

# DEFENDING IN NUMBERS

RIISING TOGETHER AGAINST ALL ODDS



**AHRD**  
Asian Human Rights Defenders



# Defending in Numbers 2021-2022

Rising Together Against All Odds



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# About FORUM-ASIA

The **Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)** is a network of 85 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. The FORUM-ASIA Secretariat is based in Bangkok, with offices in Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. [www.forum-asia.org](http://www.forum-asia.org)

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Glossary of Terms</b>	ix
<b>Preface</b>	x
<b>Executive Summary</b>	01
<b>Snapshot of the Region</b>	10
<b>Most Common Violations Against Human Rights Defenders</b>	17
Judicial Harassment	19
Physical Violence	27
Intimidation and Threats	35
Other Violations	42
<b>Scanning the Perpetrators</b>	49
<b>Human Rights Defenders at Highest Risk</b>	59
Pro-Democracy Defenders	61
Women Human Rights Defenders and SOGI Rights Defenders	69
Land, Indigenous, Environmental, and Community-Based Defenders	77
Other Groups of Human Rights Defenders	84
<b>Recommendations</b>	93
<b>Methodology</b>	96
<b>Annexe</b>	100
<b>List of Human Rights Defenders Killed in 2021 and 2022</b>	102
<b>Endnotes</b>	105





# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<b>CDM</b>	Civil Disobedience Movement
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organisation
<b>FORUM-ASIA</b>	Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development
<b>HRDs</b>	Human rights defenders
<b>INSEC</b>	Informal Sector Service Centre
<b>KontraS</b>	Komisi untuk Orang Hilang dan Korban Tindak Kekerasan (Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence)
<b>LGBTIQ+</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and other sexually or gender diverse
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>NHRI</b>	National Human Rights Institution
<b>SOGI</b>	Sexual orientation and gender identity
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>WHRDs</b>	Women human rights defenders

# PREFACE

It is a pleasure to write this preface for the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)'s publication, *Defending in Numbers: Rising Together Against All Odds*, in these challenging times for human rights defenders (HRDs) in Asia. I cannot emphasise enough how important it is to extend our support and protection to those upholding human rights, often in extremely difficult circumstances.

This report on HRDs in Asia and the violations that they endure offers a vital contribution to their work, by allowing the international community to better comprehend the situation on the ground. With the data and analysis provided by FORUM-ASIA, we can gain a much more nuanced understanding of

the different types of risks faced by different human rights defenders, be they individuals, NGOs or communities.

The release of this report is also timely as we celebrate the 25th year since the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on human rights defenders, as well as the 75th year since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Despite the challenges, we have come so far, thanks to the hard work of HRDs since the adoption of these landmark documents.

As I noted in my recent report *Success through perseverance and solidarity: 25 years of achievements by human rights defenders*, HRDs all over the world, whether in democracies or dictatorships, in

cities, in forests or in deserts, are achieving huge success, often in the face of terrible danger.

Throughout my visits and engagements, both online and offline, I have met determined and vibrant communities of HRDs. They encounter many daunting and exhausting moments, but they remain undeterred.

I am thinking, for instance, of indigenous defenders in Bangladesh who successfully protected their water source through protests and advocacy work, Afghan WHRDs who continue to work for their cause despite the horrors of the Taliban and Thai defenders who have won landmark victories for land law reforms despite immense adversity. While the human rights work that they do has been better recognised than before, we still have a long way to go.

I want to congratulate FORUM-ASIA for working to address the gap of recognition and protection that is much needed for HRDs in the region. FORUM-ASIA has been a supportive companion throughout my mandate, and I have been able to connect with many HRDs in the region due to their work.

The latest edition of *Defending in Numbers* continues to serve a valuable role in highlighting the situation of HRDs in Asia as well as giving recognition to their work. I hope that this report will be helpful to many, not just as a solemn assessment of the recent situation and the danger in which HRDs work in the region, but also as a message of hope for their resilience and solidarity.

**— Mary Lawlor, United Nations  
Special Rapporteur  
on the situation of human rights  
defenders**



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The promotion and advancement of human rights in Asia encountered significant hurdles in 2021 and 2022. While the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic were gradually being overcome, new issues emerged from drastic political changes and turmoil that took place across several Asian countries. These, in combination, created a hostile and volatile context for those engaged in human rights work. Human rights defenders (HRDs)<sup>1</sup> adapted to these unprecedented contexts and persisted in defending human rights but were, consequently, exposed to multiple forms of harassment.

*Defending in Numbers – Rising Together Against All Odds* analyses the situation of HRDs in Asia in 2021

and 2022, based on the monitoring and documentation of the violations they faced, as captured in the [Asian HRD Portal](#). This is the fifth edition of *Defending in Numbers*, a biennial publication produced by FORUM-ASIA that identifies the main patterns of harassment and challenges that defenders confront within the region. It also gathers emblematic case studies and information from HRDs that FORUM-ASIA has worked with, which exemplify the important role that HRDs play in Asia, and the tremendous effort and risks that their work entails.

In 2021 and 2022, HRDs including individuals, organisations, and communities endured many forms of violations. These violations also affected the HRDs' family members

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The Asian HRD Portal is an online platform managed by FORUM-ASIA containing useful materials for Asian defenders. It features a database that gathers all the violations against HRDs documented by FORUM-ASIA.

The portal can be visited at: <https://asianhrds.forum-asia.org/>. For a detailed explanation on the methodology of DiN, please consult the Methodology chapter.

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more frequently than in the past. Judicial harassment, intimidation and threats, and physical violence were commonplace in the region, alongside surveillance, vilification, online attacks, as well as killings.

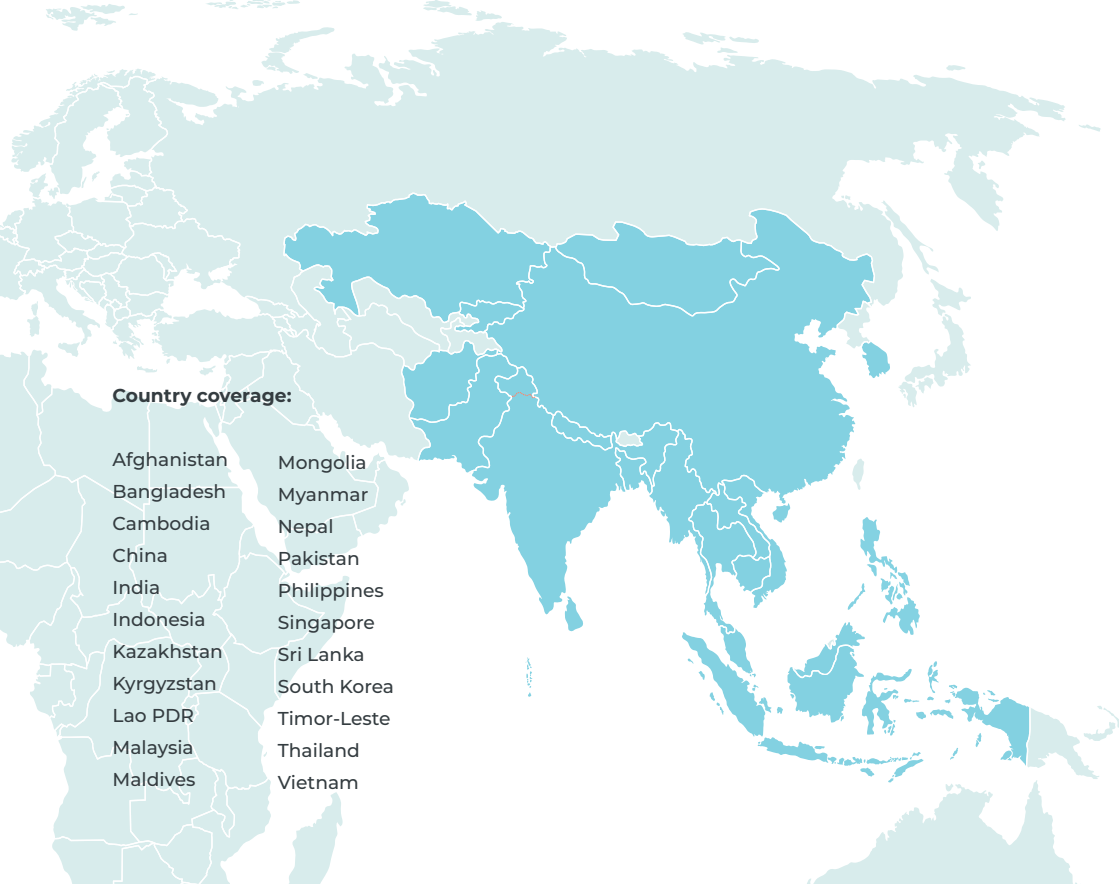
From 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2022, FORUM-ASIA recorded 1,636 violations committed against defenders across the 22 Asian countries monitored.<sup>2</sup> The countries with the highest number of violations logged were Myanmar

(205 cases), Thailand (182 cases), and India (168 cases). At least 4,450 defenders, their family members, organisations, and communities were affected.

In line with previous years, judicial harassment was the most commonly recorded violation against Asian defenders in 2021 and 2022.<sup>3</sup> With 1,033 cases documented, this strategy was regularly used by both state and non-state actors to target defenders and stop them from conducting their peaceful human rights work. A total of 3,226 defenders were affected by this category of violation. Judicial harassment oftentimes involved the arrest and detention of HRDs, many of which were conducted arbitrarily (744 cases); the enactment of repressive legislation and policies (116 cases); and the denial of fair trials to defenders (90 cases).<sup>4</sup>

Physical violence ranked as the second most common violation, with 516 cases documented. This is a significant rise compared to recent years, reflecting how defenders' right to a healthy and safe

**“ Human rights defenders ... adapted to these unprecedented contexts and persisted in defending human rights but were, consequently, exposed to multiple forms of harassment.**



**Country coverage:**

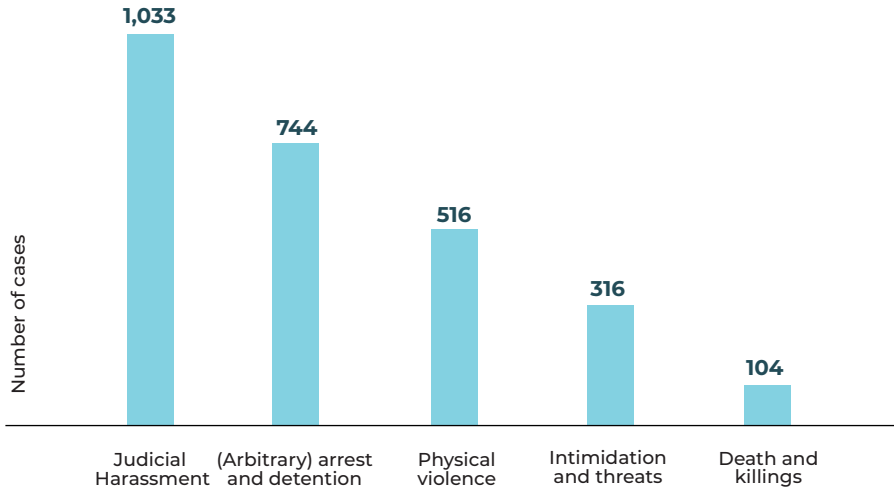
- |             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| Afghanistan | Mongolia    |
| Bangladesh  | Myanmar     |
| Cambodia    | Nepal       |
| China       | Pakistan    |
| India       | Philippines |
| Indonesia   | Singapore   |
| Kazakhstan  | Sri Lanka   |
| Kyrgyzstan  | South Korea |
| Lao PDR     | Timor-Leste |
| Malaysia    | Thailand    |
| Maldives    | Vietnam     |

environment has increasingly been violated. This violation occurred most frequently when HRDs were staging peaceful gatherings, and in many cases, such attacks caused them to be hospitalised or permanently injured. On top of this, 99 cases of raids targeting the house or office of defenders were recorded. Moreover, alarmingly, between 2021 and 2022, FORUM-ASIA documented 84 cases of targeted killings of HRDs, where at least 188 individuals lost their lives.

Twenty other cases that resulted in the death of defenders were recorded in other incidents, such as poor treatment in custody.

Incidents of intimidation and threats were persistent across the region, with 316 cases recorded in the period under review. Forty-four of these involved death threats, much of which was perpetrated by unknown actors.

## TOP 5 VIOLATIONS AGAINST HRDS IN 2021 - 2022



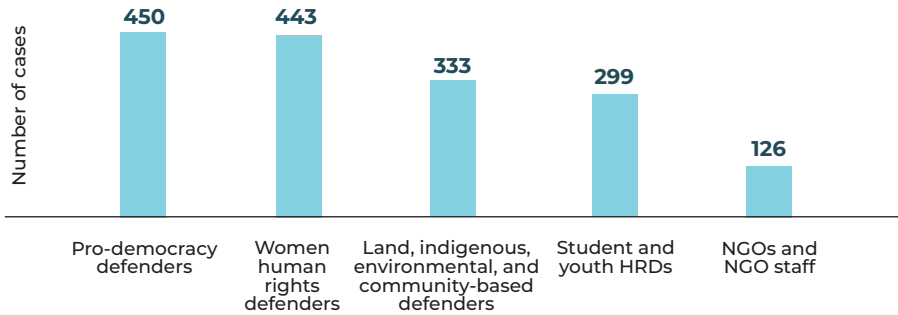
Online attacks and harassment were also rampant (44 cases), reflecting how HRDs endure violations even within digital spaces. Additionally, intimidation and threats were the most common violations committed against family members of HRDs (32 cases), demonstrating that harassment against defenders frequently had repercussions on their loved ones. It is also worth noting that despite such concerning trends, intimidation and threats remain commonly underreported by HRDs.

Other violations that were widely documented included administrative harassment (134 cases), restrictions of movement (100 cases) – which was oftentimes coupled with surveillance of defenders (50 cases) – vilification (74 cases), and abduction (46 cases).

In the period under review, a total of 18 different groups of defenders were affected by the aforementioned violations. There were some groups, however, that tended to be more heavily targeted than others.



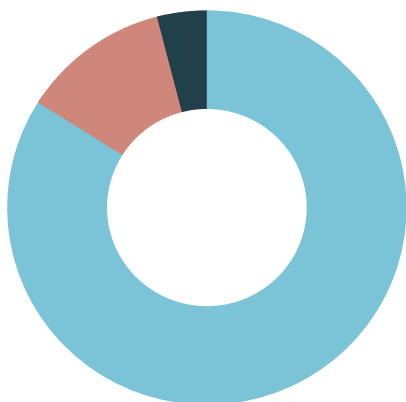
## TOP 5 HRDS AT RISK IN 2021 - 2022



Pro-democracy defenders were the group with the highest number of violations endured (450 cases). Throughout the region, these defenders stood up for democracy, while also being at the forefront of collective movements calling for civil society's greater involvement and inclusion in the political decisions that affect their lives. Moreover, pro-democracy defenders relentlessly called for the restoration of democratic values in countries where these were under threat. Such efforts, however, often came at the expense of their safety and well-being.

Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) followed closely as the group with the second-highest recorded violations endured, with 443 cases logged in the FORUM-ASIA database. This high number of cases documented reflects the leading role women played in advancing human rights in Asia, as well as their pivotal contribution to fighting injustice and societal inequities. WHRDs were subject to a broad range of harassment and threats, including violations that targeted them based on their gender and their role in challenging oppressive gender stereotypes and structures.

## KEY PERPETRATORS OF ATTACKS AGAINST HRDS IN 2021 - 2022



Number of cases

<span style="color: #46A0C9;">■</span> State actors	<b>1,354</b>
<span style="color: #C0504D;">■</span> Non-state actors	<b>194</b>
<span style="color: #1A3A5A;">■</span> Unknown	<b>65</b>

Several incidents of vilification and gender-based harassment were documented across the region, clearly reflecting the gravity of the challenges WHRDs confronted.

With 333 cases documented, land, indigenous, environmental, and community-based defenders were the third most affected group. This category includes defenders who stand for the preservation of the environment and natural resources as well as grassroots activists and community leaders who advocate for the rights of a group or community. Due to the nature of their work, this category of defenders was the most affected by violations perpetrated by

corporations. Most of the violations they endured consisted of judicial harassment and physical violence.

Other groups of HRDs that were heavily targeted were media workers (384 cases), student and youth HRDs (299 cases), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and their staff (126 cases), and minority rights defenders (82 cases).

In the two years under review, state actors were recorded as the perpetrator in 1,354 incidents of violation, equal to almost 83% of the total cases documented. The police alone were recorded as perpetrators in 846 cases.

**“ Alarming, throughout the period under review, the perpetrator was unknown in 65 cases documented, demonstrating that impunity remains a key issue across Asia.**

This trend is largely in line with patterns that FORUM-ASIA’s documentation has noted over the past few years. In 2021 and 2022, however, military forces were marked as perpetrators in 134 cases. The unprecedented number of cases attributed to this actor was largely due to the attempted coup in Myanmar and the related violations that took place under this context, for which they were complicit.

Non-state actors were perpetrators in 194 cases. Corporations (mostly agribusiness and extractive industries) were complicit in at least 46 of these cases. They, at times, worked in collusion with state actors in perpetrating these violations. Another non-state actor included groups like the Taliban, which in the context of Afghanistan was recorded as the perpetrator in 64 cases out of the 71 total cases documented in the country. This accounts for all cases recorded in Afghanistan where the perpetrator was known.

Alarming, throughout the period under review, the perpetrator was unknown in 65 cases documented,

demonstrating that impunity remains a key issue across Asia. Perpetrators thrive in contexts where justice systems fail to hold them accountable, and where law enforcement agencies do not conduct proper investigations on the violations against defenders or offer adequate protection to HRDs to ensure the threats they report do not escalate into more grave forms of violations.

Despite the multiple challenges that defenders endured, there were some positive steps taken to ensure greater protection and support were accorded to HRDs in the region.

In February 2021, the Asian Pacific Forum (APF) published the [Regional Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders for National Human Rights Institutions \(NHRIs\)](#). This sets out a range of actions that the APF and its members commit to undertake to support HRDs in the Asia Pacific region. In February 2022, the APF further issued the [Implementation Guidelines for NHRIs](#), to assist in putting the Regional Action Plan into practice.

On 1 April 2021, the Mongolian Parliament adopted the ‘Law on the legal status of Human Rights Defenders,’ or the HRD Protection Law, the first national law of this kind in Asia. It entered into force on 1 July 2021, after a period of over two years of drafting and reviewing, which civil society and United Nations agencies engaged in. The law gives legal recognition to human rights defenders and their work, defined in alignment with the 1998 United Nations Declaration on HRDs, and sets out a mechanism for their protection. In particular, the law mandates the creation of a committee, the task of which includes investigating violations committed against defenders. The Committee is set to begin its work in 2023.

There are also hopeful stories that demonstrate the meaningful impact HRDs’ work had. On 19 November 2021, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the three Agriculture Acts of 2020, also labelled as Farm Bills, would be repealed. The three Acts would have removed government-guaranteed price for crops and sparked mass demonstrations countrywide. This decision to repeal the law comes after persistent protests were held by thousands of farmers, including

“ **HRDs play an important role in the realisation of human rights, and their work deserves to be acknowledged, supported and protected.**

community-based defenders and peasant leaders, who took to the streets, even as they were met with violence and arrest by police.

Over the past two years, there has also been unprecedented solidarity among civil society. This was largely triggered by events such as the attempted coup in Myanmar, the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, and the government overthrow in Sri Lanka. Each of these had wide-ranging effects on the safety and well-being of many. In response, broad sectors of civil society joined the human rights cause. They echoed defenders’ calls for the restoration of democracy, and the creation of more just and equitable societies.

In Southeast Asia, the Milk Tea Alliance (MTA) is an emblematic example of a transnational solidarity movement. It is composed and led by a loose network of youth HRDs, which mostly rely on online platforms.

The MTA is particularly active in countries such as Myanmar, Thailand, and Indonesia, where they work on protesting against authoritarianism and advocating for democracy.

In light of the increasing challenges and harassment endured by HRDs in the region, it is of paramount importance to support HRDs, build stronger solidarity among human rights movements, and address the systemic challenges defenders face. The recognition of HRDs' work is also crucial. HRDs play an important role in the realisation of human rights, and their work deserves to be acknowledged, supported and protected.

In this regard, a positive achievement worth noting is the inclusion of Khurram Parvez in the list of the 100 most influential persons of the year 2022 by Time Magazine.<sup>5</sup> Khurram is a prominent HRD from India-administered Kashmir, who serves as coordinator of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), a human rights organisation

working on the issue of enforced disappearance in Kashmir.

Khurram is also the chairperson of the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), a regional federation of organisations providing mutual assistance among its members and international solidarity to families. Additionally, he works as a programme coordinator of the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), a federation of organisations that work on conducting research and documentation on human rights issues and seeking redress for human rights violations through advocacy and campaigns, as well as legal assistance for victims. Khurram's contribution to the human rights cause exposed him to great risks. In November 2021, Khurram was taken into custody after his house and the APDP office were raided by the Indian National Investigation Agency. The investigation against him on terrorism charges remains ongoing, and to date, Khurram is still being held in pretrial detention.

# SNAPSHOT OF THE REGION

Throughout 2021 and 2022, across Asia, there was evident repression of civic spaces that came hand-in-hand with hostility against HRDs and their work. This already challenging context was further exacerbated by the political instability and insecurity in the region, which made it even more difficult for HRDs to conduct their work.

Following the military's attempted coup in **Myanmar** on 1 February 2021, HRDs were subjected to an unprecedented wave of violations as they stood at the frontline of challenging and opposing military rule. The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) that emerged in this context quickly gained momentum across the country, with its members calling for the restoration of democracy and

civilian rule. The CDM has since become a widespread, inclusive movement, gathering anti-junta citizens from diverse backgrounds, including students, youth, teachers, doctors, nurses, civil servants, HRDs, NGO staff, lawyers, and monks. While atrocities and crimes are still being committed in Myanmar, the CDM stands as the primary opposition to the military junta and continues to inspire others to take action for the restoration of democracy in Myanmar.

The takeover of **Afghanistan** by the Taliban on 15 August 2021 also led to the deterioration of the conditions for civil society and HRDs, who were already facing significant challenges to their work even before the Taliban seized control of the country.



WHRDs, media workers, and NGO staff faced a drastic increase in violence and harassment from the Taliban for their role in promoting and protecting human rights. Despite initial promises made by the Taliban for a more 'moderate' rule compared to their approach from 1996 to 2001, systematic denial of human rights in Afghanistan under the Taliban remains evident. Reminiscent of their past rule, there has been a spate of violence against civil society. Women and girls in particular have been heavily affected, as much of their fundamental rights and freedoms have been curtailed. The Taliban's seizure of power also triggered a mass exodus of people from Afghanistan to bordering countries such as Pakistan. These included defenders and their families, who for months endured

housing insecurity, financial instability and legal uncertainty, particularly concerning their visa and immigration statuses in the countries they relocated to.

In January 2022, a sharp increase in gas prices triggered widespread protests throughout **Kazakhstan**, with civilians taking to the streets to express their grievances against the Government, which they deemed responsible for impoverishing the country and its people. While the demonstrations led to some violent incidents, community-based and pro-democracy defenders, including WHRDs, faced assault, arbitrary arrests, and other violations from authorities for their participation in peaceful rallies, or for reporting on the police's response to these protests.



People are attending protest against military coup in Myanmar.  
Photo by Ninjastrikers/Wikimedia Commons

Beginning in March 2022, large sectors of **Sri Lanka's** civil society participated in mass protests to demand the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his family members that held high-ranking institutional positions. The Rajapaksa administration was criticised for its mismanagement of the national economy. Although the protests successfully led to Rajapaksa's resignation in July 2022, in the course of this struggle, several HRDs including students, trade unionists, and pro-democracy monks were subject to arrest and endured physical violence such as being shot by rubber bullets and water cannons by police.

Since December 2021, the casino workers' union of the NagaWorld complex in **Cambodia** held a series of

strikes to demand the reinstatement of several employees who were collectively laid off. Authorities responded with physical violence, mass arrests, and intimidation, particularly against women labour leaders. Under the pretext of the prevention of COVID-19, over 100 of the arrested workers were taken to quarantine centres, where they were denied access to basic sanitary services. To date, judicial harassment against workers remains ongoing.

In **Thailand**, the vibrant pro-democracy movement calling for constitutional amendments and democratic reforms of the monarchy continued to flourish. Students, youth and WHRDs commonly led demonstrations and other





Sri Lanka Protests.  
Photo by Nazly Ahmed/Flickr

initiatives in support of democracy. Their efforts, however, were often met with violations of their right to freedom of expression, and of liberty and security.

Similar trends can be seen in **Indonesia**, where student protestors were met with violence, including by being shot with water cannons and teargas. The Indonesian province of West Papua and its right to self-determination further remained a key issue. In this regard, minority rights defenders were disproportionately affected by violations. Authorities harassed as well as criminalised Papuan defenders with treason charges and labelled them as separatists.

In **Vietnam**, civic space continued to be repressed, as reflected by the imposition of extreme restrictions on freedom of expression, including in online spaces. Bloggers and social media activists were jailed for expressing their dissent on social media, commenting on social issues, or challenging government narratives.

“ The Indonesian province of West Papua and its right to self-determination further remained a key issue.



NagaWorld workers are protesting in Phnom Penh on 11 November 2022.

Photo by Lara Shaker/VOD

State actors further employed repressive legislation to target defenders.

Consistent with the previous years, several incidents of killings were recorded in the **Philippines**, with land rights and indigenous peoples' rights defenders being disproportionately targeted. The practice of red-tagging also remained persistent. This involved falsely accusing HRDs to have links with communist groups who have been deemed terrorists. These attempts at stigmatising and discrediting exposed HRDs – especially WHRDs and community-based defenders – to more risks. Too often no perpetrator was

held accountable for violations committed against HRDs in the country.

In **India**, WHRDs were among the top affected groups of defenders. They frequently faced gender-based harassment, including through smear campaigns and rape threats. Anti-caste and other religious minority activists were also affected by vilification and online harassment. Defenders in India-administered Kashmir were subject to intense surveillance, faced travel restrictions, were raided, and endured prolonged pretrial detention on terrorism and other trumped-up charges, especially under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

## “ WHRDs in Pakistan faced regular obstructions when organising gatherings ... reflecting the widespread hostility this group of defenders endured.

While the police were the main perpetrator of these violations, corporations were also recorded to have been targeting local communities and environmental defenders with judicial harassment and physical violence. Likewise, a worrisome number of right to information (RTI) activists were killed, mostly for reporting on corruption.

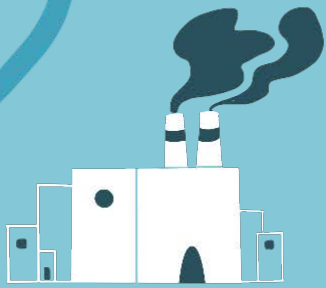
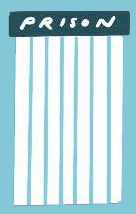
Members of the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), which advocates for the rights of the Pashtun ethnic minority in **Pakistan**, were repeatedly targeted with administrative and judicial harassment that prevented them from exercising their right to self-determination. The Government further promoted a narrative that labelled them as ‘anti-state’ and ‘anti-military.’ Moreover, WHRDs in Pakistan faced regular obstructions when organising gatherings on International Women’s Day, and were targeted by violations such as vilification, reflecting the widespread hostility this group of defenders endured.

**Bangladesh** saw the severe repression of labour rights defenders’ right to freedom of

assembly and association, many of whom were beaten for staging protests to demand better working conditions and fair treatment. Several HRDs’ family members were also subject to intimidation and threats, raided, and at times, arrested.

In **Nepal**, students and youth defenders who led protests were regularly arrested. Media workers were also significantly harassed and were the most affected group of defenders in the country. In the cases recorded, they were often assaulted by representatives of local government and business corporations while conducting their work, and/or threatened with death for reporting on issues such as corruption or mismanagement.

Similar trends were found in **Kyrgyzstan**, where alternative media outlets were exposed to raids and court-mandated website shutdowns, and where media workers were arrested on false charges and denied a fair trial. WHRDs who took part in initiatives to monitor elections also faced arrest and detention because of their work.



# Most Common Violations against Human Rights Defenders

Judicial Harassment	19
Physical Violence	27
Intimidation and Threats	35
Other Violations	42



# JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Judicial harassment was the most common violation that HRDs in Asia experienced in 2021 and 2022, a trend that has not changed in the last few years. Judicial harassment can include, but is not limited to, (arbitrary) arrest and detention, enactment of repressive legislation and policies, and all other forms of charges, prosecutions, and judicial processes imposed to interfere with the HRDs' work, and/or intimidate and harass HRDs.

Out of 1,636 cases that FORUM-ASIA recorded in 2021 and 2022, 1,033 cases of judicial harassment on HRDs were documented, and at least 3,226 individuals and organisations were impacted in these cases. This 1,033 cases of judicial harassment included 744 cases of (arbitrary) arrest and

detention, 116 cases of enactment of repressive legislation and policies, and 90 cases of denial of a fair trial.

