

Human Rights Defenders Conference for East and Horn of Africa
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Centre for Refugee Studies, York University

Contact Persons

Hassan Shire Sheikh
Coordinator, East & Horn of Africa Program
African Human Rights Defenders Project-Canada
Centre for Refugee Studies
3rd Floor York Lanes
4700 Keele St.
Toronto ON Canada M3J 1P3
Tel: + (416) 736 2100 ext 20519
Fax: + (416) 736 5837
hshire@yorku.ca

Michele Millard
Coordinator, Centre for Refugee Studies
3rd Floor York Lanes
4700 Keele St.
Toronto ON Canada M3J 1P3
Tel: (416) 736 2100 ext 30391
Fax: (416) 736 5837
Email: mmillard@yorku.ca

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Synthesis

The East and Horn Africa Human Rights Defenders Project saw the necessity for coordinated support for HRDs at risk within the sub-region and therefore held a regional conference in October 30 – November 4, 2005. The goals were to lay the foundation for the long-term legitimacy, recognition and credibility of the work of local HRDs, while continuing to minimize their short-term personal and material insecurity. The conference brought over 43 members of national coalitions of human rights defenders (over 50% were women) from 8 countries (Somalia (together with Somaliland), Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania) in the East and Horn of Africa for regional consultations and networking, supported by 16 resource persons from Canada, Uganda, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Norway, Kenya and the Gambia (please see Appendix A.).

The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Conference is the outcome of a research study carried out by Hassan Shire Sheikh, human rights defender from Somalia through the Centre for Refugee Studies at York University in 2004. The conference strategized around three main components, which encompassed a regional networking and internship program, training and capacity building for HRDs in the sub-region and developing a media and communication strategy for a longer-term change in the perception of the work of those who risk their lives to protect others.

The project was conducted by the Centre for Refugee Studies at York University in Canada and a regional coordination office at the Human Rights House in Kampala, Uganda.

The main objectives of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders regional conference were:

1. To examine the regional challenges HRDs face;
2. To provide training on regional and international instruments for protection;
3. To provide specialized trauma counseling and coping strategies for human rights defenders particularly those working under threat in a situation of armed conflict
4. To establish regional plans and network for action.

The conference was organized around a series of panels and presentations – some were interactive, others integrated a question and answer session at the end of the presentation. In addition, there were small group workshops throughout the conference; with the end goal of developing a Declaration and a Plan of Action for the emerging network (see Appendix B).

The conference successfully met its goal of bringing human rights defenders from a broad range of regions and sectors together to share the lessons learned from various experiences of human rights and advocacy work. Specific positive outcomes of the conference included a newly formed network linking people with an interest in human rights issues, a formal Declaration and a Plan of Action for the new network.

Conference Rationale

The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP) is designed to strengthen the work of human rights defenders in the sub-region by reducing their vulnerability to the risk of persecution and by enhancing their capacity for effectiveness in defending human rights. It focuses on Somalia (together with Somaliland), Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. Much of this region has experienced massive human rights abuses going back many years, in the context of single-party and military dictatorships, struggles for democracy, civil wars, and in the extreme case of Somalia, the collapse of the state.

HRDs are men and women on the frontlines of the struggle to ensure that the principles laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent human rights conventions are upheld. HRDs are a crucial link in the chain of human rights protection, from campaigning on behalf of victims of human rights violations to lobbying at the highest level for improved mechanisms for human rights protection. In the process, they support the rule of law and the institutions and principles of democracy around the world. By publicizing human rights instruments and lobbying state authorities and regional bodies, they raise awareness of human rights entitlements and help to mobilize victims of abuses to fight against them.

More often than not, the courageous work of HRDs puts them in positions of great personal and professional risk. They embarrass and threaten the legitimacy of authorities and other powerful groups that violate human rights in the process of exercising power. They thus attract the attention of power-holders, who then very often turn their patterns of persecution and oppression against HRDs, often in a more violent manner than against those whom the HRDs are trying to protect.

Despite protection ostensibly afforded by international law and organizations, governments continue to take repressive action against HRDs in order to counter exposure or criticism of state practices that violate human rights. They harass HRDs, deny them freedom of movement, force them out of employment, imprison them illegally or on the basis of subverted judicial processes, torture them, execute them without fair trial as well as “disappear” them. Many HRDs have had to flee their countries to escape such actions.

The conference, as part of a wider strategy, aimed to create a strong regional network by:

- A) Creating and maintaining a strong network of committed HRDs for the continued support and protection of the rights of defenders in the region;
- B) Establishing a cross-country and cross-regional fertilization: sharing of experiences and best practices among HRDs and from other regions
- C) Drawing local, regional and international attention to the plight of HRDs and raising public awareness, raising the profile of HRDs, especially women HRDs;
- D) Mainstreaming gender and engendering HRDs work;
- E) Giving insight into and provide training on existing international mechanism at UN and regional level;
- F) Providing HRDs training in monitoring, investigating and reporting human rights violations in their unique situations, and risk management techniques;
- G) Encouraging HRDs to develop working relation with UN Mechanism on HRDs to ensure that they will access the mechanism;
- H) Providing specialized and professional trauma counseling and coping strategies for HRDs, particularly those working under threat in a situation of armed conflict;
- I) Reviewing regional strategies (the Johannesburg Action Plan of 1998) and taking further the discussion and agreements regarding implementation.

Conference Activities and Results

The EHAHRDP conference was very successful. There was significant media coverage on TV and radio and conference coordinator Hassan Shire Sheikh did many interviews throughout the 4 days. The conference began very well, particularly during the first 2 days. However, the reality of working as a Human Rights Defender unexpectedly intruded.

One of the delegates suffered a loss in the family but decided to remain at the conference in order to complete the work. Conference delegates then plunged into crisis with the post election riots in Ethiopia and Zanzibar. The only delegate from Zanzibar had to return home immediately, but it was more complicated for the Ethiopians. The Ethiopian government started a round up of human rights activists they accused of inciting the violence and killings. They took a number of human rights defenders who were members of the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) none of whom advocated violence, and placed them in a notorious jail. There were other people on the list – two of whom were delegates attending the conference (journalists). The other Ethiopian delegates were not safe either, and the conference participants expended much effort in trying to convince them not to return home immediately, that a dead human rights activist was of no use to anyone. It was very difficult to do that – they very much wanted to be home with their family and colleagues. But they were eventually convinced and arrangements were made to house them after the conference. A petition was created, expressing the network's concerns over the arrest and treatment of the Ethiopians. There was fear among the Somali delegates as well, since they had to transit through Addis Ababa on their way to Somalia, but they did want their presence on the petition, and so they signed with the names of their allies.

On the last day of the conference, a small delegation took the signed petition and personally delivered it to the Ethiopian ambassador in Kampala. Delegates from Canada were part of the delegation, as were delegates from Uganda, Somalia, Eritrea, Norway, Somaliland, Tanzania, and the UK.

