

# Contents

Welcome Note–Danish Ambassador	2-3
Message from the Executive Director, Defenders Coalition	4-5
Message from the HRD Awards Jury	6-7
HRD Awards–The Selection Process	9
HRD Awards Selection Panel	9
<b>Testimonies from 2022 Winners</b>	
Impact Statement–Lisa Gem	12-13
Impact Statement–Billy Hani	14-15
Impact Statement–John Allan Namu	16-17
<b>Upcoming HRD of the Year Nominees</b>	
Dahabo Abagaro Bagajo–Marsabit County	20-21
Social Justice Travelling Theatre–Nairobi County	22-23
Silvana Lesuada–Samburu County	24-25
Dennis Orengo Juma–Nairobi County	28-29
<b>HRD of the Year Nominees</b>	
James Wakibia–Nakuru County	30-31
Epakan Ekaale Peter–Turkana County	32-22
Makambo Lotorobo–Turkana County	34-35
Njeri Gateru	36-37
Sankara Nyangaya–Kajiado County	38-39
Shikoh Kihika–Nakuru County	40
Pema Kenya–Mombasa County	42
Popular Vote–Voting Process	43
Global Solidarity Award	44-45
Munir Mazrui Lifetime Achievement Award	46-47
Programme of the day	48

# Human Rights at the Centre of all our Engagements



**H.E. Stephan Schønemann**  
**Ambassador of Denmark to Kenya**

.....

**I AM DEEPLY HONOURED** to host this year's Human Rights Defenders Awards Ceremony, which is also the 8th Edition of this unique recognition of courageous promoters and protectors of human rights in Kenya. Denmark is pleased to serve as the co-chair of the Human Rights Defenders Working Group alongside the Defenders Coalition and it is in this proud capacity and as avid champions of human rights, that I have the distinct privilege of hosting this year's event.

The observance of human rights is essential to the proper functioning of any society as they define the standards that recognize and protect the dignity of all human beings. Human rights govern how individual human beings live in society and with each other, as well as their relationship with the State. The centrality of human rights to proper human existence is thus indisputable.

The human rights defenders, whom we are honouring, play a crucial role in the promotion and protection of a broad range of rights including

civil and political rights as well as the promotion, protection and realization of economic, social and cultural rights. I laud the courage, conviction and zeal of these inspirational human rights defenders and it is thus an exceptional privilege to be part of this ceremony to honour them.

This year is also the 75th Anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). This important Declaration reflects a global agreement that equality, freedom and justice are values that drive a thriving society. The observance of these values needs to be vigorously promoted to ensure a more just and equitable world.

The UDHR's affirmation that human rights are "universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing" echoes the essence of human rights defence and it is thus apt that today's Awards Ceremony coincides with the UDHR's major milestone. The marking of this

**"The UDHR's affirmation that human rights are "universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing" echoes the essence of human rights defence."**

Anniversary is indeed a summon to all of humankind to rededicate ourselves to the principles of decency and mutual respect that are at the heart of human rights.

Denmark places human rights at the centre of its engagements and our work in Kenya is anchored on a commitment to international solidarity enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals, to leaving no one behind and to tackling national and global inequalities. It is also based on a shared interest in a stable, democratic and prosperous Kenya committed to the protection of human rights.

Let me conclude by referencing the proclamation of the UDHR, which states:

"This Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction".

May we all be inspired by this powerful words and rededicate ourselves to the defence of human rights!

Asante sana!

# Extraordinary work of defending **human rights defenders**

I am delighted to welcome you all to the eighth edition of the Human Rights Defenders Awards #HRDAwardKE.

The HRD Awards is an initiative to honor and recognize the great work done by human rights Defenders. Conceived by the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders (Defenders Coalition) as a strategy to counter unmitigated public vilification of activists by state and non-state actors, we show-case the impactful work of HRDs at the community who take great risks to protect their members from harm and communities' resources from abuse.

The HRDs Awards are organized annually since 2016 by a collective of like-minded actors in civil society, development partners, foreign missions and UN agencies operating as a Working Group on Human Rights Defenders in Kenya, that are committed to the promotion of universal rights and freedoms as well as the protection of those who advance those rights. I wish to thank members of the Working Group for their commitment.