The categories of HRDs that were most affected by judicial harassment were pro-democracy defenders (347 cases), WHRDs (297 cases), and media workers (210 cases). Judicial harassment was most often perpetrated by state actors, such as the police (586 cases), judiciary (360 cases), military (90 cases), and other government entities (35 cases), but was at times also committed by non-state actors such as corporations (27 cases).

Pro-democracy defenders were most affected by judicial harassment, with 347 cases of this violation recorded, affecting at least 1,343 individuals and organisations.

The charges against them often included ‘anti-state propaganda,’ ‘incitement to violence,’ ‘defamation,’ or ‘terrorism.’ More than one-third of these cases or 118 cases in total, involved youth and student HRDs, most of which were recorded in Myanmar and Thailand.

Next to pro-democracy defenders, WHRDs (297 cases) and media workers (210 cases) were the two groups of HRDs most affected by judicial harassment in the 2-years under review. WHRDs were arrested, detained, and prosecuted for various reasons such as their participation in peaceful protests for women’s rights, union activities or public advocacy for environmental justice. Media workers were often judicially harassed for investigating or reporting on human rights issues, including by posting on social media accounts.

Freedom of expression was the right that was most frequently violated in cases involving judicial harassment. 838 out of 1,033 cases of judicial harassment involved a breach of HRD’s freedom of expression. This affected at least 2,707 individuals and organisations. Freedom of expression is a fundamental right protected under international law and is crucial for HRDs’ work as it guarantees their right to express what they think and value, and their ability to

Cases of judicial harassment out of 1,636 total violations



demand a just and equal society.<sup>6</sup> Judicial harassment affected HRDs’ freedom of expression on both offline and online platforms, with 208 cases out of 838 cases occurring online. This shows that the impact of judicial harassment on human rights activities conducted online was substantial and is becoming an increasingly common tactic employed by perpetrators to hinder HRDs from conducting their work.

HRDs’ right to liberty and security was also often affected by incidents of judicial harassment, with 778 cases recorded that involved the violation of this right.



This right was most frequently violated during the arrest and detention of HRDs. In fact, 714 out of 778 cases of recorded violations of this right occurred while HRDs were being arrested and detained by the police, judiciary, and/or military. While the cases in which the military violated HRDs' right to liberty and security through judicial harassment (82 cases) were not as common as those committed by the police (464 cases) or the judiciary (260 cases), as military forces often operate under the increased leniency of the law, they were able to perpetrate violations with greater impunity. In the period under review, violations perpetrated by the military were mostly recorded in Myanmar, with 69 cases in total.

In at least one-third of all cases of judicial harassment, HRDs were arrested, detained, or prosecuted due to their participation in, or organisation of, protests and demonstrations. There were, in total, 375 cases recorded that involved the violation of HRDs' right to freedom of assembly or right to protest. In these cases, it was pro-democracy defenders (187 cases) and WHRDs (134 cases) participating in, or leading, rallies and protests, that were most affected.

**“ In at least one-third of all cases of judicial harassment, HRDs were arrested, detained, or prosecuted due to their participation in, or organisation of, protests and demonstrations.**



Fatia Maulidiyanti (left) and Haris Azhar (right) are two prominent Indonesian defenders. Photo courtesy of Fatia Maulidiyanti and FORUM-ASIA

On **20 August 2021**, Fatia Maulidiyanti, a prominent Indonesian WHRD and the Coordinator of the Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS) was interviewed by Haris Azhar – another HRD and the co-founder of Lokataru Foundation – on his YouTube channel. In this interview, they discussed the connections between the military operation and mining exploitation in Papua, and the involvement of Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, the Coordinating Minister for Maritime

Affairs and Investment, in the project. Following the release of this video, on 22 September 2021, Luhut filed a defamation complaint against Fatia and Haris and demanded an explanation of their motives behind posting this video. On 19 March 2022, both HRDs were informed that they were named as suspects in a criminal case filed by Luhut, allegedly under Articles 310 and 311 of the Criminal Code for defamation, for which they received a police letter on 23 March 2022.



Bolot Temirov is a Kyrgyz journalist and founder of the media outlet TemirLive.  
Photo by Kunduz Kyzyljarova/[Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#)

On **22 January 2022**, more than a dozen police officers raided the office of a YouTube-based investigative outlet Temirov Live in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. After searching the office for three hours, they arrested Bolot Temirov, a journalist and the founder of the outlet, for allegedly having found drugs in his possession. Bolot and his wife, who was also at the scene of his arrest, claimed that the police planted drugs on him. The raid and arrest happened just a few days after the journalist publicised an investigation of a corruption scheme related to the head of the State Committee for National Security, Kamchybek

Tashiev. Temirov was released on 23 January 2022 but was arrested again in **April 2022**, this time for alleged forgery of documents for his Kyrgyz ID. This arrest occurred only shortly after he released another investigation related to Kamchybek's son. In September 2022, Bolot was found innocent of drug charges. While he was found guilty of document forgery, the court decided that the statute of limitations had expired on these charges. After what seemed like the end of a prolonged case of judicial harassment, Bolot was deported to Russia on **23 November 2022**, despite the legitimacy of his Kyrgyz citizenship.



Union workers of the NagaWorld casino are protesting the mass layoffs of workers. Photo courtesy of CIVICUS

On **3 January 2022**, 16 union workers from the NagaWorld casino were arrested during a protest, only a few days after the arrest of 10 workers during another protest held on New Year's Eve in 2021. These protests were held in response to the mass layoffs of more than 1,300 workers at NagaWorld casino in **April 2021** and demanded the reinstatement of at least 365 workers who were laid off.

Chhim Sithar, the NagaWorld union president, was also violently arrested while attempting to join the ongoing strike on 3 January 2022. While some of the arrested HRDs were eventually released, 8 defenders including Chhim remain detained under Articles 494 and 495 of the Criminal Code for incitement to commit a felony or to disturb social security.



Nodeep Kaur is a labour rights Dalit WHRD in India.

Photo by [NewsClick](#)

On **12 January 2021**, Nodeep Kaur, a labour rights Dalit WHRD in India, was arrested for participating in the farmers' protest on the outskirts of Delhi, with charges of attempted murder and extortion. She was then reportedly beaten and sexually assaulted by the police while in custody.

This was evidenced by injuries on her body including her 'private parts,' which were found during a medical examination. Her bail request was rejected on 3 February 2021, and the police have denied allegations of torture and sexual assault.



# PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

2021 and 2022 have seen a drastic rise in the use of physical violence, including the use of excessive force, torture, killing, sexual violence, and raids against HRDs. FORUM-ASIA recorded a total of 516 cases of physical violence, with at least 1,711 individuals affected. The rise of physical violence as the second most common violation against HRDs – compared to previous years when physical violence ranked as the third most common violation following intimidation and threats – is a worrying trend that suggests violations against HRDs have become more severe and palpable.

The increase in cases of physical violence may be attributed to growing militarisation and geopolitical tensions in the region, such as the attempted military coup in Myanmar and the Taliban

takeover of Afghanistan. 109 cases of physical violence, or more than 20% of the total cases of physical violence, came from Myanmar; 53 of these cases further resulted in the death of HRDs due to physical assault or while in detention by military or police forces. Following Myanmar, Indonesia (68 cases), India (67 cases) and Afghanistan (48 cases) have also seen a rise in cases of physical violence against HRDs.

The police and the military were the most frequent perpetrators of physical violence, with 290 cases involving the police and 89 cases involving the military and armed forces. Some non-state actors, such as corporations and extremist groups, have also committed physical violence against HRDs.



Physical violence was often inflicted to disband peaceful protests and demonstrations, for example with the use of water cannons, teargas, and beatings. Some cases even involved gunshots and the firing of grenades at HRDs, a handful of which have resulted in their death. In other incidents, houses and offices of HRDs, including pro-democracy defenders, media workers, NGOs, and labour unions, were raided by police and military forces. Some of these incidents also involved arbitrary detention and searches without warrants. Finally, there were also cases of mistreatment and assault against HRDs while in detention, leaving them in severely poor health conditions, which at times led to their death.

Cases of physical violence out of 1,636 total violations



One hundred and four of the 516 cases of physical violence resulted in the death of HRDs and their family members, with at least 188 individuals who died as a result. The groups of HRDs who were killed in these cases included pro-democracy defenders (49 cases), media workers (16 cases), youth and student HRDs (16 cases), WHRDs (15 cases) and community-based HRDs (13 cases). Some cases further involved families of HRDs. There were, for example, 7 cases of violations involving family members from Myanmar and Afghanistan in 2021 and 2022. In these cases,

the family members were killed, abducted, or injured, mostly by the police or armed forces who were searching for HRDs.

FORUM-ASIA recorded 17 cases of torture and 3 cases of sexual violence against HRDs between 2021 and 2022. More cases are likely to have occurred but have not been reported due to the stigma and humiliation that victims endured in these violations. Torture is the intentional infliction of 'severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental,' conducted to obtain



information, punish, intimidate, or for any reason based on discrimination.<sup>7</sup> Gender-based violence ‘includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty’ on the basis of one’s gender.<sup>8</sup> It can also include a range of acts conducted to humiliate, intimidate or otherwise exert power over a person. It disproportionately affects women and other gender minority groups. Both acts of violence are severe violations of international human rights norms and inflict long-lasting trauma, physically and mentally, on HRDs.

Physical violence against HRDs affects a wide range of their rights, such as the right to a healthy and safe environment (432 cases), freedom of expression (377 cases), and the right to liberty and security (193 cases). In cases of physical violence that took place during the disbandment of peaceful protests and demonstrations, HRDs’ right to protest and right to freedom of assembly were further violated. Moreover, HRD’s right to life was heavily impacted in cases of physical violence, especially since many of these incidents resulted in injuring or, at worst, killing HRDs.

**“ The rise of physical violence as the second most common violation against HRDs ... is a worrying trend that suggests violations against HRDs have become more severe and palpable.**



Ah Khu was a WHRD and a director of Women for Justice, an organisation that advocated to stop violence against women. Photo by C3/[The Irrawaddy](#)

On **28 March 2021**, Ah Khu, a WHRD from the Chin state and a leader of the civil society organisation (CSO), Women for Justice, was shot to death by security forces during an anti-regime protest in Sagaing Division. The WHRD was protesting when soldiers began to open fire at protestors. Other protestors also claimed that they heard explosions that were likely grenades.

Without being able to identify the shooter, Ah Khu fell after being gunned down. She was then taken to the doctor by her friends. After failing to resuscitate her, the doctors turned them away due to fears of retaliation from authorities for assisting the WHRD. Her body was then taken to her birthplace in the Chin Hills 15 hours away by car.



Police are forcefully dispersing protestors in front of Din Daeng police station in Bangkok, Thailand. Photo by Peerapon Boonyakiat/SOPA Image/Shutterstock

On **29 October 2021**, in Bangkok, Thailand, the police violently dispersed a protest outside Din Daeng police station and arrested two protestors, Attasith Nussa and Weeraphap Wongsaman. According to the HRDs, the police beat, choked, kicked, and punched them while in custody. Moreover, they slammed Attasith's head against a wooden bench, burned them with cigarettes, and threatened them with death.

Attasith and Weeraphap were released by a court order on 30 October 2021. They filed a complaint with the House of Representatives Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights on the mistreatment and torture they endured while in detention. As of date, there has been no investigation from Thai authorities on these allegations, and no police officer has been disciplined or charged for police brutality.



Mariyam Akhtar Pakhi is a Bangladeshi WHRD and head of Mayadwip Shishu Patshala, a school for children from low-income households. Photo courtesy of Front Line Defenders

On **22 January 2022**, Mariyam Akhtar Pakhi, a Bangladeshi WHRD and head of Mayadwip Shishu Patshala – a school for children from low-income households – was raided and assaulted in her house with her family. Mohammad Hashem, the local leader of the ruling party, Awami League, forcefully entered Mariyam’s house with at least 20 armed men and attacked Mariyam, her elderly mother, two brothers, and her infant daughter.

The men also looted the house and set it on fire. Immediately after the attacks, on 23 January 2022, Mariyam reported the incident at the Sonargoan Police Station. Nevertheless, the WHRD and her family continued to face intimidation and threats from the local leaders of the Awami League, including threats to kill them if they returned to their houses.



Forouzan Safi was one of Afghan WHRDs who were killed after the Taliban takeover.  
Photo courtesy of Masih Alinejad/Twitter

On **27 October 2021**, four WHRDs were found dead with bullet wounds on their bodies in Afghanistan's Mazar-e-Sharif province. While three of the four WHRDs remain unidentified, one was recognised as civil rights defender, Forouzan Safi. Before her disappearance, Forouzan called her husband, Mohammad

Sabir Bator, an HRD living in Iran at that time, saying that she had received calls from a human rights organisation that claimed to assist HRDs in Afghanistan. Her husband suspected that she, along with the other WHRDs, was killed in a pre-arranged plan to identify and kill them.



# INTIMIDATION AND THREATS

Intimidation and threats were the third most common violation against HRDs in 2021 and 2022. FORUM-ASIA recorded 316 cases of intimidation and threats including online attacks and harassment as well as death threats. This affected a total of 736 individuals and organisations. The most affected groups of HRDs were media workers (131 cases), WHRDs (86 cases), and environmental, land rights, indigenous, and community-based defenders (60 cases).

Intimidation and threats usually have psychological impacts on HRDs and impinge on both their well-being and the effectiveness of their work. These tactics often include vilification and public bullying of HRDs to make it difficult for them to safely live and carry out their human rights work.

**“ Intimidation and threats usually have psychological impacts on HRDs and impinge on both their well-being and the effectiveness of their work.**

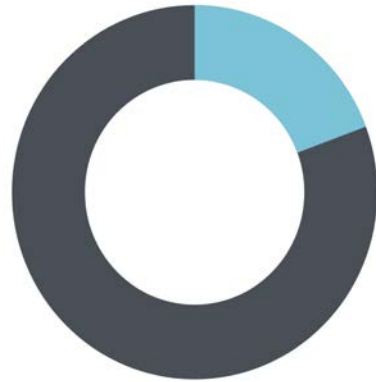
Intimidation and threats are most frequently used by state actors such as the police (139 cases) and government officials (47 cases). Non-state actors (113 cases) such as corporations and extremist groups have also frequently utilised intimidation and threats against HRDs to halt and suppress their work. Some of the intimidation tactics used were as extreme as issuing death threats against HRDs and their family members.

“ **HRDs are often intimidated and threatened in their workplaces or homes, creating an insecure environment for HRDs both professionally and personally.**”

Between 2021 and 2022, there were 44 cases of death threats recorded, in which 93 individuals and organisations were affected. These cases mostly involved media workers (22 cases), WHRDs (10 cases), families of HRDs (6 cases), and community-based HRDs (5 cases). At least 14 of these cases were followed by physical violence, including through the infliction of wounds and injuries, raids, and torture. While the perpetrators of many of these death threats remain unidentified, most of the known perpetrators were non-state actors (17 cases) such as corporation managers and community members that support such companies, as well as extremist groups.