Thus, many things were happening throughout the conference. The grief of a man who lost a family member, the grief of participants hearing about the killings and arrests of their colleagues, the fear for people's safety, the logistics of dealing with such an emergency, and all the while managing to deliver the conference agenda as planned – to run workshops, to create a network, to develop a declaration, a memorandum of understanding and a plan of action. To hold press conferences, and to put pressure on the Ethiopian government, and to take time to provide solace and understanding for the participants, to find a time to laugh and dance, even in the midst of all the trauma.

In spite of these challenges, however, much was accomplished. The following is a summary of the conference as presented by delegates and resource persons (See Appendix C. for Conference Program).

Day 1

The conference began with keynote addresses by Alex Neve, Amnesty International Canada, Janaiba Johm, Special Rapporteur on HRDs in Africa and Margaret Sekaggya, Chairperson of the Uganda Human Rights Commission. Alex Neve pointed out that what unites the participants is that they promote and protect human rights and hold perpetrators to account. Human rights are universal, and we have a need and responsibility to be HRDs working on behalf of the larger society, but we also need to support each other. Janaiba Johm encouraged HRDs to engage with relevant national, regional and international institutions by providing information, lobbying and expressing support for these institutions to governments in order to strengthen these mechanisms. Margaret Sekaggya emphasized the importance of thinking strategically, doing one's homework, maintaining credibility and impartiality. She also encouraged HRDs not only to hold perpetrators to account, but to demand that governments live up to their responsibilities.

Conference delegates presented on:

Country Reports/Examining Challenges Faced by Human Rights Defenders

Eritrea

Eritrea experiences a particular challenge in that there are no human rights organizations on the ground – there is no space for human rights work. Currently, human rights activities are carried out by the diaspora fed information by anonymous HRDs within Eritrea. The diaspora needs support through raising awareness, networking opportunities

and the protection of asylum seekers. There are also particular challenges of working within a conflict zone which should be recognized.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia has a generally well-developed human rights community that has developed internal and external networks but still face many challenges. Political and legal repression offers different challenges in place of direct physical oppression, where country conflicts allow those in power to justify their repression.

Sudan

Sudan experiences a general denial on the part of government, opposition groups and society over the prevalence of violence against women. This silence leaves women particularly vulnerable. The violence is systemic and women are multiply victimized. In Southern Sudan, there are no human rights organizations. There are no human rights in conflict zones – and individual HRDs can be assisted by involving them in networks. In post conflict situations, human rights must be at the centre of peace processes, international interventions and reconstructions.

Somalia – Somaliland

International organizations need to challenge their standards of engagement (there are particular ethical and moral issues involved in interventions). Somalia faces a particular challenge – how do we support HRDs in the context of a failed state? Who do we hold to account? How do we protect? Journalists are involved in human rights work and are well organized, trained and professional, but remain vulnerable. A heavy personal price is often paid by HRDs. There are feelings of guilt and great emotional and physical loads. It is a struggle to care for the self. Patriarchal attitudes silence women's experiences as HRDs in working life and in terms of personal experiences of persecution.

Djibouti

There is only one human rights NGO legally working in Djibouti (Djiboutian League for Human Rights), supported by a network of local monitors who work as anonymous correspondents throughout the country. While the organization is legal, its members are considered working illegally. League members are constantly harassed and their work suppressed. High profile members are denied the right to work and those who work have had their salaries suspended. The government's press regularly attacks the work of the League and refuses to publish replies. While the death penalty has been abolished, there is an increase in extrajudicial killing and impunity is complete. There are also unlawful arrests and the League is denied access to jails and detention centres.

Tanzania

Human rights defenders face several challenges in Tanzania, including arbitrary use of power by government authorities (questionable appropriation of property, preventing HRDs from collecting information on alleged human rights violations), undermining the justice system (poor enforcement of court decisions, lack of accountability), and freedom of expression and access to information. There are LGBT HRDs who are at risk in Tanzania.

Kenya

Despite the fact that HRDs have been at the frontline critiquing the previous government and mobilizing the citizens in demanding democratic space and good governance, they had not planned on what would happen when a new government was in power. This was made more difficult by the fact that the current government was popularly voted in and Kenyans, including HRDs, put a lot of faith and hope into it. However, with a new government, new challenges emerged. Because there was so much hope placed in the new government, anyone who criticized them was seen as an enemy of development. A blind eye was often turned towards its failures. Donors reduced or cut their funding to civil society, and heavily funded the government for work that was previously done by HRDs. There was an exodus of key personalities from civil society to key government positions. Human rights issues were politicized by the politicians, media created negative reports of human rights work, calling workers disgruntled, illegal organizations who were out to ruin the economy of the country if they were allowed to continue intimidating investors. There is the use of the judiciary to frustrate HRDs, suspects and their families, all in the name of national security. There is also shrinking resources, with priorities being tailored to fit into those of donors

Uganda

HRDs have found challenges ranging from political, social, economic and legal challenges. Like any other country in Africa, HRDs in Uganda have continued to be persecuted, harassed and some arrested. Parliament is pushing for the enactment of the NGO Bill, which has clauses that restrict operations of NGOs in as far as their activities and funding are concerned. The Constitution of Uganda does not recognize gay/lesbian rights and sexual minorities are marginalized and routinely persecuted and harassed. LGBT activists are also in danger of their lives. Restrictions of media and publishers limits freedom of expression as do the sedition laws. Entrenched cultural practices, for example, the practice of bride price and FGM create difficulties for HRDs who advocate against them.

Workshops

In addition to the country reports, a series of workshops were held around the challenges and strategies for the following themes.

HRDs working in a situation of:

Armed conflict – challenges exist in the nature of the conflict, perception of HRDs work, organizational vulnerabilities and the political and structural context of conflict. Strategies should include addressing the impact of armed conflict, most notably, on sensitization with communities, authorities, conflict actors, international community of the role of HRDs and on specific issues, particularly sexual violence/rape. Training and capacity building is needed to empower community members to act as HRDs. Appropriate moral and psychological support should be provided, as well as adequate resources and involvement of the international community in addressing the larger political issues.

Facing political repression – political repression exists where there is an undemocratic government. This can result when a government has rigged itself to power, has been popularly elected but refuses to meet its obligations to its people, or does not want to leave power after its term has expired. HRDs are perceived to be enemies of the people, labeled as the opposition, arrested and charged on trumped-up charges and at risk of being assassinated or detained. Strategies involve the mobilization of HRDs at national and international levels to put pressure on the government, exposure of human rights violations through national, regional and international media, inviting dialogue with authorities, be proactive, cooperation with other stakeholders, and calling on international donors to put pressure on the government to observe human rights and be accountable to its people as a basis of getting aid, among other things.