***Defenders Coalition Executive Director Mr. Kamau Ngugi. The HRDs Awards are organized annually since 2016 by a collective of like-minded actors in civil society, development partners, foreign missions and UN agencies.***

**“Honoring extraordinary work of defending human rights serves as a reminder of the sacrifices of these selfless, passionate individuals and their organizations.”**

The 2023 HRD Awards are hosted by the Embassy of Denmark in Kenya who are co-chairs of the Working Group on HRDs with the Defenders Coalition. Like their counterparts who have hosted this event, namely, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands who were the pioneers (2016; 2017), Embassy of Belgium (2018); Embassy of France (2019); Embassy of Norway (2020); Embassy of Sweden (2021; 2022), the solidarity of the people of Denmark has sustained the momentum of watering the tree and spirit of activism in Kenya. Our partners have made the event bigger and more colorful year after year.

Honoring extraordinary work of defending human rights serves as a reminder of the sacrifices of these selfless, passionate individuals and their organizations who most time remain unnoticed except when they inhale teargas, jailed or injured because of speaking truth to power. HRD Awards provides a rare safe

space for activists to have fun, network, be recognized, honored, and celebrated for their courage and sacrifice. Through the Awards, we keep the public well informed on the important role that individuals and groups in societies play to defend and promote human rights.

I wish to acknowledge the effort of all individuals who, following the publication of the call for nominations in the months of June to August 2023 opened their phones and computers and nominated the 367 individuals and groups that make you proud because of the great service to the community that deserve recognition. Out of the 367 nominees, thirteen (13) were selected by the Selection Committee as being outstanding and their profiles were forwarded to an independent panel of HRD Awards Jury who will announce the Award Winners today. We thank the Selection Panel and the Jury for their outstanding work.

As we celebrate the 75 Years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I invite you to appreciate all human rights defenders everywhere in the world who operationalize the promises of the declaration at great risk. The 2023 HRD Award Winners are our champions for they have demonstrated courage, innovation, and resilience to realize the universal promise of human rights for everyone.

Congratulations to the Winners!

# We should Invest in, and protect human rights defenders

Message from Chair of the HRD Awards Jury



*Rachael Mwikali Mueni is  
the Chairperson of the HRD  
Awards Jury.*

**“This pervasive and insidious wave of right-leaning authoritarianism is compelling ordinary Kenyans to take up their shields to defend those they love and care about.”**



Human Rights Defenders we are here, for united Intersectional Human Rights Struggles in Kenya.

The Human Rights Defenders Awards in Kenya recognizes HRDs across the board, its credibility and legitimacy is grounded in its inclusive, diverse, and intersectional approach. Our struggles in the space and in Kenya are very intersectional, from the constitution and lived realities. Over time, we have seen an increased normalization of violence from the domestic setting through to national leadership.

The rising of opposition, from Governments, private sectors especially on climate justice struggle, and religious fundamentalists in Kenya catalyzing human rights violations, and exposing citizens to violations. There is the rise of anti gender and choices movements supported by duty bearers that are supposed to protect, defend and promote human rights leading in violating human rights and exposing frontline Human rights defenders to risks for supporting human rights.

Now, more than ever, this pervasive and insidious wave of right-leaning authoritarianism is compelling ordinary Kenyans to take up their shields to defend those they love and care about. This transformation is characterized by the appropriation, dilution, and reinterpretation of key human rights concepts and practices by state and non-state actors for various political gains and purposes.

Alongside this co-option, human rights defenders have experienced backlash for their work and it has become increasingly difficult to mobilize and organize at all levels. We need to say NO to the continued normalization of violence that significantly undermines our democracy and the rule of law.

There is a need for resourcing, investing and protecting human rights defenders who are defending the rights of citizens in Kenya.

HRDs award is significant and important in ensuring that it promotes HUMAN RIGHTS and protects civic space in Kenya .

# Eight Years of recognizing HRDs in Kenya

## **ADVOCATING FOR THE RESPECT**

**OF** Human Rights is a high risk undertaking. Groups and individuals who walk this road are often the targets for reprisals by authorities and private groups who make use of various forms of repression to silence them. The “Declaration of the Rights and Responsibility of individuals, groups and organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms” was adopted in December 1998 and defines these advocates as human rights defenders.

The Annual HRD Awards was launched in 2016 by the The Defenders Coalition and the Working Group on Human Rights Defenders (HRD Working Group) as a protective strategy for human rights defenders and recognition of their work.