As more HRDs utilise online platforms for human rights advocacy and collaboration, online attacks and harassment have also become more prevalent. In the period under review, there were 44 cases of online attacks

Cases of intimidation and threats out of 1,636 total violations



- 316 cases of intimidation and threats
- 1,320 other cases

and harassment, affecting 104 individuals and organisations. More attacks and harassment perpetrated online are likely to have occurred but remain underreported due to difficulties in tracing perpetrators. This is made possible by the anonymity afforded by online platforms. Some examples of online attacks and harassment included doxing — which is the malicious publishing of personal information online — online vilification, red-tagging, hacking, and blocking of online accounts.



While in many of these cases, the perpetrator of online attacks and harassment is not immediately identified, often these violations are further exacerbated by other forms of violations such as public bullying, and secondary attacks on HRDs. State actors' negligence or refusal to act on these incidents of online harassment, and their role in committing these violations, further endanger HRDs.

HRDs' right to a healthy and safe environment and freedom of expression are the two most

violated rights during incidents of intimidation and threats. HRDs are often intimidated and threatened in their workplaces or homes, creating an insecure environment for HRDs both professionally and personally. Whether it be threats of arrest and harassment from state actors, death threats via anonymous calls, or online attacks such as blocking HRDs' access to their online accounts, each is a serious form of violation of HRDs' rights.



Karapatan is a human rights organisation based in the Philippines and a member organisation of FORUM-ASIA. Logo courtesy of Karapatan

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Throughout [2021](#), Karapatan, a human rights organisation based in the Philippines, was targeted by military-orchestrated cyberattacks. The attacks were linked back to the Department of Science and Technology and the Philippine Army. Two other news organisations, Bulatlat and Altermidya, were also targeted by these digital attacks and further red-tagged and vilified by state actors.

The three organisations also received attacks in the form of distributed denial of service (DDoS) in at least five separate incidents throughout [May and June 2021](#). Further, between July and August 2021, Karapatan received more DDoS attacks on its website, which coincided with their #StopTheKillingsPH online campaign.



Informal Sector Service Centre [INSEC]  
for human rights and social justice



WOREC

INSEC and WOREC are human rights organisations in Nepal and are member organisations of FORUM-ASIA. Logos courtesy of INSEC and WOREC

On 22 January 2021, Durga Pariyar, Renu Karna, Dev Kumari Mahara, and Anita Chaudhary, Nepali WHRDs and staff members of human rights organisations, Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) and Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), were abused and intimidated at Lahan Area Police Office. They were gathered at the police office to discuss the case of a 20-year-old pregnant woman who suffered domestic violence, and to explore

how authorities may be able to support and provide shelter to her. The police, however, attempted to take the victim of domestic violence out of the station. The WHRDs protested this. In response, they were verbally abused and mistreated by the police. Later Deputy Superintendent of Police, Sarat Kumar Thapa Chhetri, of the Lahan Area Police Office, apologised and claimed this was a mistake made by the police while he was away.



Bui Van Thuan is a Vietnamese activist who has been in detention since August 2021. Photo courtesy of the 88 Project

On [17 March 2022](#), Trinh Thi Nhung, wife of Bui Van Thuan — a social media activist that has been in detention since August 2021 — was summoned by the Thanh Hoa Province Police Investigation Bureau. Her summoning came shortly after she made a social media post about her husband’s legal situation and health condition on social media. She was further threatened with arrest if she continued to publish articles about her husband. In addition, Trinh had also been visited by a series of unknown individuals, one of whom

tried to break into her house and asked her questions about how she paid for her children’s meals. Later, on [20 October 2022](#), a masked man also insulted her in front of her house, accused her of receiving money from someone while her husband was in prison and told her to move out of her house. Trinh filed a complaint with the commune police on the latter incident on 24 October 2022, but the police did not assist her and said that there was no basis for tracking the man because there was no actual break-in.



Dr Mahim Mendis is a leading academic activist from Open University.  
Photo courtesy of Dr Mahim Mendis/Open University of Sri Lanka

Confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic and an economic crisis, the Sri Lankan government cracked down on students and teachers in the Sinhala-dominated south, where academic protests against the militarisation of higher education had been taking place. The protests were met with hostility and intimidation from both state and non-state actors. On **3 August 2021**, for example, Dr Mahim Mendis, a leading academic activist from Open University, was threatened by an unidentified caller who said

they did not like what he said at the Federation of University Teachers' Association (FUTA) protest held on that same day. Mahim further continued to receive threats thereafter. The police and other unidentified actors also threatened former members of the Inter University Students' Federation (IUSF) with death and kidnapping. Rathkarawwe Jinarathana Thero, former IUSF leader and Buddhist monk, for example, received threats of abduction over phone calls.

# OTHER VIOLATIONS

Apart from the main violations analysed previously, FORUM-ASIA also documented other types of violations that HRDs experienced in 2021 and 2022. While these were not recorded in the same frequency as the main violations, they nonetheless had serious impacts on HRDs and their ability to promote and protect human rights in the region.

## **Administrative Harassment**

Administrative harassment is a type of harassment that involves the use of bureaucratic or administrative procedures and processes to create obstacles, delays, and other difficulties for HRDs or organisations. Some examples of administrative harassment imposed on HRDs include the revocation of professional or

organisational licences (including the ability to receive funds from abroad), administrative actions aimed at the prevention of the organisation of protests and demonstrations, suspension of bank accounts, state-authorised demolitions of offices, denial of medical treatment, and layoffs.

In 2021 and 2022, there were 134 cases of administrative harassment affecting 303 individuals and organisations. Groups of HRDs who were frequently affected by this category of violations were WHRDs (33 cases), pro-democracy defenders (26 cases), student and youth HRDs (28 cases), and environmental rights, land rights, indigenous, and community-based HRDs (24 cases). Other groups affected were: labour rights defenders (17 cases), who

faced collective layoffs and were prevented from organising and/or attending demonstrations and rallies; NGOs (23 cases), whose bank accounts were frozen and whose licences were revoked; and human rights lawyers (16 cases), who faced disciplinary actions and whose licence to practise was commonly revoked.

One example of this violation in practice can be seen in the case of Odhikar, a human rights organisation in Bangladesh that has faced prolonged administrative harassment. On [5 June 2022](#), 8 years after Odhikar's initial application to renew its registration in 2014, the organisation received a letter refusing its renewal from the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB). This decision came out 5 months after the NGOAB requested information from Odhikar, such as the names and addresses of persons who were

victims of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances between 2009 and 2021, as Odhikar previously documented and published about these violations. In the refusal letter, the NGOAB mentioned 'financial inconsistencies and negative activities' as well as 'misleading information' regarding Odhikar's publication of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. This decision by the NGOAB to de-register Odhikar was upheld by the Prime Minister's Office on 1 September 2022. The harassment that Odhikar has faced is not only administrative, as key staff members of Odhikar have also been subject to judicial harassment since 2013. The aggravated impact of court proceedings and judicial harassment faced by Odhikar's staff on top of the administrative harassment reflects Bangladesh's hostile environment toward HRDs, where attempts are being taken to impede the proper operation of NGOs and NGO staff in the country.



Odhikar is a human rights organisation in Bangladesh and a member organisation of FORUM-ASIA. Logo courtesy of Odhikar

### Restrictions on Movement and Surveillance

Surveillance and restrictions on HRDs' movement, either through travel restrictions or direct physical restrictions on movement, were also common forms of violations against HRDs. A total of 132 cases, with at least 357 individuals and organisations affected, were

recorded in the period under review. Incidents concerning restrictions on movement and surveillance curtail HRDs' fundamental rights, including their freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and right to a healthy and safe environment. They also impinge on HRDs' well-being and work.

There were 25 cases recorded in which HRDs were restricted from engaging in international or national travel. Some cases involved the deporting of recently relocated HRDs. In 2 cases of deportation, for example, Chinese and Pakistani HRDs who were relocated respectively to Vietnam and Malaysia with refugee statuses were deported. This reflects a growing trend of transnational repression of HRDs in Asia.

Other cases involved local restrictions on movement, such as the case concerning the staff of the Indonesian Legal Aid

Foundation (YLBHI). YLBHI staff were at an internal meeting and management gathering at a villa in Sanur, Bali, on [12 November 2022](#), right before the G20 Bali Summit. During this meeting, several YLBHI staff were banned from leaving the villa by the Pecalang (village officials), including one person who had a flight to catch. While some participants were allowed to leave, upon their departure they were followed by unidentified vehicles. It was further reported that the Pecalang watched the villa until the next morning. This was a clear violation of the YLBHI staff's freedom of assembly, freedom of movement, right to a healthy and safe environment, and right to privacy. This was likely the Indonesian government's attempt to suppress HRDs' work and to avoid international attention on the country's human rights situation during the G20 Summit.

FORUM-ASIA also recorded 50 cases of surveillance, many of which were also accompanied by physical restraints on the HRDs' movement such as detention and house arrests. Pro-democracy defenders (20 cases) and WHRDs (16 cases) were the groups of HRDs most subject to surveillance. The police were the primary perpetrator, being involved in 40 out of 50 cases of surveillance.



YLBHI is a human rights organisation providing legal aid services in Indonesia and a member organisation of FORUM-ASIA. Logo courtesy of YLBHI





Local police are questioning environmental HRDs in a 600-kilometre cycling campaign for World Environment Day. Photo by Kim Chilin/[CamboJA News](#)

One emblematic example of an incident of surveillance can be seen in Cambodia. On [10 May 2022](#), 25 youth environmental rights defenders celebrated World Environment Day with a 600-kilometre cycling campaign. They were followed, questioned, and monitored by local authorities along the way. In some cases, the local authorities even camped with the defenders overnight, thereby restricting them in what they could say or do during the campaign. While the Government claimed that these actions were taken as safety measures, this was likely a form of surveillance against the defenders, especially considering

that the environmental defenders who protested illegal logging in the Prey Lang forest, who participated in the cycling campaign, had already been harassed and arrested by authorities in the past.

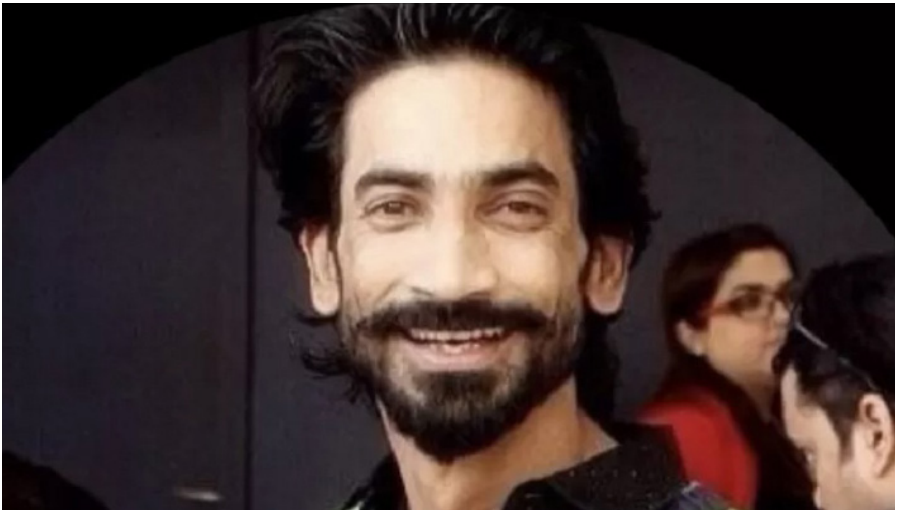
### [Abduction/Kidnapping](#)

In 2021 and 2022, FORUM-ASIA recorded 46 cases of abduction/kidnapping, the highest number of which were recorded in Myanmar (12 cases), Afghanistan (9 cases), and India (6 cases). WHRDs (15 cases) and media workers (12 cases) were most affected by abduction/kidnapping. The police (14 cases) and the military/armed forces (10 cases) were the main perpetrators

of this violation, in which case it can be considered an 'enforced disappearance' by the state.<sup>9</sup> Some cases also involved non-state actors (10 cases), and in others the perpetrator was not identified. About half of these cases were accompanied by physical violence, and 4 resulted in the death of HRDs and their family members. While in some of these cases, HRDs were eventually found and released, in many, the whereabouts of abducted/kidnapped HRDs remain unknown.

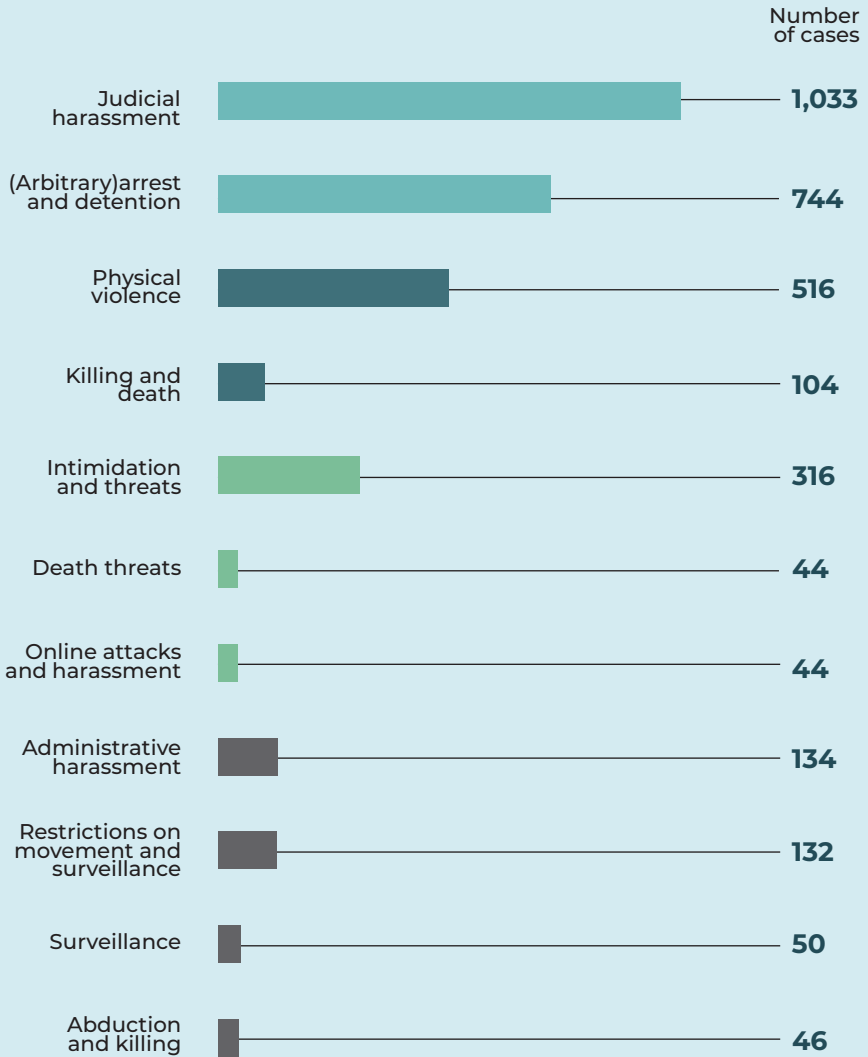
On 24 June 2022, for example, Arsalan Khan, a Pakistani journalist and social media activist based in Karachi went missing.