Facing legal repression – governments are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their struggles with HRDs. Instead of outright repression, they often accuse HRDs of publishing false information, defaming and libeling their activities and involving HRDs in very costly, lengthy legal procedures to divert or distract the organization. There are often restrictions on media and by using laws (sedition, anti terrorism) in such a way as to limit or prevent freedom of expression. The use of Shari'a laws by faction leaders and clan militias and no access to justice because of high legal costs since the general community is poor and cannot afford to get legal redress. Strategies include judicial reform, specific laws to govern NGOs, training and education for HRDs, judges and government, improving access to justice and abolishing unjust laws.

Day 2

International and Regional Instruments for Human Rights Defenders

Musa Gassama from International Human Rights Service, provided background to the Declaration on human rights defenders, describing the international and regional special Protection Mechanisms:

- UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights defenders

- African Commission on Human and People's Rights – Special Rapporteur on Defenders
- European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders

The participants were encouraged to promote the implementation of the international standards contained in the UN Declaration on human rights defenders and to use and strengthen the mechanisms.

Because of the eruption of the Ethiopian crisis, the workshops on the use of International and Regional Protection Mechanisms were cancelled. In their place was a working group session on developing strategies to respond to the crisis and support endangered human rights defenders. The group agreed to write a petition to the Ethiopian government and strategic plans were developed over protection, advocacy and public awareness raising.

Risk Assessment and Security Management for Human Rights Defenders

Luis Van Isschot from Peace Brigades International presented on the work of Peace Brigades International, in particular its protective accompaniment to threatened human rights defenders, social activists and displaced communities. He emphasized the importance of making informed decisions about security and protection by being aware that HRDs work in complex environments, where there are many different actors, influenced by deeply political decision-making processes. He demonstrated basic risk assessment techniques and used PBI's work in Colombia as a case study. It is also important to engage with international NGOs in the region, as well as regular diplomatic visits, campaigning, participation of local HRDs in national and international processes (conferences, consultations, speaking tours). Policy tools for HRDs include:

- UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (1998)
- Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on human rights defenders
- African Commission on Human and People's Rights
- African Commission – Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders
- African Commission – Resolution on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Africa (2004)
- European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders (2004)

Workshops

There were a series of workshops on managing security in different situations:

Armed conflict – HRDs should know who their targets are and have clear procedures and policies for assessing and managing risk. Working in an armed conflict situation requires learning about the particulars and updating yourself about details of incidents through radio, news and other available resources, knowing who the main actors are, your

allies and locations and being aware that the context is not stagnant. Working with the UN is important, but it has its limitations. African NGOs feel excluded from decision making, and the African Union needs to be more effective. It is important to include human rights, peace and conflict management in the training syllabus for police and army.

Facing political repression – Many strategies were discussed, some of which include: communication with authorities who authorize public meetings, involving them in events, launching constitutional challenges on laws regulating public meetings, evacuating targeted HRDs as a measure of last resort, protect organizational information and documentation, publicity, involvement and support from media, public awareness campaigns, establishing Human Rights Houses to provide HRDs and their clients with shelter and include these houses in an international network.

Facing legal repression – HRD organizations should ensure that documents are vetted and reviewed by all responsible members of the organization before being published or put on a website in order to ensure veracity and quality of information, to defend against recantations, written consents from victims to ensure that they don't change their story, have the support of legal counsel to respond to legal repression, lobby government to strengthen the judiciary, improve, establish or restore judicial independence, create link with local community leaders, traditional and other authorities and chiefs, establish safe houses and create self-help programs, assess risks through participatory methodologies with communities.

Day 3

Mainstreaming Gender and Engendering Human Rights Defenders

Faiza Mohamed from Equality Now presented on “Women Human Rights Defenders – Risks, Challenges and Opportunities.”

In general, women face many human rights challenges in their work, including death threats, attack on families, damage to property, and sexual violence, among others. Attempts to seek protection are problematic and this encourages non-state actors to treat women even worse. There are specific characteristics to women HRDs - they are seen to defy cultural, religious, social norms of what a woman is supposed to be and therefore face violations tied to their gender (especially sexual violence). The first ever consultation on women human rights defenders was held in April 2003 in Bangkok, Thailand where it was recognized that women HRDs are integral in the promotion and protection of human rights, it was acknowledged that women HRDs are at greater risk due to gender, that conflict and fundamentalism create risk, non-state actors also pose a risk and there was a call to mainstream women HRD discourse and to take action to support WHRDs and protect them..

2004 launch of campaign to support women HRD whose objective was to highlight gender specific violence directed at women HRD (Follow up meeting was scheduled for Nov. 2005). Specific examples of cases affecting WHRDs include:

- Uganda: banning of “Vagina Monologues”, defamation of organizers
- Ethiopia: banning of Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association who provided free legal aid to poor women for 6 weeks
- Kenya: Incest case by a government official resulted in threats, harassment, and recantation.
- Somalia and Somaliland: Pressure from Islamists and traditionalists e.g. FGM, participation, violence against women, anarchy forces WHRDs to work silently and in private
- Zimbabwe: NGO Bill bans NGOs working on governance (including human rights) access to international funding
- Gambia: 1997 government banned activities of NGOs working on FGM
- Sierra Leone: killings of sexual minorities

Not all women HRDs are in agreement with each other (LGBT, abortion, etc.)

Providing and support and credibility is of paramount importance. This would include the creation of awards (e.g. AU Nelson Mandela Award for HRDs), Urgent Action Fund in Africa: secures funds to support human rights of women and girls on the African continent, rapid response within 72 hours, Frontline: established small grants programme for the same reason up to 6000 Euros,

Human rights norms & principles under threat in current environment need:

- solidarity to withstand this
- strengthen regional and international networks
- to build strong constituency base of local alliances and public support
- Information security, good documentation, be part of community support groups
- Have houses that are safe, have travel documents always ready

Trauma Counselling and Coping Strategies for Human Rights Defenders

Teresa Dremetsikas from the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) and Michele Millard from the Centre for Refugee Studies (CRS) presented on developing a model of support for human rights defenders and their organization to come to terms with their traumatic experiences. Some points to consider were: trauma has effects and consequences, trauma is contagious, while counseling has a place of value for healing, the underlying social/political environment has to be taken into consideration, a supportive community is key – find your community, if necessary create it, don’t forget to be selfish (sometimes). Self care is tremendously important - if it doesn’t happen, who will help the victims? Self-knowledge, establishing boundaries, developing a supportive

network, and knowing your stressors are all important factors. It is urgent that HRDs be able to incorporate personal care into their workplace, network and personal life. The presenters demonstrated a model for community support that was developed by CCVT and participants were encouraged to adapt the model according to their respective needs.

Day 4

Lobbying and Media Work for Human Rights Defenders and Planning and organizing advocacy work on behalf of HRDs

Keith Rimstad from Amnesty International Canada and Bashair Ahmed from the International Secretariat of Amnesty International were co-presenters and spoke about the role of a campaigner, how a campaign is designed, doing a situational analysis in order to understand the situation in a country, identifying capacity by looking at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis), establishing objectives and tactics, designing action plans and implementing them and finally, evaluating objectives, outputs and activities on a continual basis.