### **The objectives of the HRD Awards include include:**

- **To honor the extraordinary work of HRDs in the promotion and protection of human rights;**
- **To positively profile the work of HRDs and highlight the challenges they face in their work as agents of social change and transformation;**

- **To recognize and appreciate the human rights work of young and upcoming HRD’s in Kenya;**
- **To enhance the safety and protection of all HRD’s in Kenya.**

At the inception stage, three categories were identified to honor outstanding and innovative work of HRDs that had great impact despite adversaries; recognize promising innovative work of upcoming activists and recognition of individuals whose work had long lasting impact. In 2021 a new category, namely the Global Solidarity Award, was added to recognize partners whose role in various capacities has been impactful in Kenya’s human rights landscape.

Participants at the Award ceremony are also able to vote for a popular nominee who has not been selected as a winner in any of the categories but has done impressive human rights work.

### **About the HRD Working Group**

The Working Group on Human Rights Defenders brings together diplomatic missions and civil society organizations that are concerned with



the protection of HRDs and Human Rights more broadly.

The Working Group on HRDs convenes every two months whose objectives are information sharing, coordination and whenever needed, joint action related to the protection of HRDs and the working environment in which they operate.

The Working Group on HRDs has two co-chairs - Defenders Coalition as the permanent chair and a rotational Co-chair a position that is currently held by the Embassy of Denmark in Kenya.

### **The HRD Award Categories**

*The awards are presented in five categories:*

- **The Upcoming Human Rights Defender of the Year Award**
- **Human Rights Defender of the Year Award,**
- **Munir Mazrui Lifetime Achievement Award and**
- **The Global Solidarity Award.**
- **Popular Award**

### **Cash Awards**

Award winners in the first three categories are each given a cash award of USD 1000 to advance their human rights work.

An exemption is the Popular Award Winner who is given USD500. The Solidarity Award has no monetary award.

*In addition, the Award Winners,*

- **Receive a plaque and certificate,**
- **Are invited as guests at the HRD award ceremony in the following year.**

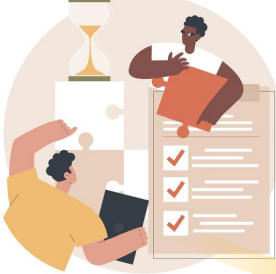
### **The Selection Criteria**

The following are taken into consideration:

- Demonstrable impact of the HRD's human rights work to the community.
- The role of the HRD in promoting human rights, especially the rights of marginalized and vulnerable groups
- Courage of the HRD in his/her human rights work
- Demonstrated leadership, innovation and creativity in his/her human rights work
- Contribution to development of a human rights-based approach within his/her county with regards to the thematic area of focus
- Future goals and likely impact
- Human Rights Defender's acceptance on the universality of human rights
- Degree of difficulty of the achievement and sacrifices made
- Visibility derived from the award to enhance the work of the HRD to promote human rights and active citizenship
- The HRD should have a link to the community and his/her work should have built or is working towards building a movement

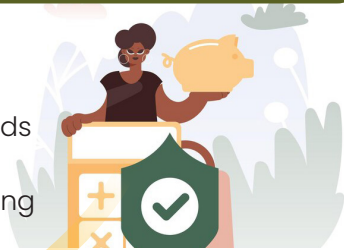
# HRD Awards // The Selection Process

## NOMINATION



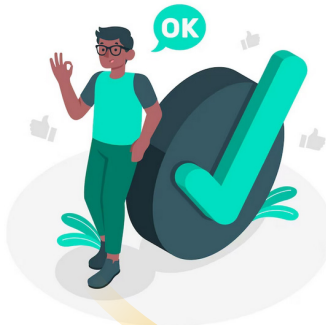
The Working Group on Human Rights Defenders in Kenya develops a call for nominations, which is then widely circulated by the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders in Kenya (Defenders Coalition) and other partners. This call outlines the criteria for eligibility for nomination. Individual HRDs can be nominated in the three categories. Defenders Coalition receives all nomination forms for review by the Shortlisting panel.

## SHORT-LISTING



A panel of missions and organizations involved in the planning of the HRD Awards shortlists five individuals per category within the set-out guidelines for shortlisting candidates.

## VERIFICATION



The Independent Selection Panel, which comprises eminent individuals in the human rights sector, forms the Awards Jury that reviews the shortlisted candidates and makes a final decision, from the names submitted.

## SELECTION



The host for the 2023 Annual HRD Awards is hosted by the Ambassador, Embassy of Denmark in Kenya, attended by human rights defenders, CSOs, the UN, government agencies, representatives from the international missions, and the media who will cover the event. The Embassy of Denmark is Co-Chair with the Defenders Coalition of the Working Group on Human Rights Defenders.

