

## SCOTTISH HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER FELLOWSHIP OVERVIEW

The Scottish Human Rights Defenders Fellowship was established in 2018 to support those at risk for their work in protecting human rights around the world through a 3 to 6-month temporary relocation programme at the University of Dundee. Through this period, we provide diverse opportunities in research, capacity building, advocacy, holistic security and professional development for HRDs, in a needs-based programme which is accessible, sustainable and impactful in supporting, protecting and enabling defenders in the long-term. We do this by:

- 1) **Supporting** Human Rights Defenders' resilience and wellbeing practices during this period of rest and respite, enabling them to continue or develop sustainable working practices, especially regarding holistic security, and organisational change around wellbeing and HRD specific psychosocial risk
- 2) **Equipping** HRDs with increased technical knowledge and livelihoods skills in areas such as research, leadership, language, advocacy, human rights mechanisms, security and protection
- 3) **Strengthening** defenders' international and national networks through expert, legal, advocacy and research coaching and support, to better enable them to achieve substantive change in their country or thematic contexts
- 4) **Enabling** HRDs capacity to identify, access and mobilise international solidarity, protection and support networks through education, research and awareness raising activities

## STRUCTURE AND STAKEHOLDERS

The Fellowship was an initiative of the Scottish Government and was developed in collaboration with the University of Dundee. A steering committee was set up to oversee and support the development of the Fellowship, including the human rights team of the Scottish Government, representatives from four civil society organisations, Amnesty International Scotland, Front Line Defenders, the Royal Society of Edinburgh and most recently, Peace Brigades International UK – and including the Universities of Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and St. Andrews.

Past nominees have benefited from a holistic and wide-ranging programme offering, including wellbeing, research support, government advocacy, human rights trainings, university modules, networking opportunities and opportunities to conduct guest lectures. Additionally, Fellows benefit from engaging with civil society organisations that can support their human rights work here in Scotland. Fellows have had wide ranging experience from education, legal and media backgrounds to community and grassroots activists, land and environment defenders, gender and sexuality activists and defenders of indigenous communities from all over the world.

Amnesty and Front Line Defenders have provided 'invaluable' sustainable support to their nominees, through advocacy training, digital security and protection planning and strategic support



in-country. In 2023, Peace Brigades International UK was welcomed to the steering committee as a third nominating partner with valuable connections to grassroots land and environmental defenders around the world.

This is of particular import as we are proud to announce this year will host two additional defenders, on a separate but interlinked 6-month WHRD Gender and Environment programme for women human rights defenders from the Global South, who will join the core Fellowship programme from September 2023 – March 2024. The additional funding for this new programme has come from the Energy and Climate Change Directorate as announced by now Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition, Mairi McAllan, at COP27.

The new WHRD Gender and Environment Programme is part of growing efforts to strengthen women's voices and participation in policy and decision making around climate change, and aims to further inclusion of grassroots and indigenous defenders in particular.

This is due to the fact that land and environmental defenders are at most risk in the world, and indigenous defenders even more so. Indeed, research by Global Witness revealed that over 1,700 environmental defenders have been murdered in the last decade, averaging a killing of one every two days; with 39% of the victims coming from indigenous communities despite only making up 5% of the world's population. Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) are an even more vulnerable category within this, and in addition to facing the intimidation, stigmatisation, threats, attacks, criminalisation, and violence (kidnapping, sexual violence, assassination etc) faced by many HRDs, WHRDs face additional gender-based threats due to the context of inequality and discrimination in which they operate, as well as intersection risks based on race, age and other intersecting forms of discrimination (especially those from indigenous, LGBTQI+ and sex worker communities).

Through this pilot programme, Scotland aims at recognising both the importance of WHRDs work on the front line, and the unique threats they face, as well as continuing its traditions of gender equality and support for women worldwide.

How Scotland can work with the international community to prevent attacks on the critical frontline defenders standing as the last line of defence for our species and our planet is an important question that, in line with the recent landmark guidance from the UN Committee on economic, social and cultural rights (CESCR), the hosting of these WHRD Gender and Environment Fellows will be a first step for Scotland in recognising the importance of WHRD land and environment defenders, and in adopting and implementing programmes that provide protection for defenders at risk wherever necessary.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E/C.12/GC/26: General comment No. 26 (2022) on Land and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/ec12gc26-general-comment-no-26-2022-land-and>

## TEMPORARY RELOCATION IN SCOTLAND

In the first year of the Fellowship, three Fellows came to Dundee for the autumn semester – from Burundi, Malawi, and Turkey. This pilot programme was officially launched in partnership with the Scottish Government and instigated a series of parliamentary debates around Scotland’s current and future support for human rights on a global level. Building on the success of the first programme, the beneficiaries of the first programmes are now campaigning on a global level and utilising the research and advocacy skills gained from the Fellowship to pursue international collaborations and opportunities.