The police denied any involvement in the disappearance of Arsalan and claimed that no missing report had been lodged. His friends, however, claimed that he was picked up by law enforcement. His wife further claimed that she attempted to report his disappearance at the Clifton police station, but the police refused to register his case. CSOs and the Karachi Union of Journalists (KUJ) asserted that Arsalan was illegally detained due to his activism on social media. This incident is a serious attack on the HRD's freedom of expression, right to liberty, and right to work in a safe environment.



Arsalan Khan is a Pakistani journalist and social media activist based in Karachi. Photo courtesy of Naimat Khan/Twitter

# SUMMARY OF KEY VIOLATIONS AGAINST HRDS IN 2021 - 2022





A white magnifying glass is centered on a dark teal background. The handle of the magnifying glass extends from the bottom right towards the center. A thin, wavy red line runs horizontally across the middle of the image, passing behind the magnifying glass's frame. The text "SCANNING THE PERPETRATORS" is written in white, bold, uppercase letters inside the circular lens of the magnifying glass.

**SCANNING THE  
PERPETRATORS**



# PERPETRATORS OF ATTACKS

State actors were recorded as perpetrators in majority of the cases documented in the period under review. They were complicit in 1,354 of the total 1,636 cases recorded – equal to nearly 83% of all cases. Police accounted for 846 violations documented, followed by the judiciary (368 cases), the military (134 cases), and government actors at the central and local levels (116 cases).

Compared to past years, the number of violations perpetrated by the military was much higher, with 134 cases recorded. This mostly stems from their role in the attempted coup in Myanmar, where they currently occupy the self-proclaimed and de facto ruling authority. They have been responsible for mass violations and atrocities committed against

civilians, including HRDs, daily. Their actions were often supported by police and the judiciary, which have systematically used the revised Article 505 on fake news and other incitement offences in the Myanmar Penal Code to imprison defenders. The attempted coup turned Myanmar into a country dominated by absolute military rule, where even laws are weaponised to strengthen the military's grip on power. This has created a context where the military, police, and their supporters, commit violations with impunity.

Defenders in other countries also faced widespread attacks by state actors. In Kazakhstan, in response to mass demonstrations in January 2022, police systematically used excessive force and arrested protesters.



People are attending protest in Kazakhstan. Photo by Esetok/Wikimedia Commons

The physical violence and the casualties that resulted from these incidents were left unpunished. In the following months, multiple rallies countrywide were further staged to demand justice for those protestors killed, injured, or arrested. Authorities responded by arresting demonstrators, including HRDs, some of whom remained behind bars for months.

In Sri Lanka, following the resignation of former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, human rights violations persisted under the rule of newly appointed

President Ranil Wickremesinghe, who took office in July 2022. The President declared a state of emergency between July and August 2022, in response to mass protests calling for government accountability, a resolution to the country's economic crisis, and an end to corruption. Under this state of emergency, the power of the police and armed forces was expanded, while civic space shrunk. FORUM-ASIA further documented several human rights violations that employed similar tactics by the preceding President.



“ Compared to past years, the number of violations perpetrated by the military was much higher, with 134 cases recorded.

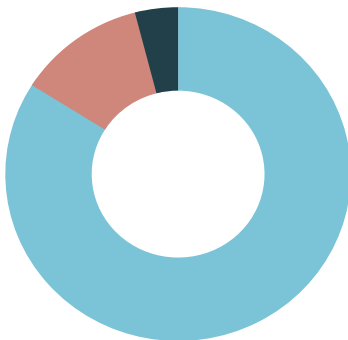
Defenders were consistently attacked and criminalised for their peaceful activities, and their demands for justice and improved living conditions remained unaddressed.

Non-state actors, on the other hand, were perpetrators in 194 cases. Several of the recorded violations by non-state actors were attributed to the Taliban, whose takeover of Afghanistan has led to the severe deterioration of human rights conditions in the country.

Since they assumed power on 15 August 2021, based on FORUM-ASIA’s documentation, all violations recorded in Afghanistan where the perpetrator was known were committed by the Taliban. They have de facto administered Afghanistan since the takeover, despite having very limited international recognition. Their rule has been characterised by the imposition of oppressive rules and restrictions that curtail people’s fundamental freedoms and rights, especially the rights of women and girls, as well as ethnic and religious minorities.

HRDs were also constantly targeted by the Taliban, with several incidents of surveillance and house raids recorded.

### KEY PERPETRATORS OF ATTACKS AGAINST HRDS IN 2021 - 2022



Number of cases	
State actors	1,354
Non-state actors	194
Unknown	65



The Taliban is celebrating in Kabul in September 2022. Photo by Callum Darragh/Flickr

Oftentimes this harassment was further extended to HRDs' family members. Due to the dire conditions in the country, the majority of HRDs in Afghanistan resorted to hiding or seeking internal relocation to avoid being harassed, as well as arrested, tortured or killed. Others sought relocation to bordering countries. Moving away from Afghanistan, however, did not put an end to the harassment of HRDs, since the Taliban has presence in several of the bordering countries where HRDs relocated to.

“ Since they assumed power on 15 August 2021, based on FORUM-ASIA's documentation, all violations recorded in Afghanistan where the perpetrator was known were committed by the Taliban.

“ There were 65 cases of violations against HRDs recorded where the perpetrator was unknown. This reflects the climate of impunity that exists across Asia.

HRDs who fled also often found themselves in precarious situations financially and legally as they struggled to acquire and extend visas, find a safe shelter and apply for work. The compounding effect of these circumstances took a toll on the psychosocial well-being of defenders.

Within the category of non-state actors, corporations were responsible for 46 out of the 194 cases recorded for this group of perpetrators. Land and environmental defenders, indigenous people's rights defenders, and investigative media workers were the key groups primarily targeted by non-state actors.

The most common violation committed by non-state actors was judicial harassment, notably through the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), which are lawsuits filed with the purpose of criminalising, delegitimising defenders and deterring HRDs from conducting their work, often by dragging them into long and exhausting series of trials that work to drain their time, money and energy.

SLAPPs are often filed against HRDs to demotivate them. In this sense, they can have substantial effects on HRDs' well-being.

Corporations are common perpetrators as they often operate in contexts where their actions are supported by state actors that prioritise economic growth at the expense of human rights. Consequently, it was not unusual for police and the judiciary to collude with corporations in committing, or at least turning a blind eye to, human rights violations committed by business corporations. In FORUM-ASIA's documentation, for example, there were recorded cases of defenders advocating against corporate abuses who faced harassment by state actors, strongly suggesting that there was collusion between the two. Other violations perpetrated by business corporations included intimidation and threats, physical violence, and there was even one recorded case where an HRD was killed.

There were 65 cases of violations against HRDs recorded where the perpetrator was unknown. This reflects the climate of impunity that exists across Asia, where

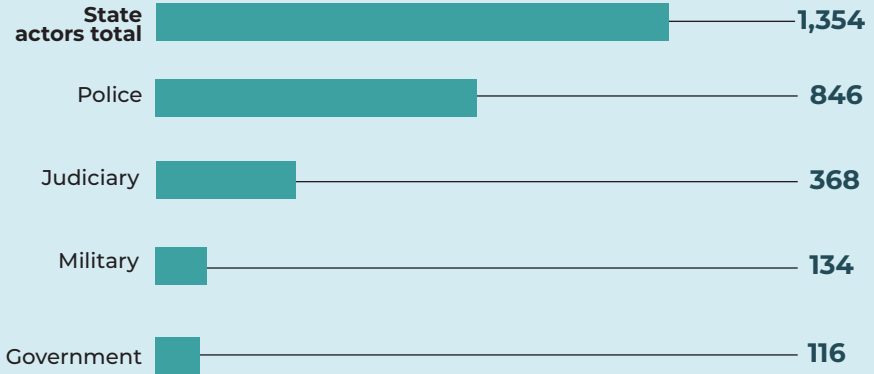
perpetrators are too often left unidentified and inadequately held accountable for their actions. The context is further exacerbated by the lack of attention authorities give to threats reported by HRDs, especially before they escalate into life-threatening forms of harm.

Alarming, the perpetrator was unknown in many cases involving physical violence (38 cases). At least 16 out of these 38 cases were

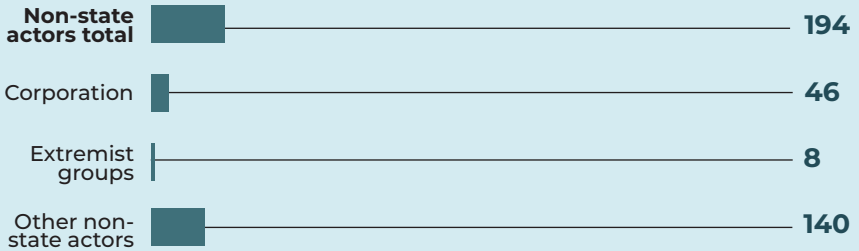
incidents that involved the direct killing of HRDs and at least three were incidents of physical violence that led to the death of defenders such as mistreatment in custody. The fact that the perpetrators of grave violations remain unknown indicates the failure of state actors to conduct investigations on attacks against HRDs and in ensuring that their and their family members' right to justice and effective remedies are secured.

# SUMMARY OF KEY PERPETRATORS OF ATTACKS IN 2021 - 2022

Number of cases recorded involving state actors



Number of cases recorded involving non-state actors



Number of cases recorded where the perpetrator was unknown





# Human Rights Defenders at Highest Risk

Pro-Democracy Defenders	61
Women Human Rights and SOGI Rights Defenders	69
Land, Indigenous, Environmental, and Community-Based Defenders	77
Other Groups of Human Rights Defenders	84





# PRO-DEMOCRACY DEFENDERS

Pro-democracy defenders are those who conduct human rights work for the establishment of democratic values and norms in society. The work of pro-democracy defenders in Asia is crucial as many countries in the region are still struggling to establish and secure democratic systems, characterised by free and fair elections and respect for human rights. In 2021 and 2022, despite growing geopolitical tensions and a rise in authoritarianism in the region, pro-democracy defenders worked relentlessly in countries such as Myanmar, Thailand, China, Kazakhstan, and Vietnam, among others, even as they faced life-threatening risks and harassment from both state and non-state actors. For this reason, pro-democracy defenders were documented as the group of HRDs at the highest risk in Asia.

“ The work of pro-democracy defenders in Asia is crucial as many countries in the region are still struggling to establish and secure democratic systems.

In the two years under review, there were 450 cases of violations against pro-democracy defenders, which affected at least 1,622 defenders. The highest number of violations against pro-democracy HRDs were recorded in Myanmar (132 cases), Thailand (132 cases), and China (74 cases) — countries characterised by tumultuous and repressive political conditions that create hostile environments for HRDs to conduct their work.

“ As the methods that pro-democracy defenders use for their human rights work diversify — from street protests to social media campaigns to artistic projects — the violations against them also intensify.

Of the 450 cases involving pro-democracy defenders, about 33% involved student and youth defenders (148 cases), and 30% involved WHRDs (131 cases).

Pro-democracy defenders were mostly targeted by state actors such as the police (231 cases), judiciary (162 cases) and armed forces/military (78 cases). They were also harassed by non-state actors including extremist groups (12 cases).

As the methods that pro-democracy defenders use for their human rights work diversify — from street protests to social media campaigns to artistic projects — the violations against them also intensify. The most common type of violation that pro-democracy defenders experienced was judicial harassment. Three hundred and forty-seven out of the 450 cases of violations against pro-democracy defenders involved judicial

Cases affecting pro-democracy defenders out of 1,636 total violations



■ 450 cases affecting pro-democracy defenders

■ 1,186 other cases

harassment, including (arbitrary) arrest and detention, denial of a fair trial, and enactment of repressive legislation and policies. Much of such harassment was perpetrated in response to HRDs' participation in, or organisation of, protests and rallies.

Next to judicial harassment, pro-democracy defenders were also commonly affected by physical violence. Out of 516 cases of violence, 134 cases involved direct physical attacks against pro-democracy defenders, 49 of which resulted in their deaths.

In most of these cases, the primary perpetrators were the police or armed forces such as the military.

The rights most commonly violated in incidents affecting pro-democracy defenders were freedom of expression (349 cases), right to liberty and security (276 cases), right to protest and/or freedom of assembly (231 cases), and right to a healthy and safe environment (157 cases).

There were also cases where their right to life and right to health were infringed upon. In some incidents recorded, for example, pro-democracy defenders were subjected to inhumane conditions in detention, while others reportedly contracted COVID-19 in detention due to the poor implementation of public health measures in such facilities.



Tantawan Tuatulanon is a Thai pro-democracy youth and WHRD.  
Photo by [Prachatai](#)

Tantawan Tuatulanon is a Thai pro-democracy youth and WHRD who has repeatedly been harassed for advocating for the reform of the monarchy. She was first arrested on [26 February 2022](#) for conducting a poll on whether the royal defamation law should be repealed. On 5 March 2022, she was arrested again for live streaming herself during a royal procession. On [6 March 2022](#), Tantawan was charged with royal defamation, for

reportedly resisting officers, and violating the repressive Computer Crimes Act. Despite being granted bail initially, this was revoked on 20 April 2022 based on claims that she violated bail conditions by driving close to a royal motorcade on 17 March 2022. Her bail request has since been repeatedly denied, leading Tantawan to stage a [hunger strike](#) that lasted more than a month.



Wai Yan Phyo Moe is a student leader who took part in anti-coup demonstration in Myanmar. Photo by [Myanmar Now](#)

On [3 March 2021](#), Wai Yan Phyo Moe, a prominent student leader from Myanmar, was arrested by the authorities alongside other fellow students, Sitt Naing, Lay Pyay Soe Moe, and Thuta Soe, for taking part in an anti-coup demonstration in Yangon. He was found guilty of incitement almost a year later, in [February 2022](#). While in detention, Wai Yan Phyo Moe, Sitt Naing, Lay Pyay Soe Moe, and around 90 other inmates were brutally beaten by

prison guards for staging a silent strike against the junta on Human Rights Day, 10 December 2021. They were further tortured and placed in solitary confinement for taking part in this strike. In [September 2022](#), Wai Yan Phyo Moe was tried for the second time on additional incitement charges for his activities before the attempted coup, adding two years to his prison sentence and bringing his total prison term to seven years.