# HRD Awards Selection Panel



**Rachael Mwikali**  
Name of Institution here



**Andrew Maina**  
Name of Institution here



**Dr. Willy Mutunga**  
Name of Institution here



**Njeri Kabeberi**  
Name of Institution here



**Ikal Ileng'ei**  
Name of Institution here



**Kamanda Mucheke**  
Name of Institution here



**Grace Lolim**  
Name of Institution here



**Geoffrey Mwampembwa**  
Name of Institution here



# Lisa Gem: Upcoming Human Rights Defender 2022

**THE LAST ONE YEAR HAS BEEN** eventful for me. My work as a children's rights defender has caught the attention of many people and organizations because of the highlight I got from the Defenders Coalition.

**FOR EXAMPLE,**

- I was a guest during the launch of the Children's Court in Vihiga
- I am the human rights ambassador for my school,
- recently I was the chief guest during the Children Service Week by Winam Law Court,
- My work got covered by both a German TV channel and the Star Newspaper.
- The Nation newspaper recognised me as among the 60 most influential women since independence during this year's Madaraka Day celebrations.

And with the Cash award that I received I have been able to start a children expression studio in Kisumu. It is important for every child to be able to express themselves. This way they can talk about the violations they experience and call out the people who violate them. I have had the opportunity to grow up in an environment where I could speak up and this is what I want for every child. This studio will be an opportunity for children to learn different ways of expression, of their rights and develop content which can benefit many children across the world.

I remain grateful to Defenders Coalition and hope that you can also help me reach out to other children rights defenders to be able to join our efforts.

**“The Nation newspaper recognised me as among the 60 most influential women since independence during this year's Madaraka Day celebrations.”**

# Billy Hani: Upcoming Human Rights Defender 2022



**WINNING THE 2022 UPCOMING HRD OF THE YEAR AWARD** was not only an individual win for me, but also for the entire community of LGBTIQ+ Activists who put their lives at stake daily, fighting for the recognition and protection of the rights of a

community that is criminalized and ostracized. The award made me realize the deliberate efforts and support by our allies in the fight for the rights of every Kenyan.

As a HRD working in the promotion of individual and collective wellness of activists and feminists, the award has motivated me to keep doing the work and demonstrated the importance of mental wellness for HRDs who often focus on taking care of the society, and rarely taking care of themselves through deliberate rest among other wellness practices.

In March 2023, we at HeART Out Kenya (an organization I co-founded and currently run) hosted the first ever queer feminist convening in Uasin Gishu County to map out and find out the great work that other queer feminists are doing within the county, to strategize and hold space for JOY and collective care.

We have also done a film, *We Left Church, Not God*, which explores the harm that the anti-LGBTIQ+ preachings have done to our community, pushing them out of the churches where they explored their spirituality and found connections with God and the society.

The visibility from the award also enabled me to access spaces that have developed my leadership capacity to better run HeART Out Kenya, such as the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI).



**We have also done a film, *We Left Church, Not God*, which explores the harm that the anti-LGBTIQ+ preachings have done to our community, pushing them out of the churches where they explored their spirituality and found connections with God and the society.**

# John Allan Namu: 2022 HRD of the Year Award Winner,



## RECEIVING THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER OF THE YEAR AWARD 2022

has been a transformative experience, rippling through my work at Africa Uncensored in profound ways. Beyond the personal honor, the award has become a catalyst for connection.

It has opened doors to a network of other dedicated rights defenders whose impactful work I might not have encountered otherwise. This expanded community has become a wellspring

of inspiration and collaboration, fostering a collective strength that is indispensable in the challenging terrain of human rights advocacy.

I've met and worked with brave individuals working to protect sexual minorities in the rift valley, reeling from the death of one of their own (LGBTQ activist Edwin Chiloba) but still working. I spent time with a man who has dedicated his life to documenting abuses of all sorts in Western Kenya.





**“The recognition served as a poignant reminder of the core principle guiding our work at Africa Uncensored—the imperative of placing the public at the heart of our endeavors.”**

I went into the field with a veteran human rights defender who is still documenting the heart-breaking impact of the deaths in Shakahola.

They may not know it but every time I left, I felt deeply inspired by them, and a little guilty that I had the opportunity to leave. Festus, Billie, Redempta, Aleks, Audi, and everyone who I have met this year, I hope you know that your work is important, and I appreciate everything you do to stand for others.