Creating effective lobby strategies involves a consideration of why the government might be willing to act on human rights. HRDs should identify important contacts and what factors would likely influence them. Be strategic about timing. Keep in mind that lobbying is often effective only in the long term. Methods include letter-writing, telephone contacts, meeting, grassroots campaigning and media work.

Workshops

There were a series of workshop during the second part of the day that dealt with devising an action plan for HRDs in situations of armed conflict, facing political and legal repression that culminated in the official Plan of Action appended to this report.

Project Objectives:

1. To examine the challenges faced by human rights defenders in the region
2. To provide training on existing regional and international instruments for the protection of human rights, and through discussions with local actors to gain insight to inform future in-country sessions to build capacity in such areas as research methodologies, documenting abuses and campaigning
3. To provide participants with insight on coping strategies, risk management skills and specialized trauma counselling, with a view to developing a basic model of

self care that can be adapted to the individual realities of respective human rights advocates, particularly those in situations of armed conflict

4. To create and maintain a strong network of human rights defenders active in the region
5. To develop a regional plan of action, that will, inter alia, provide for the creation and implementation of a media and communications strategy and an emergency support internship program, to enhance the effectiveness, visibility, legitimacy and safety of human rights defenders in the East and Horn of Africa
6. To lay a foundation for future regionally targeted research and documentation on the human rights situation in the sub-region by Canadian-based institutions

In concrete terms, the conference successfully met its goal of bringing human rights defenders from a broad range of regions and sectors together to share the lessons learned from various experiences of human rights and advocacy work. Specific positive outcomes of the conference included a newly formed network linking people with an interest in human rights issues, a formal Declaration and a Plan of Action for the new network; as well as a commitment on the part of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (EHAHRDN) to identify a core group of individuals and organizations interested in carrying out a range of follow up activities to include, further contact with conference participants, research and capacity building, as well as plans for follow up regional trainings to take place in the sub-region. EHAHRDN, the Centre for Refugee Studies and Amnesty International have committed to facilitate various components of these activities. Due to the crisis in Ethiopia, which resulted in a number of delegates being stranded in Kampala, EHAHRDN began its work immediately in terms of developing a media and communications strategy and connecting delegates to internship programs with the cooperation of Amnesty International and UNHCR.

Although conference organizers had envisioned more thorough training sessions during the conference, due to time constraints, an ambitious program and the political crisis in Ethiopia, this goal was not completely attained. Participants received more information than training; however, based on the evaluations, the majority found this valuable as an initial introduction to what was anticipated as ongoing training and capacity building, indeed, demanding that further opportunities for regional training be provided.

The delegates manifested a great need to for psychosocial support to assist in coming to terms with their experiences. When the workshop on trauma, counselling and coping mechanisms was presented during the conference, it was clear that while awareness of the effects the work has on the personal lives of the participants was high, there was no infrastructure in place to help them deal with it. As one delegate said, “We live with the trauma.” In particular, there was great concern over a delegate who was currently living in hiding and was manifesting traumatic symptoms. The Centre for Refugee Studies and the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture initiated contact with Kampala-based African Centre for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims as well as with a Ugandan psychiatrist who had been a member of CCVT’s Health Network in Toronto. Both agreed to support the case, and the African Centre also expressed interest in becoming involved

with developing programs of self-care within the workplace for human rights defenders (they were just becoming involved with this in their own workplace).

Conference Outputs and Dissemination

A conference web site: <http://www.yorku.ca/crs/AHRDP/home.htm> was developed as the primary vehicle for disseminating material to conference participants in advance of the conference.

Upon arrival at the conference on October 30, all conference participants were provided with folders that included a list of Conference facilitators and a Conference Program. The full text of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights' Resolution on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Africa and their Guidelines of the Submission of Communications, information about Amnesty International Africa Region's Human Rights Defenders Program in Africa and assorted background and campaign materials were also provided.

After the conference, a comprehensive conference report, including detailed summaries of all conference panels and working group sessions was prepared. This report will be posted to the conference web site pending receipt of final comments/revisions suggested by resource persons and other presenters themselves.

A conference video is available on CD-ROM, the full text of the keynote addresses, presentations of the resource facilitators as well as the Declaration, Memo of Understanding and Plan of Action will be posted on the conference website <http://www.yorku.ca/crs/AHRDP/home.htm>, and plans are underway to create an expanded, detailed version of the report to be disseminated as a manual in electronic and hard copy form in collaboration with Amnesty International and the Centre for Refugee Studies.

Training

Funding efforts are underway to develop practical, hands-on regional training workshops for human rights defenders. In addition, the Centre for Refugee Studies has connected with Makerere University over the possibility of collaborating on developing training modules for front line workers, policy and decision makers as well as other stakeholders. Curriculum development and funding initiatives are currently in development.

Capacity Building

Women human rights defenders played a significant role during the conference. It was evident that the capacity to meaningfully engage at a certain level was more developed in some women human rights defenders than others. However, participants did not have any difficulties in expressing their respective issues. Participants benefited from working with each other – working within such a heterogeneous environment was seen as an advantage.

Conference Management

The conference was evaluated by participants themselves who completed a formal evaluation form at the conclusion of the conference. The vast majority of participants rated the overall quality of conference sessions as excellent. A follow up feedback session with organizing committee members afforded another opportunity to assess the success of the conference, discuss lessons learned and identify follow up actions. Feedback from this source was also very positive. Overall, the conference was well organized, managed and had good technical support. Conference organizers were responsive to participants' needs and were effective in resolving any issues that arose. IDRC support was good – the grant application process was relatively smooth and IDRC project managers were flexible and supportive.

Impact

A major breakthrough occurred during the conference in terms of expanding the notion of human rights to include sexual minority rights as well as bringing the particular challenges and experiences faced by women human rights defenders to the fore. Generally speaking, sexual minority issues are considered taboo subjects in Africa, even among human rights defenders. However, due to the courageous interventions on the part of an LGBT activist, and supported by conference participants, sexual minority concerns were transparently included in the human rights discourse of the conference as well as in the final Plan of Action. In addition, great efforts were made, and largely succeeded, in mainstreaming gender into the discourse with a commitment not only to deal with gender issues in the community, but also within their own organizations. As a result of this and other activities which brought a certain cohesion to people's sense of their work, the conference went a long way in creating a tightly knit community of human rights defenders capable of engaging in analysis and self criticism so important to the development of truly inclusive notions of human rights.

Overall Assessment

Overall, the conference was a success. The main goals of establishing a network with a comprehensive and feasible action plan were achieved. Team building was accomplished, information shared, solidarity developed and skills acquired. Unsurprisingly, conferences are labour intensive and expensive, but regular face-to-face meetings among human rights defenders are of paramount importance in building relationships and trust. It is also important as a way for human rights defenders to know that their experiences, however difficult, are not unique. Human rights defenders share the same risks; experience the same dangers throughout the world, and knowing that they are part of this larger group supports them in their struggle in both moral and practical terms.

