

## What types of support do Human Rights Defenders need?

Below is a summary of some of the key kinds of support that many Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) need and want, both in Scotland and in other countries. This list is in no way exhaustive but it provides some helpful indications to help with planning and decision making around how to better protect human rights.

- **Peer support & self-care** - Being an HRD can be very isolating and lonely, and particularly with regard to specific human rights in Scotland where there are few spokespeople and activists for example around tackling racism, there is a considerable lack of peer support.
- There can be a negative impact on HRDs' emotional and physical wellbeing due to the relentlessness of speaking up on issues, facing backlash and criticism, and exhaustion. Self-care is essential, and we need organisations/networks to provide and strengthen this self-care.
- There are particular needs of different types of HRDs that should be recognised and met, for example Women Human Rights Defenders could benefit from particular support and a specific network for them.
- **Financial resource** - Being an activist for human rights can be expensive, for example there can be travel costs to meetings or media opportunities, printing or publication costs, postage and so on. There is additional cost to defending the rights of those in rural areas where travel is expensive and where there is often a need to have multiple meetings with individuals and families, rather than one-off bigger meetings. The Government or organisations meeting with HRDs should always meet individual travel costs, and there is potential for funders/networks to consider meeting other HRD costs.
- **Time resource** - Being an HRD can also mean significant time commitment, which can have an impact on study or employment. HRDs are often balancing several time commitments of which being an activist is only one. This needs to be recognised by those organising meetings or events who wish their inclusion, giving plenty of notice, making sure the time is well-spent for the individual, timetabling meetings at convenient times for example in the evenings rather than during the work week.
- **Support for HRD families** - Families of HRDs who are on the frontline are also often negatively impacted and any programme for defenders needs to also consider whether there are ways they can meet their family's needs.
- **Support with media** - HRDs are often flung in front of the mainstream media with little or no training around this which can lead to a lack of confidence, a negative experience of doing so or to HRDs simply not being willing to deal with the media at all -thereby weakening their cause. Media confidence training for HRDs in Scotland would be very valuable and welcomed.
- Social media comments and criticism of HRDs can be very hurtful, difficult to deal with and exhausting. This includes both comments from those opposed to their cause but also actually from those from within their own communities. Many HRDs would value social media solidarity

from others even where they are not working in directly the same area and would welcome training or techniques in how to handle social media.

- **Access to training** - Many HRDs who are campaigning, not as part of a bigger organisation or network, but on their own or for their communities, would welcome access to free training opportunities. For example, training on things like lobbying, using the law, and participation, as well as media training(above) would be welcomed.
- **International opportunities** - There are many opportunities to highlight national issues, concerns and successes in the regional and international human rights arena. More could be done to ensuring HRDs in Scotland have access to these opportunities.
- **Solidarity and influence** – Many HRDs would welcome solidarity from other HRDs across Scotland, particularly because they can face many difficulties such as bullying, intimidation, harassment, being sacked, not being offered promotion opportunities, exclusion from community events. Organisations and networks could helpfully consider how they can show solidarity, and how they can use their influence to open doors for individual and community activists to be at the decision-making table. More opportunities to share information and collaborate between HRDs would be valuable.
- There can be benefit in bringing together different experts and professionals to support HRDs such as lawyers, doctors and counsellors, many of whom would gladly give their time and expertise pro bono for a good cause.
- **Share the success stories** – whilst being an HRD can be difficult and long-term, it is very important to recognise and celebrate successes. Sharing stories of HRD successes can help motivate and encourage others in their efforts.

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