The recognition served as a poignant reminder of the core principle guiding our work at Africa Uncensored—the imperative of placing the public at the heart of our endeavors. Every piece of our investigative reporting is meticulously crafted with the aim of resonating with the public.

If a story lacks a human connection, if there isn't someone at the epicenter of the narrative, we refrain from telling it. This philosophy underscores our commitment to ensuring that our

journalism not only exposes injustice but also engages and empowers the broader public, making them active participants in the fight for human rights.

Perhaps most significantly, the award has injected a renewed sense of motivation into my work. In the realm of human rights, countless warriors toil in the shadows, their efforts often overlooked. The award has served as a spotlight, not just on my endeavors, but on the collective struggles of all those working tirelessly in the field. It is a beacon that pierces through the overwhelming noise of our fast-paced world, urging us to persist in our commitment to justice. The motivation derived from this recognition is not merely personal but extends to a broader understanding that the work we do today, no matter how unnoticed, sets the stage for the unfolding chapters of justice that will shape our collective future for decades to come.



The background features a light beige color with faint, stylized graphics. On the left, there is a silhouette of a turkey's head and neck, facing right. Behind it is a fan-like pattern of vertical bars. On the right side, there is a laurel wreath with several leaves.

# Upcoming HRD of the Year Nominees

# Dahabo Abagaro Bagajo (Marsabit County)



**DAHABO ABAGARO BAGAJO** is a Kenyan registered nurse from a pastoralist nomadic community in Marsabit County, the second largest county in Kenya by size. Dahabo uses her professional skills in pre- and post-natal care to promote access to maternal healthcare for the mothers and children in her village, where the nearest health facility is 300 Kms away.

Noting the lack of access to antenatal healthcare services to women and children, Dahabo started an initiative that she named Healthy Mother Healthy Baby through which she offers health education quality medical care.

To reach many people in her community, Dahabo has trained 150 safe motherhood promoters who support her in operating a mobile clinic that accesses even the most remote parts of the county.

Remarkably, until date, 800 women have directly benefited from her antenatal care work. Her community sensitization efforts have not been left behind either as she has cumulatively touched the lives of over 3000 girls.

Dahabo also advocates against harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) as well as early/forced marriages that

are highly prevalent in the arid and semi-arid counties of Kenya.

While Dahabo has achieved this level of impact in her community, the path has not been a bed of roses. Dahabo notes that she has struggled to promote certain rights as a result of the largely patriarchal society from where comes from.

“My culture has does not acknowledge harmful practices like FGM and early child marriages as a violation of human rights and denying girls opportunities to achieve full potential of their lives. These practices are seen as normal and anyone who dares speak against them is an enemy of the custodians of culture. Personally, I have been attacked, profiled, and stigmatized for publicly denouncing these practices.”

Despite the many challenges she has faced, her remarkable work and innovative health care service through the safe motherhood promotors has customized a local solution to the hard-to-reach pastoralist realities.

She got an opportunity to undergo a civic leadership course at Wagner, New York which she attributes to sparking her community owned solutions to maternal health care within her community.

**“Personally, I have been attacked, profiled, and stigmatized for publicly denouncing these practices.”**

# Social Justice Travelling Theater (Nairobi County)

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE CENTERS TRAVELLING THEATRE (SJCTT) IS A COLLECTIVE**

of Activist from the Social Justice Movement who use Theatre as a means of transforming society to a socially just Society. For this team, art and sports is an advocacy tool for awareness accretion as well as persuading communities to support human rights defenders in their work.

The Social Justice Centers Travelling Theatre's (SJCTT) advocacy is shaped by its surrounding; since most of the members are from the informal settlement area, most of the human rights violation they focus on includes, Police excesses, including harassment, extortion and enforced disappearances.

The Social Justice Travelling Theatre Initiative was founded in 2019 as part of the organs of the Social Justice Movement which has been in the forefront addressing Social and Political issues affecting the Kenyan Population. The Social Justice Travelling theatre has been pioneered by young people who organize in various informal settlements in Nairobi and around the country.