Appendix A.

Contact Details

Conference Facilitators

Name	Organisation	Position	Address	Email	Website	Telephone	Fax
Jean Nsonjiba Lokenga	Amnesty International, Africa Regional Office	HRDs Coordinator, Africa Team	Plot 20A, Kawalya Kaggwa Close, Kololo Pobox 23966 Kampala, Uganda	jlokenga@amnesty.org	www.amnesty.org	+25671770083 (mobile), +256-31-350100	+25631350240, +256-41252989
Maria Teresa Dremetsikas	Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT)	Settlement Coordinator	194 Jarvis Street, Toronto, Ontario, M4J-3A9, Canada	tdremets@ccvt.org	www.ccvt.org	+4163631066	+4163632122
Michele Millard	Centre for Refugee Studies, York University, Canada	Coordinator	321 York Lanes, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, M3J1P3, Ontario, Canada	mmillard@yorku.ca	www.yorku.ca/crs	+4161362100, ext. 30391	+4167365837
Luis Van Isschot	Peace Brigades International (PBI), Canada		4433, Rue de Bordeaux, Montreal, HZH 1Z6, Quebec	lvanis@po-box.mcgill.ca		+15145989725	
Alex Neve	Amnesty International Canada	Secretary General	312 Laurier Avenue East, KIN 1H9, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada	aneve@amnesty.ca	www.amnesty.ca	+16137447667, +16138523927	+16137462411
Hassan Shire Sheikh	East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project Coordinator	Chairperson	Lulume Rd, Nsambya, PO Box 11027, Kampala, Uganda	hshire@yorku.ca		+25641510263, +25671394843	+25641510498

Musa Yerro Gassama	International Service for Human Rights, Geneva, Switzerland	Deputy Director	Montfleury, 1290 Geneva, Switzerland	m.gassama@hrdo-ishr.ch	www.ishr.ch	+41227335123, +41798197215	
Keith Rimstad	Amnesty International, Canadian Section	Campaigner, Human Rights Defenders	312 Laurier Avenue East, KIN IH9, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada	krimstad@amnesty.ca	www.amnesty.ca	+6137447667	
Bashair Ahmed	Amnesty International, International Secretariat, Eastern Africa Team	Campaigner, East Africa	1 Easton Street, WCI X ODW, London, UK	bahmed@amnesty.org		+442074135625, +447795511200	
Peter Van der Horst	Amnesty International Dutch Section	Coordinator Special Programme on Africa	PO Box 1968, Amsterdam, Netherlands	p.vanderhorst@amnesty.nl	www.amnesty.nl	+31206264436	+31206240889
Martin Hill	Amnesty International, International Secretariat (IS), Eastern Africa Team	Horn of Africa Researcher	1 Easton Street, WCI X ODW, London, UK	mhill@amnesty.org	www.amnesty.org	+442074135516	+442079561157
Niels Jacob Harbitz	Human Rights House-Oslo	Project Manager, Editor	Tordenskioldsgt. 6B, Oslo, Norway	niels.jacob@humanrightshouse.org	www.humanrightshouse.org	+4722479245, +4791526584 (mobile)	+4722479201
Rashidi Annie Mulumba	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights	Legal Officer	Kairaba, Banjul, The Gambia	legal1@achpr.org		+220392962, +2209981222	+2204390764

Livingstone Sewanyana	Foundation for Human Rights Initiatives (FHRI)	Executive Director	Human Rights House, Lulume Road, Nsambya, PO Box 11027	fhri@spacenet.co.ug	www.fhri.or.ug	+25641510263	
Sheila Keetharuth	Amnesty International, Africa Regional Office	Interim Head of Office		skeethar@amnesty.org			
Faiza Jama Mohamed	Equality Now			fmohamed@equalitynow.org	www.equalitynow.org		

Conference Participants

	UGANDA	Organisation	Position	Address	Email	Website	Telephone	Fax
1	ROSE ADONG	Justice and Peace Commission, Gulu Archdiocese	Project Officer Paralegals		jpcgulu@infocom.co.ug		+25677766644	
2	CHARLES MUKANDIRWA	Union Pour la Paix Permanente, DR Congo	Coordinator	Kyebando, Kampala, Uganda	charlesmukandirwa@yahoo.com		+25671590685	
3	DAVID S. KAGGWA	Community Recovery Network	Executive Secretary	Plot 3, Pilkington Road, Kampala, Uganda	dkaggwa@lawyer.com		+25677474695	+25677474695
4	TAFADZWA MAPFUMO	Foundation for Human Rights Initiatives (FHRI)	Intern	Lulume Rd, Nsambya, PO Box 11027, Kampala, Uganda	tafadzwamap@yahoo.com		+25641266718, +25641269525	

5	SOPHIE KYAGULANYI	Foundation for Human Rights Initiatives (FHRI)		Lulume Rd, Nsambya, PO Box 11027, Kampala, Uganda	fhri@spacenet.co.ug			
6	PATRICK TUMWINE	Human Rights Network, Uganda	Advocacy & Networking Officer	Old Kira Rd. Kampala, Uganda	advocacy@hurinet.or.ug, tumwinep@yahoo.com	www.hurinet.or.ug	+25641286921, +25677315896	
7	PAULINUS NYEKO	Human Rights Focus-Gulu	Chairman	Airfield Road, Gulu, Uganda	paulinusnyeko@yahoo.com, jaaotto@yahoo.com		+25677594075 (mobile), +25647132259	
8	MARY ASILI	Kirewa Women's Forum/ Mifumi Project	Advocacy Officer		mifumi@mifumi.org		+25639981122	
9	FR. DEO ERIOT	Archdiocese of Tororo in Partnership with Mifumi Project	Priest/Resource Person	St. Paul's College, PO Box 445 Mbale, Uganda	deoeriot@yahoo.com		+25677570872	
10	JULIET MUKASA	Sexual Minorities Uganda	Chairperson		julie.mukasa@inmail24.com	www.smug.4t.com	+25671625915	
	KENYA							
11	BEATRICE KAMAU	Social Reform Centre	Executive Director		gakamau@yahoo.com, sorec@fastermail.com		+254722767924, +2542342327	
12	HABIBA ISSACK BARROW	Habiba International Women & Youth Affairs	Coordinator		habibainter@yahoo.com		+2547217451250, +2544652421	

