in Mexico, **467 human rights defenders** at risk received support and accompaniment in 2023, increasing their security and resilience and enabling them to continue their work for human rights despite the aggressions, persecution, and threats they face. In Colombia, our 83 grantee partners provided support and accompaniment to **13,831 human rights defenders** at risk.



In May 2023, several internet shutdowns took place in **Pakistan** due to political turmoil. Grantee partner **Digital Rights Foundation (DRF)** has been monitoring and tracking internet shutdowns during this period across the country, as well as **informing network partners about the use of VPNs for safe browsing during these times**. DRF has also conducted digital security trainings to journalists, women human rights defenders and other marginalised groups to learn how to protect themselves in case they face online abuse and harassment.

# Oslo as a Breathing Space City for human rights defenders (In Norwegian: Oslo som Pusteromsby for menneskerettighetsforkjempere)



2023 marked the start of our two-year pilot project called Oslo Breathing Space City, which is a temporary relocation programme for human rights defenders living in stressful or hostile environments.

Naghma, a human rights defender from Pakistan, arrived in Oslo in April 2023 as the first guest of the programme. Later, she summarised her experience as follows:

“ I got the much-required space for reflection and planning and a lot of learning opportunities. Living three months in a different society itself was a learning experience. ”

**Three more human rights defenders arrived over the course of the year and all four stayed in Oslo for a period of two to three months.** They come from different continents and are human rights lawyers, activists, and journalists. What unites them is the need for time and space to recover from their tireless and demanding work with human rights. The guests stated that the programme was able to provide psychosocial assistance while also rendering a great chance to meet civil society organisations, learn about Norwegian society and politics, engage in cultural events, and familiarise themselves with Norwegian nature.

## About Oslo Breathing Space City

### Breathing Space City



is an initiative with the aim of creating a breathing space for human rights defenders at risk.



The goal is that human rights defenders come to Oslo for a three-month stay to take a break from their everyday life,



and then return to their home countries with a larger and stronger network, having rested and recovered, and carrying feelings of solidarity and support with them.

It will also be a tool to educate a wider audience, namely the citizens of Oslo, on human rights work and create solidarity between cities and human rights movements around the world.

**Breathing Space City** is rooted in Norwegian civil society and the Oslo Municipality and was initiated by five Norway-based organisations: The Norwegian Human Rights Fund (NHRF), Amnesty International Norway, Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF), the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC), and the Rafto Foundation. The NHRF holds the Secretariat.



## The Secretariat



## Highlights from the team

By March 2024 The NHRF **Secretariat in Oslo** has 12 staff members. Three new staff members joined the team during 2023 and early 2024. The NHRF works with local consultants based in **India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka** and **Mexico**. In 2023, we had two interns as part of our ongoing internship agreement with the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights.

After conducting an employee survey in August 2023, the **Secretariat was recognised as a Great Place to Work** for the first time.

## NHRF in Colombia



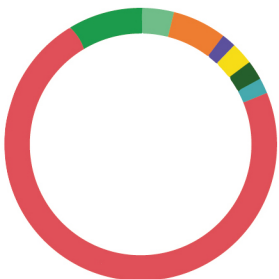
The NHRF **Colombia office in Bogotá** has a new country director who assumed the position in July 2023. The team also grew in 2023, from 12 to 16 full-time staff.

Through the Great Place to Work survey, the staff in Colombia highlighted that they feel proud about the ways in which the NHRF contributes to the society in Colombia. The team emphasised the unity among the staff and the strong commitment they feel to their work.

## Accounts

The NHRF would like to **thank our member organisations and donors**, among them, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Bogotá, the Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees (Fagforbundet), the Municipality of Oslo, Fritt Ord, OSF, Jamette og Sverre Markussens Hjelpfond, Amnesty International Norway, The Council of Churches in Norway, The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the Atlas Alliance for their generous support in 2023.

### Funding per programme in 2023 (NOK – Norwegian Kroner)



|   |            |
|---|------------|
| ● Colombia  | 30.152.767 |
| ● Human Rights Defenders projects in non-priority countries | 3.719.747  |
| ● India   | 2.748.473  |
| ● Mexico  | 1.578.025  |
| ● Indonesia   | 1.134.040  |
| ● Pakistan  | 958.204    |
| ● Sri Lanka   | 729.485    |
| ● Thailand  | 698.821    |

### Accounts and distribution



|                          |     |
|--------------------------|-----|
| ● Governmental donors    | 88% |
| ● Foundations and others | 7%  |
| ● Member organisations   | 4%  |
| ● Other income           | 1%  |



|  |     |
|--|-----|
| ● Transfers to partners                  | 68% |
| ● Personnel cost (excluding admin staff) | 17% |
| ● Admin                                  | 7%  |
| ● Project Cost excluding transfers       | 7%  |
| ● Communications                         | 1%  |
| ● Fundraising                            | <1% |

**The Norwegian Human Rights Fund (NHRF)** was founded in 1988 by Norwegian civil society, academia, and workers' unions. Our mandate is to protect and promote human rights internationally by being a flexible and courageous actor that provides support to local and front-line organisations and movements.

In 2023, this was the composition of the NHRF Board (member-organisation the person represents in brackets): Marit Sørheim (Atlas Alliance, Chair of the board), Aina Østreng (The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions), Bjarte Økland (Amnesty International Norway), Zenia-Marie Chrysostomidis (Norwegian Centre for Human Rights), Wenche Fladen Nervold (Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations), Amitabh Behar (independent board member).

Graphic design, layout, and illustrations: Kevin Johaan Correa Valenzuela

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Your support goes directly to front-line organisations fighting for human rights all over the world.



Vipps (Norway):  
Give your donation  
to 562372



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