It has adopted both street performances and stage



***The Social Justice Travelling theatre has been pioneered by young people who organize in various informal settlements in Nairobi and around the country.***

performances to reach their audiences. Majority of the issues that the group has interrogated includes performances on police brutality that is prevalent in informal settlements and where majority of the members come from. Its performandes are informed by works of Social Justice Movement that monitors and document key violations involving Police harassment and police excesses including extortion and enforced disappearances. Additionally, Social Justice Travelling Theatre deconstructs normalized

harmful practices such as Gender-Based Violence which is rampant in various areas in Kenya.

Over the years, this Social Justice Travelling theater have successfully unpacked numerous rights issues among citizens for them to remain vigilant and active in the promotion and protection of human rights. Moreover, they have evolved as talented actors, utilizing street theater as a means to reach communities, drive campaigns, and counteract the shrinking civic space in Kenya.

“The theatre as a unit has inspired the forgotten history of the theatre and has sparked a renewed hope in organizing social movements and alternative methods of organizing the community today. It has also brought together the different kinds of arts including music, poetry, spoken word and progressive cultural dance. It has also transformed aspects of community education and awareness in the sense that it has brought a different view towards mobilizing and recruiting members to the Social movements and building strong organizations in the civic and political duties.”

Most members of the Social Justice travelling theatre come from the informal settlements, unemployed, and they depend on theatre as their form of sustenance. Raising resources for conducting performances and sustaining their membership is a big pain point for Social Justice Centers Travelling Theatre (SJCTT). The team has on several occasions encountered

resistance from various duty bearers who perceive their work as challenging the state. This has exposed them to push backs such as illegal arrests when coming from training sessions and propagation of negative rhetoric about their work.

### **Why the HRD stands out from others working on Similar issues.**

The innovation within this group is trailblazing in the frontier of the use of art for social change by communities. For this team, art and sports is an advocacy tool for awareness accretion as well as persuading communities to support human rights defenders in their work.

The use of theater has a rich history of human rights advocacy; *I Will Marry When I Want* (Ngaahika Ndeenda) is a Gikuyu play co-written by Ngũgĩ wa Mirii and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. was showcased in Kenya in 1977. The government banned the play and arrested Ngugi. The use of theater makes Social Justice Centers Travelling Theatre (SJCTT) stand out from other awardees.





Silvana Lesuuda  
(Samburu County)




**SILVANA LESUUDA IS A SOCIAL JUSTICE** activist leading Network Empowering Samburu Transformation (NEST), a women-led organization based in Samburu County, located in Kenya's ASAL areas and is home to pastoralists and indigenous persons characterized with largely patriarchal social and political setups. In her Samburu community, women's voices continue to be suppressed, ignored, and marginalized, despite their contribution to the community.

Over the years, Lesuuda has been creating awareness and the recognition of the true role of women and girls in the community. She has been able to raise women's voices in a community where women face a unique seat of marginalization. Lesuuda, through NEST advocates for the end of period poverty and stigma, early child marriage and fighting against harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Despite working against entrenched cultural power dynamics, where power is disproportionately wielded by men, mostly old men, Lessuda has managed to score positive outcomes with a crucial constituency, the morans, against Child marriage and period poverty. She has turned some of the morans into a champion of her cause. Before her engagement, such conversations were considered taboo.

"I have succeeded in sustaining the conversation and setting the agenda against Children's Marriages; I have led conversations on period poverty, which I now work closely with Moran men as my champions and advocates; these talks were initially considered taboo but have been accepted at the moment."



**"I have succeeded in sustaining the conversation and setting the agenda against Children's Marriages; I have led conversations on period poverty, which I now work closely with Moran men as my champions."**

# Dennis Orengo Juma (Nairobi County)

## **DENNIS IS A HUMAN RIGHTS**

**DEFENDER** working with a range of marginalized and vulnerable groups of the society. These include widows, Children, Refugees, Persons with Disabilities(PWDs) and victims of extrajudicial killings. Dennis volunteers to do sign language interpretation in police stations and in courts of law whenever deaf persons are in conflict with the law or have been violated so as to ensure mitigation of language barrier in the dispensation and access to justice.

Orengo has registered a catalog of impressive policies and direct individual support for individuals whose rights were abused.

“Under the Disability Rights Advocacy, I have helped three Deaf Children who were defiled to get justice with about 10 more cases on disabled child defilement cases pending in court. I helped



**“Besides supporting PWDs, Dennis supports widows facing various challenges accessing justice by introducing them to alternative justice system. Additionally, Dennis trains the widows on paralegal skills where they can go to court and seek justice.”**

in documentation, filing of the cases and sign language interpretation during the court process. I also proposed 7 amendments to the Disability Bill 2023 which were all adopted by the Senate. Between 2019 to 2022, I have helped mobilize funds to buy 50 white canes to 50 visually impaired persons. I have also helped establish a disability club at St Paul’s University where I help disabled students in application of bursaries, local and international scholarships.”