Protestors are on the streets in Sri Lanka demanding democracy and the resignation of the Rajapaksa administration. Photo by Eranga Jayawardena/[AP](#)

Amidst escalating anti-government and pro-democracy protests in Sri Lanka, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa declared a state of emergency and enforced stricter security laws to allegedly 'ensure public order.' The protests, having begun in [March 2022](#) and lasted

for several months, gathered thousands of student protestors on the streets. The police continuously attempted to disperse the protests using tear gas and water cannons. Protestors remained resilient and persisted in demanding their civil, political, and economic rights.





Protestors in Kazakhstan were surrounded by the police in a so-called 'kettling' tactic on 10 January 2021. Photo by Ayan Kalmurat/[Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#)

On **10 January 2021**, a few dozen HRDs in Kazakhstan marching in Almaty to protest the recent parliamentary elections were harassed by the police through an aggressive crowd-control tactic known as 'kettling'. This tactic involves temporarily trapping crowds into a small area and blocking people from leaving. It has widely been critiqued as it restrains people's movement and increases the likelihood of violence ensuing by forcing people to be near one another under uncomfortable conditions.

The Kazakh police used this tactic to block protestors from marching, forcing them to stand together in freezing temperatures for around seven to nine hours without food, water, or access to a bathroom. They were then humiliated and subjected to psychological pressure by police, who in an act of provocation, repeatedly played a song through loudspeakers. Among the group of protestors, there was one pregnant woman and two children. At least one protestor collapsed due to hypothermia and was picked up by an ambulance.





# WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOGI RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) are any women<sup>10</sup> and gender non-conforming persons who advocate for human rights, as well as organisations or persons of any gender who advocate for women's rights and/or gender equality. In many Asian countries, merely speaking up on these issues can put one's security and life at risk, yet many WHRDs persistently fight for this cause.

WHRDs face multiple threats and challenges from both state and non-state actors. Consequently, they are ranked as the second-highest group of HRDs at risk in the periods between 2021 and 2022. There were 443 cases of violations in which 1,633 WHRDs' rights were affected.

Many WHRDs were also pro-democracy defenders (131 cases), student and youth defenders (89 cases), community-based HRDs (84 cases), and media workers (73 cases).

WHRDs were mostly commonly subjected to violations such as judicial harassment, physical violence, intimidation, and threats. Beyond these risks, WHRDs also faced additional gender-based challenges. WHRDs are commonly perceived as challenging 'entrenched gender stereotypes and deeply held ideas and norms about who women are and how women should be.'<sup>11</sup> As a consequence, they are often discriminated against, marginalised and belittled.

“ **WHRDs are commonly perceived as challenging ‘entrenched gender stereotypes’ ... As a consequence, they are often discriminated against, marginalised and belittled.**

Gender-based violence, often through sexual violence, or the ‘threat of violence,’ is also commonly used to silence WHRDs.<sup>12</sup>

All the cases that FORUM-ASIA recorded in 2021 and 2022 which involved gender-based harassment and sexual violence were committed against WHRDs. Some of these cases were perpetrated by the police, who sexually assaulted or verbally abused WHRDs using misogynistic language. Others were perpetrated by extremist and right-wing groups. Records show that these groups have engaged in acts such as molesting and sexually assaulting WHRDs during protests, attempting to break into WHRD’s home, and threatening WHRDs with rape and murder. These incidents show how attacks against WHRDs draw on patriarchal structures and often involve perpetrators seeking to assert their dominance over WHRDs.

Cases affecting WHRD and SOGI rights defenders out of 1,636 total violations



- 443 cases affecting WHRDs
- 14 cases affecting SOGI rights defenders
- 1,184 other cases

As an important aspect of gender equality is having the freedom to express one’s gender identity, HRDs that work on putting an end to discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), or SOGI rights defenders, were another group of HRDs commonly exposed to risks. However, due to the repressive and hostile approaches of many Asian governments and

“ ... attacks against WHRDs draw on patriarchal structures and often involve perpetrators seeking to assert their dominance over WHRDs.

communities against SOGI rights, many SOGI rights defenders worked underground. Consequently, the violations they experience tended to be more underreported than the violations against other HRDs. In 2021 and 2022, FORUM-ASIA recorded 14 cases of violations against SOGI rights defenders, which affected at least 39 individuals and organisations. Twenty-eight of them have also been identified as WHRDs. Violations against SOGI rights defenders are most often committed in the form of intimidation and threats.

This includes online attacks and harassment, such as interference with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and other sexually or gender diverse (LGBTIQ+) groups' online events and rallies or blocking their social media accounts.

Other violations included brutal attacks, assaults, and death threats on individuals. Finally, there were also some recorded incidents of individuals being arrested and charged for organising and participating in campaigns and protests that called for SOGI rights.



SOGI rights defenders are protesting in front of the Ministry of Education in Singapore. Photo courtesy of Kirsten Han/Twitter

On **26 January 2021**, three SOGI rights defenders were arrested in Singapore for participating in a public gathering outside the Ministry of Education's (MoE) building without a permit, thereby allegedly violating the Public Order Act. The three were identified as Elijah Tay, Lune Loh, and Kokila Annamalai.

They were at the gathering to call on the MoE to end its discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in Singapore's school system and the erasure of the LGBTQ+ community in sex education. The protest was organised specifically after a trans woman pre-university student claimed that the MoE blocked her from receiving hormonal treatment.



Four WHRDs who were shot to death had worked for an NGO called Social Welfare Bureau for Assistance in Welfare & Organisational Networking (SABAWON). Logo courtesy of SABAWON

On [22 February 2021](#) in Pakistan, masked terrorists shot dead four WHRDs and vocational trainers: Naheed Bibi, Irshad Bibi, Ayesha Bibi, and Javeria Bibi. The WHRDs were in a vehicle driving near Mirali in the North Waziristan tribal district during the shooting. Their driver, Abdul Khaliq, was severely injured from the incident and was sent to a local hospital.

The four women worked for Bravo College, Bannu, as well as an NGO called Social Welfare Bureau for Assistance in Welfare & Organisational Networking (SABAWON), and gave vocational training to local women. These killings were internationally condemned as senseless attacks on women and aid workers.



Nguy Thi Khanh is an award-winning environmental WHRD in Vietnam.  
Photo by Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Southeast Asia/Wikimedia Commons

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On 9 February 2022, Nguy Thi Khanh, a Vietnamese environmental WHRD, was reported to be in detention under tax evasion charges. She promoted sustainable development and green energy and was the first Vietnamese to win the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2018 for founding and overseeing the Green Innovation and Development Center. As an environmental rights defender that criticised the use of coal and promoted green energy, she posed a challenge to the Vietnamese government's interests, which were focused on increasing the national production of coal.



People have gathered to disrupt an event planned by LGBTQ+ and feminist groups in Aqtobe, Kazakhstan. Photo by Zhanagul Zhursin/[Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#)

On **8 August 2021**, a planned event by LGBTQ+ and feminist groups in Aqtobe, Kazakhstan, was disrupted by more than 100 people who rallied against LGBTQ+ rights, claiming that they contradicted their 'traditions and religion.' Despite the fact this was a clear attempt

to intimidate the event organisers, the police did not interfere with the unsanctioned rally. This incident is in line with other cases seen in Kazakhstan, where other feminist and LGBTQ+ events and protests were disrupted by acts of intimidation and violence.





# LAND, INDIGENOUS, ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY-BASED DEFENDERS

Land, indigenous, environmental defenders, and community-based defenders were the third group of HRDs at the highest risk in 2021 and 2022. Land and environmental defenders are those who work for the protection of human rights related to land and the environment. These defenders, which work for everyone's 'enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment' are often at the forefront of facing both state and non-state actors, making them among the 'most exposed' and at-risk groups of HRDs.<sup>13</sup>



**Land and environmental defenders are those who work for the protection of human rights related to land and the environment. These defenders ... are often at the forefront of facing both state and non-state actors, making them among the 'most exposed' and at-risk groups of HRDs.**

Community-based defenders are a broad group of HRDs. They can include rural and urban-based defenders and be involved in work

covering a range of issues, from land rights to housing rights to demilitarisation. The key distinction that defines their work, however,

“ **Community-based defenders are a broad group of HRDs. They can include rural and urban-based defenders and be involved in work covering a range of issues, from land rights to housing rights to demilitarisation.**

is that they focus on issues that affect their community collectively. Other examples of rights that they advocate for include the right to self-determination and the right to a healthy and safe environment for community members.

There were 333 cases of violations against the land, indigenous, environmental, and community-based defenders, affecting 1,059 individuals and organisations. Out of the 333 cases, 190 cases specifically affected land, indigenous, and environmental defenders, and 198 cases affected community-based defenders such as Papua defenders fighting for self-determination, Dalit WHRDs advocating for equality in India, and Vietnamese community members protesting a road demolition.

The most common perpetrators against the land, indigenous, environmental, and community-

Cases affecting land, indigenous, environmental, and community-based defenders out of 1,636 total violations



333 cases affecting and, indigenous, environmental, and community-based defenders

1,303 other cases

based defenders were the police (204 cases), judiciary (61 cases), and corporations (26 cases).

The violations commonly perpetrated against these defenders included arrest and detention (157 cases), judicial harassment (152 cases), and physical violence (118 cases) including raids and forced evictions. These cases were most commonly recorded in Cambodia (54 cases), India (52 cases), Indonesia (45 cases), and the Philippines (40 cases).

The rights most often violated in cases involving land, indigenous, environmental, and community-based defenders include freedom of expression (239 cases), right to liberty and security (166 cases), right to a healthy and safe environment (158 cases), and the right to protest and/or freedom of assembly (155 cases). The protection of land, indigenous, and

environmental defenders, as well as of community-based defenders, is often 'inherently linked to the protection of their communities,' and can only be achieved through holistic approaches such as through the 'strengthening of democratic institutions, the fight against impunity, a reduction in economic inequality and equal access to justice.'<sup>14</sup>



Sukhgerel Dugersuren is a prominent environmental WHRD in Mongolia.  
Photo courtesy of Front Line Defenders

On [2 August 2022](#), Sukhgerel Dugersuren, a prominent Mongolian environmental WHRD and the Executive Director of Oyu Tolgoi Watch (OT Watch) was told by the General Intelligence Agency that she was being investigated for alleged crimes under Article 19.4 of the Criminal Code for illegal cooperation with foreign intelligence agencies.

At the same time, she also became a target of a smear campaign on social media under the same allegations. She was likely targeted with judicial and online harassment due to her extensive work investigating human and environmental rights violations in Mongolia, as well as the detrimental effects of mining, energy, and other infrastructural projects on local communities.



Protestors are opposing the militarisation of local villages in India.

Photo by [Free Press Journal](#)

On [12 May 2021](#), Indian security forces set up a military camp in Silger village in Sukma district despite opposition from local villagers. After opening the camp, community members started to protest the militarization of the area and the subsequent suppression of their rights. On 17 May 2021, when around 3,000 people were gathered at the protest, the military opened fire on the protestors. Three people were shot to death at the protest including Uska Pandu and Kowasi Waga.

State authorities have denied that these killings were conducted intentionally and maintained that the deceased were Maoists. The community members, however, have asserted that these deaths were clear attempts to suppress the community's protests and are reflective of the hostile context they work in, where too often they are attacked and injured by perpetrators who commit these violations with impunity.



Protestors from Sarawak's Miri district are supporting the 'Stop the Chop' campaign, denouncing Malaysia's timber certification scheme. Photo courtesy of the Borneo Project via [Mongabay](https://www.mongabay.com)

Samling Group, a Malaysian timber company operating in Sarawak, threatened to take legal action against the Penan and Kenyah indigenous communities that had been campaigning against the company's certified sustainable production plantations. These communities criticised the company's encroachment on their land and filed complaints with the Malaysia Timber Certification Council, alleging that the company

had not adequately consulted with the communities about their plantation. On **26 May 2021**, Samling sent a warning letter to the Long Moh village community that the company had the right to take legal action against them. Sarawak-focused environmental justice NGOs, Bruno Manser Fund and the Borneo Project claim that this is an act of judicial harassment and an attempt to silence indigenous communities.





Protestors have gathered on 24 October 2022 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan to call for the release of detained activists and opposition politicians and to protest the government's border demarcation deal with Uzbekistan. Photo by Vyacheslav Oseledko/AFP via Getty

On [23 October 2022](#), 23 people were detained in Kyrgyzstan for opposing and criticising the impending transfer of an important dam to Uzbekistan as part of the government's border demarcation agreement. Twelve of the 23 who were detained were members of a newly created group that sought to protect the Kempir-Abad water reservoir. Others included HRDs, bloggers, and politicians. All 23 people were detained for 48 hours. The court then ordered pre-trial detention for the duration of two

months for several of the detainees. It has also been alleged that before the arrests, state authorities conducted warrantless house searches on several of the HRDs and seized some of their personal property. This was the case for WHRD, Rita Karasartova, whose house was broken into by the police without taking proper steps such as presenting their IDs. When the police forcibly entered the houses of the HRDs, including Rita's, they also attempted to stop the HRDs from video recording the arrests.

# OTHER GROUPS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Beyond the three groups of HRDs at the highest risk mentioned in previous chapters, FORUM-ASIA also recorded violations that were committed against other groups of HRDs. The broad range of HRDs described in this section reflects the diversity in the type of human rights issues that HRDs are working on and the different strategies they adopt to conduct their work. Despite the challenges that they face and the lack of recognition they receive for their work, communities of HRDs continue to expand, grow, and persevere in doing their human rights work.

## **Student and Youth Defenders**

The past few years have seen an increase in participation among the younger generation in human rights

advocacy and civil society networks. This group of HRDs brought new and creative ideas about how to approach human rights issues, including by embracing the use of online platforms and other technologies. Some student and youth defenders were also WHRDs, pro-democracy defenders, minority rights defenders, and indigenous and environmental rights defenders. The participation of youth defenders has been praised by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, who noted in her recent report that it is important to give more platforms for young HRDs to raise their voices as well as to protect them in the work that they are doing.<sup>15</sup> The violations that student and youth defenders experience are





Afghan women students are protesting for their right to education.  
Photo by Mohsen Karimi/AFP

similar to those experienced by other defenders, yet attacks and harassment against them are becoming more concentrated and violent than in previous years.

In 2021 and 2022, 299 cases involved student and/or youth defenders. A total of 1,161 student and youth defenders were affected in these cases. Youth HRDs have come to play important roles in organising human rights campaigns in recent years, including online. Such campaigns were particularly prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic, where due to travel restrictions and social distancing

“ Despite the challenges that they face and the lack of recognition they receive for their work, communities of HRDs continue to expand, grow, and persevere.

rules, more human rights activities shifted to digital spaces.