13	SAMUEL MUHOCHI	Independent Medical-Legal Unit	Legal Redress Officer	David Obieli Rd. off Wajikai Way, 0606 Nairobi, Kenya	medico@imlu.org, smohochi@yahoo.com		+254722818420 (mobile), +254204456048	+25
14	MIRIAM KIHIGA	Amnesty International Kenya	Coordinator		amnestykenya@sections.amnesty.org		+2544450627	
15	DINAH KITUYI	Independent Medico - Legal Unit	Programme Officer		medico@imlu.org		+2545431734, +254722738634 (mobile)	
	TANZANIA							
16	FRIDA CHINUKU	Legal and Human Rights Centre	Legal Officer	Kijitonyama, Dar Es Salam, Tanzania	fridcyst@yahoo.co.uk, lhrc@humanrights.or.tz		+2552773038, +255748348965	+25
17	SAID HASSAN MZEE	Zanzibar Legal Services			mazizini@hotmail.com, cri@udsm.ac.tz, zlsc@hudumazasheria.or.tz		+255242233784	
	SUDAN							
18	HARRIET KUYANG LOGO	South Sudan Law Society	Programme Coordinator		hkuyang@yahoo.co.uk		+25677389685	
19	HALA YASSIN ELKARIB	SIHA Network of women's organisations in the Horn of Africa	Regional Coordinator	South Khartoum, PO Box 2805, Khartoum, Sudan	sihanet@hotmail.com, sihahornofafrica@yahoo.co.uk		+24987577772, +249912682253 (mobile)	+24
20	OSMAN HUMMAIDA	Sudan Organisation against Torture (SOAT)	Director	Kilburn Park Rd, London, UK	osman@soatsudan.org		+442076258055, +447832339925	+44

21	JEREMIAH SWAKA MOSES	Sudan Council of Churches	Consultant Peace-Building	53 Khartoum, Sudan	Jeremiahswaka2002@yahoo.co.uk		+249912158290	
	ETHIOPIA							
22	YENEMENGIST DEMISSIE WOLDERUFAEL	Ethiopian Human Rights Council	EC Member	P.O. Box 100261 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	ehrc@ethionet.et		+251911209589 (mobile), +251116292774	
23	YARED HAILEMARIAM	Ethiopian Human Rights Council	Human Rights Investigator	Addis Ababa, Lideta Sub-City, Ethiopia	hailyared@yahoo.com		+251115514489, +251911675403	
24	KEBEDE KEJELA	African Initiatives for a Democratic World Order (AIDWO)	Executive Director		kebedek@yahoo.com		+251911239789 (mobile)	+251
25	WOLDEGABRIEL WOLDEGHIORGHIS	Kembatta Women's Self Help Center			kmg.selfhelp@ethionet.et		+251114670791	
26	DEBEBE HAILEGEBRIEL	Action Professionals Association for the People (APAP)	Executive Director		apap@ethionet.et, debiegh@yahoo.com		+251111243555, +251911217446 (mobile)	+251
27	TIKIKEL TADELE ALEMU	Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association			ewla@ethionet.et		+251115521674	
28	KIFLE MULAT	Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association	President		efjakifle@gmail.com		+251115521674	
	DJIBOUTI							
29	KASSIM ALI DINI	Ligue Djiboutienne des Droits Humains (LDDH)	Journalist Project Officer		noel_iddh@yahoo.fr		+253812150< D28Dir	

	SOMALIA and SOMALILAND							
30	SULEIMAN ISMAIL BOLALEH	Somaliland National Human Rights Network, Hargeisa, Somaliland	National Human Rights Focal Person	Goljano Xeroawr Street, Hargeisa, Somaliland	slhumanrightsnetwork@yahoo.com, sbolaleh@yahoo.com		+2522520013, +2522407322	
31	IBRAHIM H. MUSA ("WAIS")	Samotalis Coalition of Human Rights, Somaliland	Executive Director		samotalis71@hotmail.com, waismusa05@hotmail.com		+2522528840, +2522429251	
32	ABUKAR SHEIKH YUSUF	Isha Human Rights Organisation, Baidoa, Somalia	Chairperson		abuusheik@hotmail.com, ayuusufa@hotmail.com, ihro@globalsom.com		+2521223404, +2521512331	
33	ASMAHAN ABDELSALAM HASSAN	Nagaad Women's Coalition, Hargeisa, Somaliland	Member		asmahassan6@hotmail.com		+252252892, +252247838	+25
34	ZAHRA OMAR MALIN	Peace & Human Rights Network, Somalia	Vice- Chairperson		phrnsom@globalsom.com		+252944294, +25212158878, +2525964926	
35	ABDULLAHI ABDI ANSHUR	Social Life and Agricultural Development Organisation (SADO), Bardera, Somalia	Peace and Human Rights Department Manager		abanshur2@yahoo.com, sadbardera@yahoo.com		+2525133039, +254720538122 (Nairobi)	+25

36	ALIA ADEN ABDI	Hiraan Women Action on Advocacy for Peace and Human Rights (HIWA) Organization, Somalia	Chairwoman	Halwadaaga Street, Beletwein, Somalia	hiwa@globalsom.com, hiwahiran@yahoo.co.uk		+2521685393, +2521587150	+25
37	MARIAM HUSSEIN	Dr. Ismail Jumale Human Rights Organization (DIJRO), Somalia	Co-Chairperson		dijhro@globalsom.com, dijhrocenter@yahoo.com		+2525944505, +2525966099	+25
38	AINI ABUKAR GA'AL	Coalition of Grassroots Women Organization (COGWO), Somalia	Peace and Human Rights Officer	Bexani, Mogadishu, Benadir, Somalia	ainigaal@yahoo.com		+2521220486, +2521283013	+25
39	HAWA ALI JAMA	WAWA (We Are Women Activists) Network, Puntland	Chairwoman	Airport Rd. near UNHCR compound, Bosaso, Puntland State, Somalia	wawabossaso@hotmail.com, wawa_somalia@yahoo.com		+2525236573, +2525725274	+25 (pu
40	OMAR FARUK OSMAN NUR	National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ), Somalia	Secretary General		faruk129@yahoo.com,	www.nusoj.org	+252-1-859944	
41	ISSA AHMED WARSAME	Justice Watch Association (JUWA), Somalia	President	Hawlwadag, Mogadishu, Somalia	juwaorg@yahoo.com	www.juwa.4t.com	+2521227984, +2521272997	+25

42	AHMED MOHAMED ALI ("KIIMIKO")	Somali Human Rights Defenders Network, Somalia	Chairperson		shrdefenders@globalsom.com, info@shrdefenders.org		+252-1-222959, +252-1-271285	
	ERITREA							
43	ELIZABETH CHYRUM	Human Rights Concern, Eritrea, UK	Executive Director	Flat D, 13 Queens Gate Terrace, London,	hrc_e@yahoo.co.uk, Echyrum@aol.com		+447958005637	

Appendix B.