Besides supporting PWDs, Dennis supports widows facing various challenges accessing justice by introducing them to alternative justice system. Additionally, Dennis trains the widows on paralegal skills where they can go to court and seek justice by themselves when they are not able to afford litigation services.

**DIFFICULTIES AND RISKS**

Owing to the fact that Dennis works with marginalized and vulnerable groups in the community, perpetrators of violations are always keen to intimidate and silence Dennis by issuing threats. He has had to relocate

severally due to an increase of threats as a result of his work.

“For my advocacy, I have faced threats which has led to at times stalling my work because I have to operate incognito or move out of the jurisdiction area where I operate. I have been forced to change houses every quarter for my safety.”

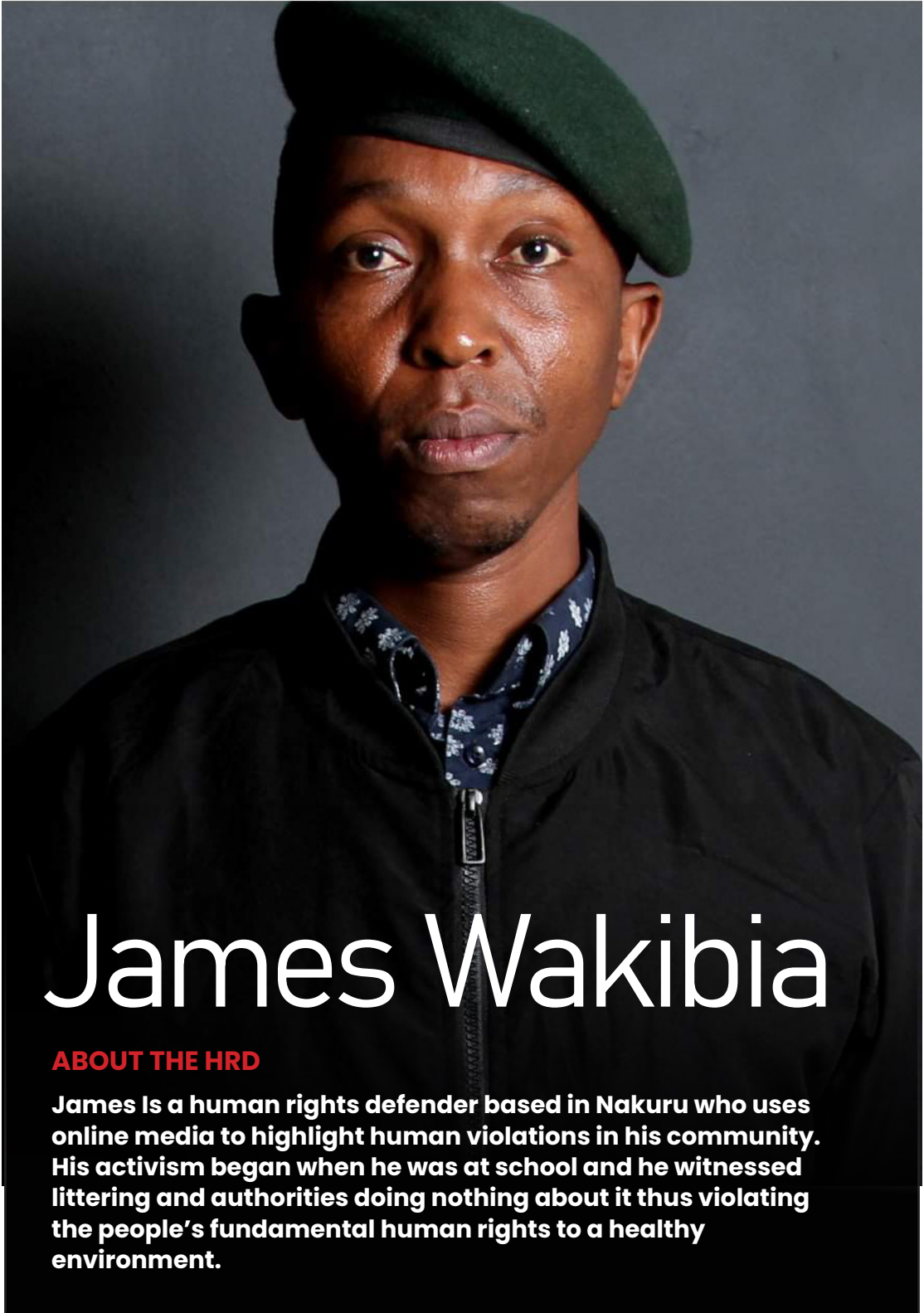
Despite the challenges, Dennis has overcome this challenge by remaining firm, consistent and upholding integrity and abiding by the rule of law at all times. This has made perpetrators lack a basis on which to discredit his service.