There were 210 cases of judicial harassment committed against student and youth defenders to stifle their work. They were also often subjected to physical violence (115 cases).

The rights that student and youth defenders were most frequently deprived of were: freedom of expression (257 cases); right to protest and freedom of assembly (203 cases); and right to liberty and security (175 cases).

Several examples demonstrate the severity of violations against student and youth defenders. On [30 October 2022](#) in Afghanistan, women students participating in a demonstration at Badakhshan University were beaten and arrested. They were protesting the Taliban's decision to prohibit women and girls who were not wearing burqas from entering the university, which violated women's right to education. This is not an isolated case of violence against young WHRDs, as the Taliban has forcibly disbanded other protests by student WHRDs in Herat, Balkh,

Kabul, and Bamiyan. In these incidents, students were further subject to arrest and torture.

In Thailand, 16-year-old Paeng and 17-year-old Ton-or, two youth defenders affiliated with the gender equality group, Feminist's Liberation Front, were charged and questioned for their participation in a 'car mob' protest on [10 August 2021](#). This protest condemned the military coup and the regime's mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The two young HRDs went to the Thonglor Police Station on 6 September 2021 to hear their charges, which were allegedly about violating the Emergency Decree. The police then took them to court in a detention truck against the HRDs' protests and attempted to take their DNA samples — both of which were considered unnecessary and a clear abuse of power that left both youth defenders feeling startled and unsafe.



Paeng and Ton-or are being taken to court in a detention truck.

Photo by [Prachatai](#)

## Media Workers

Media workers were another group of HRDs particularly at risk. There were 384 cases of violations against 867 media workers and media organisations recorded. The most prevalent violations against media workers were judicial harassment, physical violence, intimidation, and threats. Media workers are especially at risk because their



Francisco Belo Simões da Costa is a journalist in Timor Leste and editor-in-chief of Hatutan.com. Photo by [Hatutan.com](https://www.hatutan.com)

work often involves investigating and reporting on human rights violations. This means they often have a public profile that easily exposes them to harassment from state and non-state actors. With this direct exposure, media workers were the group of HRDs most affected by physical violence, with 142 out of 516 cases of physical violence affecting media workers.

There were also cases of judicial harassment against media workers, who faced charges of defamation and of spreading false information. In Timor-Leste, journalist and editor-in-chief of Hatutan.com,

Francisco Belo Simões da Costa, reported on an allegation of ministerial corruption involving a project managed by the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Social Communication, Francisco Martins da Costa Pereira Jerónimo. In response to his report, the Minister filed a lawsuit based on defamation charges under Article 285 of the Penal Code. Francisco Belo was summoned for this case on [18 May 2022](#). This is not an isolated case, as in 2017 two other journalists received jail terms for defamation under the Penal Code in Timor-Leste. This reflects the gravity of the harassment against media workers

in Timor-Leste and the persistent struggle to secure freedom of the press in the country, despite it being right protected under Article 41 of Timor-Leste's Constitution.

### NGOs and NGO Staff

FORUM-ASIA recorded 126 cases of violations against NGOs and NGO staff between 2021 and 2022. The most common types of violations they endured were judicial harassment (62 cases), arrest and detention (38 cases), and administrative harassment (23 cases). While the cases usually involved the harassment of staff working at the NGOs, either through judicial proceedings or intimidation and threats, sometimes the violations were perpetrated at an institutional level.



AMIHAN National Federation of Peasant Women is a human rights organisation and a collective of peasant women in the Philippines. Logo courtesy of AMIHAN

In 37 cases, NGOs were harassed through the de-registration of their organisation, incidents of censorship and hacking, attacks and raids on their office, and the freezing of their bank accounts.

On [5 May 2021](#), for example, the Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) of the Philippines issued an order to freeze the bank account of the AMIHAN National Federation of Peasant Women, citing Section 11 of the Terrorism Financing and Suppression Act of 2012. Zenaída Soriano, AMIHAN's national chairperson, learned that their bank account was frozen on 3 June 2021, although the reasons remained undisclosed. On 8 June 2021, she received a formal notice from AMLC informing her that the order mandating the freezing of their bank accounts would be extended for six months. The order was allegedly issued due to claims that the organisation was financing the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army. AMIHAN denounced this as false and as an act of red-tagging on the part of the Government in response to AMIHAN's active criticism of the administration. Both red-tagging and freezing bank accounts are common harassment tactics used by the Philippine government to interfere with the work of NGOs and NGO staff.

## Minority Rights Defenders

Another commonly affected group of HRDs were minority rights defenders. These defenders are often subjected to similar threats as other defenders, but also generally face an additional layer of risk to their safety and well-being as they are also discriminated against for belonging to minority groups. This refers to ethnic, racial, religious, or any other groups that experience social, economic, or political disadvantages based on their minority status.

FORUM-ASIA recorded 82 cases of violations against minority rights defenders, affecting 219 individuals and organisations. The highest number of cases were recorded in Indonesia (32 cases) and India (18 cases), followed by China (7 cases), Pakistan (5 cases), and Vietnam (5 cases). The biggest perpetrators in these cases were the police (64 cases) and the judiciary (11 cases), who were responsible for arresting and detaining, judicially harassing, and inflicting physical violence on the defenders, thereby violating a range of their rights such as freedom of expression (67 cases), right to liberty and security (50 cases), and right to protest and freedom of assembly (40 cases).

To give an example, Khurram Parvez is a prominent Kashmiri

HRD, who is the coordinator of the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) and the chairperson of the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), and he has long been subject to harassment by the Indian government due to his investigation and research on enforced disappearances and other human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir. On [22 November 2021](#), the National Investigation Agency (NIA) raided Khurram's residence and arrested him for charges of criminal conspiracy



Khurram Parvez is a Kashmiri HRD who has long been subject to harassment by the Indian government. Photo courtesy of Khurram Parvez/Twitter



and funding of terrorist acts under the Indian Penal Code and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act. On [27 March 2022](#), the NIA and local police again also raided Khurram's residence in Srinagar, seizing documents related to financial transactions. As this report is being written, the arbitrary detention of Khurram remains ongoing, while the arrest and other acts of judicial harassment committed against other HRDs and journalists in Jammu and Kashmir also continue to be documented.

More than 30 cases of violations against minority rights defenders have been recorded in Indonesia, specifically concerning the rights to self-determination of West Papuans. On [3 March 2021](#), West Papuan HRDs, Roland Levy and Kelvin Molama were forcibly taken from their dormitory rooms in Jakarta and arbitrarily detained by the police. Both were involved in the Aliansi Mahasiswa Papua (AMP), through which they actively advocated for the self-determination of West Papuans and openly discussed human rights violations occurring in West Papua. They were both convicted on charges of violence and theft under Article 170 and Article 365 of the Indonesian Criminal Code and were sentenced to five months of imprisonment. They were released from prison on [3 August 2021](#).



Roland Levy (above) and Kelvin Molama (below) are West Papuan HRDs who are involved in the Aliansi Mahasiswa Papua (AMP). Photo courtesy of Front Line Defenders

### Artists

Artists carry out human rights work in various ways, including through their artistic interpretations and expression of human rights situations and struggles. Their contribution to the human rights movement has been emphasised by UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, who noted in her report that artists play an

important role in the human rights field, not only as supporters of HRDs but also as the main actors 'striving to promote and protect human rights.'

FORUM-ASIA recorded 39 cases of violations against artists, affecting 58 HRDs. These include photographers, writers, cartoonists, poets, singers, and performers. The rights most affected in these cases were freedom of expression (36 cases) and the right to liberty and security (24 cases). Most of the cases — 34 in particular — involved judicial harassment, arrest, and detention of artists, often under charges of incitement and sedition, and in 6 cases, physical violence conducted through raids and acts of torture. Finally, 11 cases of violations against artists were from Myanmar, 8 from China, 6 from India, and 5 from Thailand.

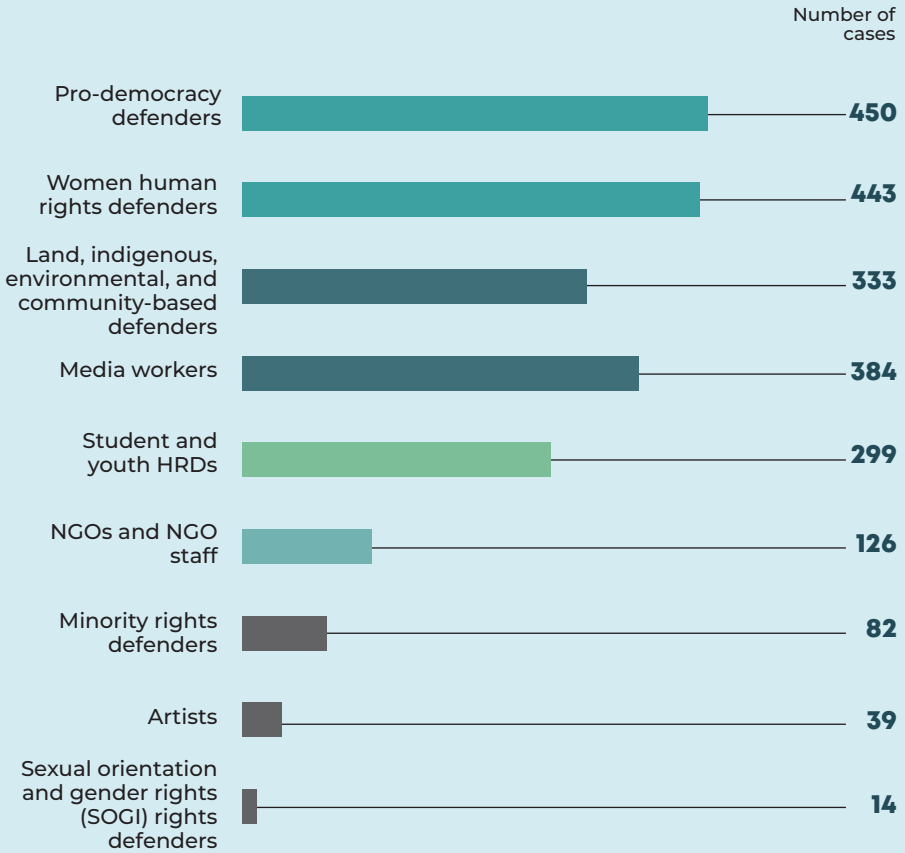
Htein Lin, a prominent Burmese artist, and his wife Vicky Bowman, a former British ambassador to Myanmar and the director of Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business, were arrested in Myanmar on [24 August 2022](#) on charges of allegedly violating the immigration law. Htein Lin was an outspoken advocate for human rights and a critic of the military junta's oppression of dissenting voices in Myanmar.

He criticised the execution of four pro-democracy defenders on 25 July 2022, including two of his artist friends, Phyo Zeya Thaw and Ko Jimmy. He was previously imprisoned from 1998 to 2004 for his activism during the former military coup in Myanmar. On [2 September 2022](#), Htein Lin and his wife were each sentenced to one year of imprisonment.



Htein Lin (left) is a Burmese artist and activist, and Vicky Bowman (right) is his wife and a former British ambassador to Myanmar as well as the director of Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business. Photo courtesy of Vicky Bowman/Facebook

# SUMMARY OF KEY GROUPS OF HRDS AFFECTED IN 2021 - 2022





# RECOMMENDATIONS

This report provides an overview of the challenges faced by Asian defenders and the most common trends of violations against them. FORUM-ASIA calls on relevant stakeholders to take necessary actions to contribute to an environment where Asian defenders can conduct their work safely and free from harassment.

To this aim, FORUM-ASIA makes the following recommendations:

## We call on States to:

- Uphold obligations under international human rights treaties and standards, particularly the UN Declaration on HRDs;
- Ensure that domestic laws comply with international human rights standards and that any repressive law criminalising HRDs is amended or repealed;
- Undertake measures to: prevent HRDs from being targeted by creating a safe and conducive environment for them to conduct their work; protect HRDs from harm by creating a national legal framework for their protection; and provide HRDs with effective remedies when they are at risk or are victims of abuses;
- Ensure timely investigations of abuses and violations against HRDs through judicial processes that are just and transparent, and where perpetrators are held accountable for their actions;
- Immediately release all detained HRDs and drop the charges filed against them;
- Respect the independence of NHRIs and other national human rights bodies protecting human rights and HRDs, and ensure that they

- can operate independently and with adequate resources;
- Ensure that NHRIs work for the protection of HRDs including through the establishment of early warning systems, a focal point or desk on HRDs and temporary relocation mechanisms, in collaboration with HRDs and CSOs;
- Issue invitations to respond to communications from, and adopt the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and other Special Procedures mandate holders working with HRDs; and
- Provide protection to HRDs who have relocated from their home countries due to persecution, including by ensuring their non-refoulement.
- Expand the space for CSOs within UN mechanisms and ensure that those who are engaging with the mechanisms are protected from any act of reprisals;
- Call on States to abide by their obligations to protect HRDs, and hold them accountable for the violations they commit against HRDs;
- Ensure that the UN Regional Offices, the UN resident coordinators, and the other UN country offices mainstream the protection of HRDs in their work and promote them within UN mechanisms; and
- Improve coordination among UN agencies to better support HRDs on the ground, including by collectively pushing for Governments to enact laws on HRD protection.

**We call on the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and other UN agencies to:**

- Ensure that the current communications system consistently addresses the situation of Asian HRDs and that appeals and press releases about them are disseminated in a timely manner;

**We call on national and transnational corporations to:**

- Ensure full compliance of operations with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights by implementing the protect, respect and remedy framework;

- Abide by other international human rights standards relevant to their operations;
- Ensure HRDs are appropriately and meaningfully consulted at every stage of their operations, especially when engaging in projects that have a direct impact on them and other communities; and
- Strictly refrain from directly or indirectly causing any form of harassment against HRDs, provide compensation to HRDs adversely impacted by their operations, and constructively engage with them in preventing further violations.

**We call on other non-state actors to:**

- Act in compliance with the international human rights treaties and standards, particularly the UN Declaration on HRDs, and contribute to creating and maintaining an environment where HRDs can conduct their work safely and free from reprisals; and
- Refrain from committing any violation against defenders, protect defenders from any abuse that may arise from actions of others, and constructively engage with defenders in ways that support and address their demands for protection, wherever possible.