DECLARATION OF THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK

We, Human Rights Defenders from Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Somaliland, Sudan including Southern Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda meeting at the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Conference, organised by the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project and Amnesty International, held at the Windsor Lake Victoria Hotel, Entebbe, Uganda from 30 October to 4 November 2005;

Recalling that Human Rights Defenders are men and women working for the promotion and protection of regionally and internationally recognised human rights, including those working on civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights through peaceful means;

Taking into consideration the significant role that Human Rights Defenders, including Women Human Rights Defenders, play in the promotion and consolidation of peace, human rights, good governance, democracy and rule of law;

Deeply concerned about the great personal risks and dangers Human Rights Defenders face, including harassment, cruel and degrading punishments, torture, intimidation, death threats, imprisonment, abductions, arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings and detention in unauthorised detention centres;

Deeply concerned that Human Rights Defenders are, at times, subjected to public statements that dehumanize and demoralise them, including smear campaigns, political persecution, vilification and constant surveillance;

Deeply concerned about the social and cultural environment in which women operate as Human Rights Defenders and the specific risks that they face, including social stigmatisation, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, pressure exerted upon women human rights defenders by traditional practices, non-state actors, perpetrators of violence against women, and patriarchal society;

Mindful of the lack/insufficient of national mechanisms for the effective protection of Human Rights Defenders and the lack of recognition by Governments and Governmental Institutions in the East and Horn of Africa of the existence of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect universally recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 9 December 1998(UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders);

Recognising the existence of International and Regional instruments for the protection of Human Rights Defenders, including the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the

European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Commission) Resolution on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and other regional and international instruments;

Emphasising the important role that the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Human Rights Defenders and the African Commission Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa play in the effective protection of Human Rights Defenders in the East and Horn of Africa;

Recognising the importance of solidarity among Human Rights Defenders, networking and network building at national, sub-regional levels and with the international community as a vital source of protection for individual Human Rights Defenders;

CALL UPON:

All Governments and Governmental Institutions in the East and Horn of Africa to recognise the legitimacy and important role Human Rights Defenders play in the promotion and consolidation of peace, human rights, good governance, democracy and rule of law;

All Governments and Governmental Institutions in the East and Horn of Africa to ensure that national legislation and administrative regulations regarding non-governmental and civil society based organisations are in conformity with the principles enshrined in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and support the role of Human Rights Defenders;

All Governments and Governmental Institutions in the East and Horn of Africa to cooperate with the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Human Rights Defenders and the African Commission Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa;

The African Union Members States and the African Union Commission to support the work of the UN and African Commission special mechanisms for the protection of Human Rights Defenders and to develop a climate of respect for the work of Human Rights Defenders;

The United Nations and the African Commission special mechanisms for the protection of Human Rights Defenders to pay particular attention to the situation of Human Rights Defenders in the East and Horn of Africa and to support their effort in the promotion and protection of Human Rights;

The East African Community, Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the African Union and the international community to engage dialogue with relevant stakeholders with a view to protecting Human Rights Defenders;

The European Union to operationalize and give full effect to the European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders of June 2004, in particular in providing adequate resources to Human Rights Defenders in the region and to enable them to carry out their human rights work;

The international community, African governments, inter-governmental organisations and UN specialised agencies, UN Field Presence and Country Teams working in Africa for human rights, development, reconstruction of war-torn areas, women, children, refugees and internally displaced persons, for example, to include in their strategies and programmes, the promotion of human rights and support for Human Rights Defenders in the East and Horn of Africa;

The Human Rights Defenders in the East and Horn of Africa to support and participate actively in the success of the work of the Network;

AND RESOLVE TO:

Stand shoulder to shoulder and demonstrate unflinching support for Human Rights Defenders, in particular those working under threats in situations of armed conflict, those facing political and legal repression, and other forms of violations;

Support the regional and international special mechanisms for the protection of Human Rights Defenders;

Disseminate this Declaration and implement the Action Plan of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network.

**Adopted by acclamation on 4 November 2005,
Entebbe, Uganda**

The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network Plan of Action for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in the Region

Introduction

We,

The Human Rights Defenders and resource persons from various non-governmental organizations, meeting at the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Conference, organized by the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP), Amnesty International and the Centre for Refugee Studies at York University in Canada, held at the Windsor Lake Victoria Hotel, Entebbe, Uganda from October 30 – November 4, 2005, adopt this action plan, in conjunction with the Declaration of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network.

The Situation of Human Rights Defenders in the East and Horn of Africa

Having analyzed the situation faced by Human Rights Defenders in the East and Horn of Africa, we recognize and express concerns for the following:

Concerns relating to the capacity of Human Rights Defenders

- Insufficient training, skills and knowledge in the understanding and use of existing regional and international mechanisms
- Weak national and regional Human Rights Defenders networks
- Difficulties faced in doing human rights work in countries where there are no Human Rights organizations such as Eritrea
- Difficulties faced in doing human rights work in failed states
- Lack of adequate financial and other resources
- Inadequate access to information
- Lack of recognition of the work of Women Human Rights Defenders
- Inadequate numbers of Women Human Rights Defenders at the policy and decision making levels of human rights organisations

Concerns relating to the legal environment

- Lack of national legislation that complies with international and regional standards on the protection of Human Rights Defenders
- Unwillingness of certain governments to comply with legal decisions when they have lost a human rights case in the courts
- Victimization of Human Rights Defenders through government-initiated lawsuits
- Repeated arrests, harassment and other human rights violations by government authorities (official and paramilitary)
- Impunity and lack of redress for human rights violations experienced by Human Rights Defenders

Concerns relating to the political environment

- Lack of recognition of the particular experiences faced by Women Human Rights Defenders

- Lack of awareness and acceptance of issues relating to sexual minorities and other marginalised groups
- Insufficient freedom of expression, government control of media
- Victimization of Human Rights Defenders through government-sponsored slander and defamation
- Credibility of independent Human Rights organizations is undermined by the interference of Government Organized Non-governmental Organizations (GONGOs)
- Lack of community awareness of the value of Human Rights Defenders
- Persistence of harmful traditional practices affecting women's rights

Concerns relating to the psychosocial environment

- Human Rights Defenders are at high risk for direct trauma, vicarious traumatisation, and burnout
- Lack of institutionalized psychosocial support for Human Rights Defenders at all levels
- Lack of space and resources to deal with the trauma and fear experienced by Human Rights Defenders at all levels

Action Plan

The present plan of action aims to define strategies to respond to the difficult situations faced by Human Rights Defenders in the East and Horn of Africa, and agree to carry out the following strategies and actions to enhance their capacity to conduct human rights work and to improve their protection.