Two more Fellows joined the Fellowship for a 3 month programme in 2019 – from Russia and Zambia – and in 2021, from Brazil and Colombia for a 9-month hybrid programme developed to meet the demands of defenders at-risk during the pandemic. Our 2022 Fellowship welcomed a new cohort, from the Philippines and Belarus for a 3 month relocation. The 2022 – 2023 Fellowship scheme, we launched our first 6-month programme, bringing together three defenders from Kenya, Indonesia and Afghanistan online and in person for a vibrant programme of respite, research, advocacy and training.

The Fellowship has received high level engagement and commitment from the Scottish Government, as well as inspired cross-party support during debates on Reaffirming Scotland's Support for Human Rights Defenders. The Fellowship has hosted numerous advocacy meetings, knowledge sharing and policy influencing opportunities with, amongst others, former First Minister Nicola Sturgeon MSP, UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor, Cabinet Secretary for External Affairs Angus Robertson, former Minister for International Development Neil Gray and the former Minister for Older People and Equalities, Christina McKelvie, as well as a number of MPs and MSPs, and international NGOs.

Relocation in Scotland has enabled defenders to continue and strengthen their activism and impact, engage in peer-to-peer learning, as well as mobilise critical public attention and awareness of their struggles. Through opportunities at the university, and networking with Scottish civil society and domestic defenders, Fellows have been able to gain vital sustainable support for their human rights work upon return to their home countries.

## MISSION AND PROGRAMME OFFERING

The Fellowship is primarily funded by the Scottish Government, which sees the Fellowship and related activities as part of its core commitment to protecting human rights. Additional support, engagement opportunities and networking have been provided through grants from the EU’s ProtectDefenders Mechanism, and much of the professional development and capacity building support comes from the University of Dundee, Amnesty International and UK, Peace Brigades International and Front Line Defenders, showing the value of key partners and external stakeholders in temporary relocation initiatives.

As a committee, we are keen to assimilate and develop upon good practice in capacity building training in temporary relocation initiatives, and are facilitating research and train-the-trainer workshops with the Fellows in order to further both the professional development of the Fellows themselves, and the organisational development of the Fellowship – enabling the growth of peer-to-peer learning between Alumni and current Fellows, as well as supporting defenders in developing and internationalising their training portfolios.

With the expansion into virtual programming since the pandemic, we have developed a wider range of specialist programme opportunities, drawing on the expertise of all stakeholders to produce a tailored and impactful educational environment for the Fellows. Training, wellbeing and knowledge-sharing opportunities include, but are not limited to:

- Protection and Security Management
- Investigative Methods
- Conflict Mediation
- Advocacy and Campaign Strategy
- Media Advocacy
- Policy drafting and Influencing
- Digital Security, and Visibility and Risk consultancy
- Writing for Wellbeing and Stress Management
- Research Output Facilitation

As well as developing new skills in research and advocacy, Fellowship beneficiaries are encouraged and enabled to advocate for their specialist work and more broadly, as representatives of Human Rights Defenders globally, meeting with Scottish Government and Parliament and representatives of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office whilst on speaker tours in London.

More generally, Fellows are supported to work on policy and human rights defenders protection strategy with international organisations and institutions. The focus on fostering an environment of awareness and understanding of HRDs' impact and their protection needs hinges upon creating opportunities to share knowledge in a meaningful way and developing new channels of influence and solidarity between HRDs, governance institutions and international civil society organisations.

Both during and after the programme, the Fellowship aims to provide a rich educational environment for HRDs to pursue and develop their advocacy strategies with national and international impact. With the provision of expert training, structured research sessions, facilitated networking events and wellbeing activities, this year's programmes aim to both learn from and build upon good practice in temporary relocation initiatives and bring new debate around human rights and international relations to Scotland and the UK at a crucial time – with plans in place to host our inaugural Alumni conference, bringing together SHRDF Alumnus from around the world to consult on Scotland's growing protection potential and deliver a rich programme of training, wellbeing activities and outreach with Scottish academy and civic society.



Scottish Human Rights  
Defender Fellowship  
University of Dundee

## **HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE**

This Fellowship connects directly to strategic priorities at the both the University and School levels. At the University level it supports the strategic goal of intensifying impact locally and globally by supporting the work of international human rights defenders, it supports the values of the University (in particular as it creates a welcoming and inclusive environment in conjunction with other related activities, such as the Humanitarian Scholars programme), and it enhances the University's reputation (as evidenced by the recent recognition of the programme by the Herald Higher Education Awards). At the School level, the Fellowship connects to the Social Justice and Social Change theme, giving students the opportunity to interact with human rights practitioners.