# METHODOLOGY

## Database

The HRD Programme of FORUM-ASIA has been recording violations committed against Asian defenders since 2010, as part of its monitoring and documentation work. The [Asian HRDs Portal](#), managed by the HRD Programme, contains a page named '[Cases of HRDs](#)', which features a publicly available database containing all the recorded cases of violations against HRDs. The main sources of information that the monitoring and documentation draw on include media outlets, communications and reports from the United Nations bodies and other national and regional human rights institutions, and FORUM-ASIA members and partners. Additionally, there are cases of violations against HRDs that are shared confidentially with the HRD Programme by defenders themselves or FORUM-ASIA members and partners. These cases are recorded internally but are not made public.

The geographical scope of the monitoring primarily covers the countries where FORUM-ASIA works, and where its member organisations are based.

Before encoding a case into the database, the HRD Programme ensures that the following criteria are met:

- The source of information is credible;
- The affected HRD, NGO, group, or community is identified, the type of violation is specified, and the exact date and location of the violation are reported;
- As much as possible, biographic information about the affected defender is included, such as their status as HRDs, gender, and, where relevant, their ethnic or indigenous identity; and
- There is a clear, proximate and documented connection between the HRD's work or status, and the violation.

All the cases of violations that meet the above-mentioned criteria are encoded to the Asian HRDs Portal and added to the database.

When the case is encoded, it is tagged with relevant terms and categories, such as the type of rights violated, the nature of the violation, the perpetrator and so on. The Annexe below contains the full list of tags used. Given the complex nature of violations, for most of the cases recorded more than one tag is selected for each category. For example, it often occurs that a single case involves more than one type of violation. It is also commonplace to see more than one right being affected in a single violation. In such cases, a case is encoded with multiple tags. As a result, when the total of all the cases encoded in each category is counted, the result is normally higher than the total number of cases recorded overall.

Finally, after cases are encoded into the database with all the relevant tags, they become publicly accessible through the Asian HRDs Portal. This excludes some cases that are sensitive in nature, which are not published on the website but are included as part of the analysis.

It is worth noting that the HRD Programme regularly updates

the tags used to categorise cases, with the intent of continuously improving the documentation process and ensuring it adapts to the constantly evolving human rights landscape. For instance, in 2023, the tag 'Transnational repression' was added to the list of 'Violations' as it was a new trend that the HRD Programme noted to have increasingly affected defenders in the region.

## Data analysis

To produce *Defending in Numbers*, the cases from the database were extracted – including the sensitive cases that were not published – and their tags were analysed to identify the key trends. This publication is based on the cases encoded on the Asian HRD Portal that occurred between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2022. There were many cases where HRDs were targeted by multiple violations, which were often related to one another in the span of the two years under review.

In cases where a new violation against an HRD, who already had a previous case encoded about them in the database, the new case was recorded as an 'update' of the original violation. For instance, if an HRD was first arrested, and then tried and eventually sentenced to jail, the arrest would be encoded as the first original violation, while

the conviction would be an update of their case. Nevertheless, since updates still constitute violations being committed, they are counted and considered as standalone cases in the analyses.

The analysis in *Defending in Numbers* looks into quantitative data from the Asian HRD Portal, as well as qualitative data gathered from FORUM-ASIA's continuous work and engagement with the HRDs from the region. This approach enhances the statistics with insights reflecting the direct experiences and accounts shared by HRDs. Where appropriate and possible, comparisons between the results from 2019-2020 and the results from previous editions of *Defending in Numbers* were also made to identify changes and continuities.

## Data limitations

Although the HRD Programme of FORUM-ASIA monitors the violations committed against Asian HRDs daily, the cases encoded and analysed in *Defending in Numbers* do not represent the total violations happening in Asia. There are key limitations in the documentation of the HRD Programme that should be considered.

Firstly, the daily monitoring conducted by FORUM-ASIA largely relies on what is found in the

media, other sources consulted, or information shared by FORUM-ASIA's network. If a violation is not reported by any of the sources, is reported in a language inaccessible to the HRD Programme team members, or is not otherwise communicated to FORUM-ASIA, the HRD Programme is unable to encode that case.

Secondly, if the source consulted does not provide the specific information required, such as the exact date of the violation, the location, or other details necessary to identify, for example, the status of the defender, the HRD Programme will not encode that case.

In consideration of these limitations, it should be noted that the purpose of *Defending in Numbers* is to provide a snapshot of the situation of HRDs across Asia, and more particularly the patterns of violations they endure, as opposed to providing a comprehensive or 'complete' list of violations committed against them.

Over the past few years, to address some of the aforementioned gaps noted, and to improve the quality of FORUM-ASIA's documentation, the HRD Programme has collaborated with some FORUM-ASIA member organisations whose work also includes monitoring violations against HRDs at the national level.

Since 2020, for example, the HRD Programme has been partnering with FORUM-ASIA's Indonesian member, [Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence – Komisi untuk Orang Hilang dan Korban Tindak Kekerasan \(KontraS\)](#), which shares cases of violations recorded against Indonesian HRDs with the HRD Programme. In 2021, the same type of partnership was started with FORUM-ASIA's Nepalese member, the [Informal Sector Service Centre \(INSEC\)](#), which has shared cases of violations committed against HRDs in Nepal. Some of these cases are encoded in local languages. FORUM-ASIA plans to expand its collaboration with more members and partners in the future.

### Selecting case studies

The case studies featured in *Defending in Numbers* were chosen after identifying: (a) the most common violations committed against HRDs, and (b) the groups of defenders most affected by these violations. After these were identified, all the cases recorded in the Asian HRDs Portal that occurred in the period under review were mapped out to identify emblematic cases.

Particular attention was given to cases that FORUM-ASIA worked on, including submitting an Urgent Appeal to the United Nations

Special Procedures, issuing a statement or press release, or providing assistance to the HRD. However, cases recorded in the Asian HRD Portal, which FORUM-ASIA did not work on specifically, were also considered.

As a result of this mapping activity, a list of potential case studies was compiled for each violation and the group of defenders analysed in *Defending in Numbers*. The final case studies were narrowed down and selected based on how well they illustrated the trends identified, with consideration also of geographical and gender balance.

### Using Uwazi

The Asian HRDs Portal features a [database](#) with all the cases of violations against HRDs that FORUM-ASIA has documented in its monitoring. Through this database, users can make customised searches by selecting the different tags under each category. This can then be extracted and downloaded by the user for their use.

Another function of the Asian HRDs Portal that is available for users is offered by the [case submission page](#).

# ANNEXE

Below are the index of terms and categories for encoding.

## Rights concerned

Academic freedom  
Access to justice  
Denial effective remedy  
Freedom of assembly  
Freedom of association  
Freedom of expression  
(Offline/ Online)  
Freedom of movement  
Freedom of Religion and Belief  
Internet freedom  
Labour rights  
Land rights  
Media freedom  
Minority Rights  
Right to Protest  
Right to access and communicate  
with international bodies  
Right to access to funding  
Right to education  
Right to fair trial  
Right to food  
Right to health  
Right to healthy and safe  
environment  
Right to housing

Right to information  
Right to liberty and security  
Right to life  
Right to political participation  
Right to privacy  
Right to property  
Right to protect reputation  
Right to self-determination  
Right to work  
SOGI rights  
Women's rights

## Violations

Abduction/Kidnapping  
Administrative Harassment  
(Arbitrary) Arrest and Detention  
Censorship  
Death  
Death threat  
Denial Fair Trial  
Deportation  
Enactment of repressive legislation  
and policies  
Enforced Disappearance  
Extrajudicial Killing  
Gender Based Harassment  
Intimidation and Threats  
Judicial Harassment  
Killing  
Online Attack and Harassment



Raid  
Reprisal a result of communication  
Restrictions on Movement  
Sexual Violence  
Surveillance  
Torture  
Travel Restriction  
Use of Excessive Force  
Vilification  
Violence (physical)  
Wounds and Injuries

## Groups of HRDs

Academic  
Artist  
Blogger/ Social Media Activist  
Community-based HRD  
Corporate accountability activist  
Environmental rights defender  
Family of HRD  
Freedom of religion/ belief activist  
Indigenous peoples' rights defender  
Media Worker  
Labour rights defender  
Land rights defender  
Lawyer  
Minority rights defender  
NGO  
NGO staff  
NHRI/ NHRI staff  
Pro-democracy defender  
RTI activist  
SOGI rights defender

Public Servant  
Student  
Whistleblower  
WHRD  
Youth

## Perpetrators

### State actors

Armed forces/ Military  
Government  
Judiciary  
Police  
Suspected state  
Unknown

### Non-state actors

Corporation

- Agricultural business
- Extractive industries
- Other corporations

Extremist group  
Other non-state  
Suspected non-state

# LIST OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS KILLED IN 2021 AND 2022

Below are the names of the Asian HRDs and their family members who were killed or died as result of violations in 2021 and 2022, as documented in FORUM-ASIA's Asian HRD Portal. FORUM-ASIA commemorates them and their work. The list of names is not exhaustive as not all names of killed HRDs could be found.

Abdul Rahman Mawen  
Abner Esto  
Ahmed Reza  
Ajay Lalwani  
Ali Reza Ahmadi  
Amrabhai Boricha  
Ana Marie "Chai" Lemita Evangelista  
Ariel Evangelista  
Aung Ko Ko Phyo

Aung Myat Lin  
Aye Kyaw  
Ayesha Bibi  
Bashir Ahmad Bayat  
Bismillah Adil Aimaq  
Buddhinath Jha, also known as Avinash Jha  
Chad Booc  
Chennakeshavalu  
Chit Min Thu  
Dandy Miguel  
Danish Seddiqi  
Daw Phyu Phyu Khaing  
Do Cong Duong  
Dr Maung Maung Nyein Tun  
Dumagats Puroy  
Edward Esto  
Emmanuel "Manny" Asuncion  
Erfaldi Erwin Lahadado

Forouzan Safi  
Francisco, also known as Saya Ko  
Guo Hongwei  
Hla Min Maung  
Hlaing Win  
Hnin Aung  
Htet Aung  
Irshad Bibi  
Javeria Bibi  
Jemar Palero  
Jesus Pason Jr  
Jojarain Alce Nguho III  
Joseph Jimenez  
Juan Macababba  
Juhad Hamidi  
Julie Catamin  
Khaing Tun  
Khet Thi  
Khin Hnin Wai  
Ko Aung Bone Kyaw  
Ko Kaung Sett Lin  
Ko Sein Win  
Kowasi Waga  
Kunchok Jinpa  
Kyaw Min Yu, also known as Jimmy  
Kyaw Naing Win  
Kyaw Nyi Zin  
Kyi Sett Hlaing  
Ma Ah Khu  
Mark Lee "Makmak" Coros Bacasno  
Marlon Naperi  
May Hnin Aye  
Melvin Dasigao  
Mina Khairi

Min Min Zaw  
Min Oo  
Mohammad Rahat  
Mohib Ullah  
Muhammad Zada Agra  
Mya Thwe Thwe Khine  
Myo Lwin  
Nabayan Chakma Milon  
Nabina Tharu  
Naheed Bibi  
Nazim Jokhio  
Omid Sharifi  
Percival Mabasa, also known as  
Percy Lapid  
Peri Asso  
Poe Thandar Aung  
Pu Tuidim  
R Jeganathan  
Rai Singh Gurjar  
Raihan  
Raman Kashyap  
Randy de la Cruz  
Ranjeet Soni  
Rex Jose Mario Fernandez  
Rodan Berito  
Rony Hossain  
Sai Win Aung, also known as A Sai K  
Salai Than Gang  
Saw Moe Tun  
Shahid Zehri  
Shuvo  
Sithu Kaung Myat  
Soe Moe Hlaing, also known as  
Mae Gyi

Soe Naing  
Somsak Onchuenjit  
Subhash Kumar Mahto  
Sushil Kajal  
T Shridhar  
Thinzar Hein  
Thu Thu Zin  
U Lwin Win  
Uska Pandu  
Venkatesh  
Vipin Agarwal  
Wai Wai Myint, also known as  
Pan Thee

Win Ko Oo  
Win Kyaw  
Win Lwin  
Win Swe  
Ye Aung  
Ye Min Oo  
Ye Yint  
Zarli Naing  
Zaw Win Maung  
Zia-Ur-Rehman Farooqi

# ENDNOTES

1. The definition of human rights defender adopted by FORUM-ASIA is consistent with that which is provided by the United Nation Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, commonly known as ‘The Declaration on human rights defenders.’ This specifies that any individuals, organisations, or groups who work to defend human rights peacefully and who embrace the principle of the universality of human rights are considered HRDs.

2. Please note that the number of violations recorded does not necessarily reflect the experiences of all defenders on the ground. The aim of *Defending in Numbers* is to provide an overview of key patterns based on FORUM-ASIA documentation, which has its own limitations. Please refer to the Methodology chapter for more information about these limitations.

3. Throughout this publication, the analysis makes comparisons of trends found in previous or past years, this specifically refers to the years covered in previous editions of *Defending in Numbers*. These can be found here: <https://forum-asia.org/?s=defending+in+numbers>

4. It may be noted that when a sum is made of all the cases recorded for each violation, the result is higher than the total number of cases mentioned to have been documented (1,636 cases). This is because many of the cases recorded involved more than one violation. For more information on how this data is compiled please see Methodology chapter.

5. <https://time.com/collection/100-most-influential-people-2022/6177681/khurram-parvez/>

6. Everyone has the right to hold opinions without interference and the right to freedom of expression under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). It is an ‘indispensable condition[s] for the full development of the person’ as well as the ‘foundation stone for every free and democratic society.’ General comment No. 34 on Article 19: Freedoms of opinion and expression, para. 2.

- 7.** Article 1, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
- 8.** CEDAW General Recommendation No. 19: Violence against women, 1992, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/52d920c54.html>, para. 6.
- 9.** When a state, or anyone acting with the authorisation, support or acquiescence of a state, perpetrates abduction or any other form of 'deprivation of liberty' followed by a 'refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty of by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person,' it is defined as an enforced disappearance under international law. Article 2, International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, accessible at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-protection-all-persons-enforced>
- 10.** This includes any self-identifying women regardless of sex assigned at birth, including trans and intersex women.
- 11.** UNSR on HRDs report 'Situation of women human rights defenders', U.N. Doc. A/HRC/40/60 (2019), para. 6.
- 12.** UNSR on HRDs report 'Situation of women human rights defenders', U.N. Doc. A/HRC/40/60 (2019), paras. 36, 42
- 13.** HRC Resolution on 21 March 2019, Recognizing the contribution of environmental human rights defenders to the enjoyment of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/RES/40/11 (2019), p. 2.
- 14.** HRC Resolution on 21 March 2019, Recognizing the contribution of environmental human rights defenders to the enjoyment of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/RES/40/11 (2019), p. 3.
- 15.** UNSR on HRDs report 'Success through perseverance and solidarity: 25 years of achievements by human rights defenders', U.N. Doc. A/HRC/52/29 (2023), para. 127.



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