Strategies to enhance the capacity of HRDs

- Develop a gender analysis framework in the context of human rights work
- Commit to reviewing Human Rights Defenders organizations' policies and procedures through the lenses of gender analysis; commit to implementing changes as required
- Train Human Rights Defenders to use regional and international instruments and special mechanisms for the protection of Human Rights Defenders (UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, African Commission Mechanism, UN Mechanism)
- Recognize minority rights defenders
- Raise awareness and education on the special needs of sexual minorities defenders and those defending the physically challenged and other marginalised groups
- Undertake training on risk management, fundraising, communications and media
- Develop skills for more effective report writing, documentation and program evaluation
- Develop a media strategy and use the media to raise the profile of the work of Human Rights Defenders

- Develop an online resource and documentation center, including a website, searchable database and resources
- The network should facilitate access to funds for emergency needs
- The network should establish and maintain relationships with organisations that have special programmes on the protection of Human Rights Defenders (such as the Urgent Action Fund in Africa, Amnesty International and Frontline's small grant program)

Strategies to enhance the legal protection of Human Rights Defenders

- Analyze national legislation that does not comply with international and regional standards on the protection of Human Rights Defenders
- Raise awareness on laws that hinder the work of Human Rights Defenders through public education and outreach activities
- Advocate and lobby Governments and national institutions to conform with international and regional instruments for the protection of human rights defenders
- Lobby to ensure government compliance with legal decisions
- Develop training programmes targeting Government officials, other authorities, decision-makers and policy-makers on issues related to the work and protection of Human Rights Defenders
- The secretariat of the network should respond to and provide support in urgent Human Rights Defenders situations by facilitating access to national, regional and international mechanisms
- The network should encourage proactive strategies and actions in the work of Human Rights Defenders, this may include early warning mechanisms and ongoing evaluation of the environment through risk management tools
- Send communications on individual Human Rights Defenders' cases to both the regional and international mechanisms for the protection of Human Rights Defenders
- The network should monitor and observe trials of individual Human Rights Defenders
- The network should support Human Rights Defenders, particularly Women Human Rights Defenders and other marginalized groups, to access the legal system and obtain appropriate remedies

Strategies to enhance the political environment for the protection of Human Rights Defenders

- Establish and maintain regular information sessions with Government officials, other authorities, decision-makers and policy-makers on issues related to the work and protection of Human Rights Defenders
- Approach EU Missions and other Embassies to raise awareness on the EU guidelines and to gain commitment for their implementation
- The network should apply for observer status in the African Union and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
- Establish and maintain regular contacts with both the regional and international mechanisms for the protection of Human Rights Defenders

- Raise awareness with the authorities on the gender-specific persecution of Women Human Rights Defenders
- Commit to support the international campaign on Women Human Rights Defenders
- Raise awareness and lobby transnational and national corporations in regards to their obligations to adhere to international human rights norms and standards
- The network and national coalitions should establish contacts with local, regional and international media organizations to raise awareness on the situations of Human Rights Defenders

Strategies to develop psychosocial support for Human Rights Defenders

- Establish and maintain contacts with national, regional and international trauma, torture and rehabilitation centres
- Involve these centres in providing psycho-social support for Human Rights Defenders, either through direct service or through capacity building (i.e. train the trainer sessions)
- Commit to create space and develop a model for its members to run facilitated peer support groups on a regular basis

Appendix C.

**Human Rights Defenders Conference for East
and Horn of Africa
Windsor Lake Victoria Hotel,
Entebbe, Uganda
October 30 – November 4, 2005**

Conference Agenda

**East and Horn of Africa
Human Rights Defenders Project
And
Amnesty International**

SUNDAY, October 30, 2005

2:00 pm – 5:00 pm	Registration	
3:00 pm – 5:00 pm		Opening Reception Arrival of Delegates

MONDAY, October 31, 2005

8:00 am – 9:00 am	Registration	
9:00 am – 10:30 am		Welcoming Remarks Hassan Shire Sheikh
		Opening Plenary Keynote Address: Alex Neve, Amnesty International Canada
		Keynote Speech: Janaiba Johm, Special Rapporteur on HRDs in Africa
		Opening Address : Ugandan Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs
10:30 am – 11:00 am	Morning Break	
11:00 am - 1:00 pm		Country Reports/Examining Challenges Faced by Human Rights Defenders
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	Lunch Break	

2:00 pm – 3:30 pm		Workshop A: HRDs working in a situation of armed conflict
		Workshop B: HRDs facing political repression
		Workshop C: HRDs facing legal repression
3:30 pm – 4:00 pm		Afternoon Break
4:00 pm – 5:00 pm		Plenary Session: Workshop Reports
5:00 pm – 5:30 pm		Wrap up and Lessons learned
7:00 pm		Dinner

TUESDAY, November 1, 2005

9:00 am – 10:30 am		International and Regional Instruments for Human Rights Defenders Musa Gassama, International Human Rights Service
10:30 am – 11:00 am		Morning Break
11:00 am - 12:30 pm		Workshops on the use of International and Regional Protection Mechanisms
12:30 pm – 2:00 pm		Lunch Break
2:00 pm – 3:30 pm		Peace Brigades International – Risk Assessment and Security Management Luis Van Isschot, Peace Brigades International
3:30 pm – 4:00 pm		Afternoon Break
4:00 pm – 5:30 pm		Workshop A: Managing security in a situation of armed conflict
		Workshop B: Managing security when facing political repression
		Workshop C: Managing security when facing legal repression
5:30 pm – 6:30 pm		Plenary Session: Workshop Reports
6:30 pm – 7:00 pm		Wrap up and Lessons learned

WEDNESDAY, November 2, 2005

9:00 am – 10:30 am		Mainstreaming Gender and Engendering Human Rights Defenders Faiza Mohamed, Equality Now
10:30 am – 11:00 am		Morning Break
11:00 am - 12:30 pm		Women HRDs Bangkok Report and Practical Campaigns by Equality Now Faiza Mohamed, Equality Now
12:30 pm – 2:00 pm		Lunch Break
2:00 pm – 3:30 pm		Trauma Counselling and Coping Strategies for Human Rights Defenders Teresa Dremetsikas, Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (Toronto) and Michele Millard, Centre for Refugee Studies (York University)
3:30pm – 4:00 pm		Tea Break
4:00pm – 5:00 pm		Trauma Counselling and Coping Strategies for Human Rights Defenders (Continued)
5:00 pm – 6:30 pm		Trauma Counseling – follow up
6:30 pm – 7:00 pm		Wrap up and Lessons learned
7:00 pm		Dinner

THURSDAY, November 3, 2005

9:00 am – 10:30 am		Lobbying and Media Work for Human Rights Defenders Keith Rimstad, Campaigner AI, Canadian Section: Experience of Campaigning for HRDs in Latin America
10:30 am – 11:00 am		Morning Break
11:00 am - 12:30 pm		Planning and organizing advocacy work on behalf of HRDs Bashair Ahmed, East Africa Campaigner, International Secretariat, Amnesty International,
12:30 pm – 2:00 pm		Lunch Break

2:00 pm – 3:30 pm		Workshop A: Devising an action plan for HRDs in situations of armed conflict
		Workshop B: Devising an action plan for HRDs facing political repression
		Workshop C: Devising an action plan for HRDs facing legal repression
3:30 pm – 4:00 pm		Afternoon Break
4:00 pm – 5:00 pm		Plenary: Presenting workshop action plans
7:00 pm		Dinner

FRIDAY, November 4, 2005

9:00 am – 10:30 am		Launching the East and Horn of Africa HRDs Network Hassan Shire, Coordinator, East Africa HRD Project
10:30 am – 2:30 pm		Closing Remarks and Press Conference Jean Lokenga, Human Rights Defenders Coordinator, Africa Program, Amnesty International