Dennis believes that this recognition will help enhance his safety and security by consolidating position and role in the community. He believes that the award will send a strong message to perpetrators that his work is legitimate and that he has allies across various sections of the community. He also hopes to make use of the funds from the recognition to develop a software application that supports the monitoring of human rights violations in his community.





# HRD of the Year Nominees



# James Wakibia

## **ABOUT THE HRD**

**James is a human rights defender based in Nakuru who uses online media to highlight human violations in his community. His activism began when he was at school and he witnessed littering and authorities doing nothing about it thus violating the people's fundamental human rights to a healthy environment.**

Since then, he knew that something needed to be done to raise awareness and bring about change. Important to note that James has a terrific ability to draw from his own experience and observation to develop thoughtful opinions on a variety of environmental issues.

James combines his photography skills and extensive use of online platforms, especially X (Twitter), to mobilize and campaign on plastic environmental pollution and spotlight human rights abuse and violations, mainly when vulnerable individuals are involved. What initially started as a passion project when he was at the university has grown into a project that takes up most of his time.

Frustration: While, in principle, most people favor a clean environment free of plastic, campaigning without institutional support has been difficult for James. There were many occasions when James wanted to give up, but he persisted. James also lost many opportunities because nobody wants to work with someone who can ask tough questions.

James's persistence in his campaigns has paid off in small and big ways.

"I was also running a campaign to call for a ban on single-use plastic bags, a campaign I ran since 2013 until 2017 when eventually the minister of environment then, Prof Judi Wakhungu, banned the use, manufacture, and importation of plastic bags in Kenya. It warms my heart knowing that we have less plastic polluting the environment. My desire is that our environment will completely be free from plastics in the next decade, and I am campaigning hard for that."

James also campaigned online for two patients detained by hospitals for outstanding medical bills; through government interventions, the hospital released the two patients.

***Why the HRD stands out from others working on similar issues***

The environment has linkages with plenty of other human rights. Linking environmental protection follows the long tradition pioneered by human rights giants like Prof. Wangari Maathai. James believes that this award will be like new oil in an engine; it will give him the much needed fuel to keep fighting for environmental and human rights.



**"I was also running a campaign to call for a ban on single-use plastic bags, a campaign I ran since 2013 until 2017 when eventually the minister of environment then, Prof Judi Wakhungu, banned the use."**

# Epakan Ekaale Peter (Turkana County)

**PETER EPAKAN LOKAALE IS** a climate justice activist from Turkana, the largest county in Kenya in landmass and one that has been on the receiving end of the impact of climate change which has manifested through unpredictable rainfall or extreme rainfall, frequent and prolonged dry spells and increased daytime temperatures.

Epakan has a great interest in climate justice, but he has also expanded his scope to mobilize his community against perennial interclan and inter community conflicts specifically among the Turkana, Toposa, Nyangatom, and cross-border conflict involving the Karamoja in Uganda, the Toposa of South Sudan, and the Turkana of Kenya.

For the past two years, Epakan has been extensively involved in the promotion of peaceful coexistence of the various communities in Turkana and its neighbouring counties. Among other strategies, he organizes dialogues that bring the in-conflict groups and victims to a fireplace conversation for the in-conflict groups to understand the magnitude and impact of the conflict on everyone in the community. Through this, Epakan has been able to encourage



behaviour change among the youth within the in-conflict groups.

Epakan is vocal on the accountability of public officials in his county. He deploys direct action to mount pressure on the county government of Turkana to follow the due constitutional process in dispensing its



responsibility. Being a member of Free Kenya, Turkana Human Rights Network and The Red Vests Movement, Epakan is also involved in the push for good governance and social accountability by coordinating activities such as public assemblies to petition the county government.

“During our Saba Saba protest, we highlighted many concerns, including the roadside appointments made by the Turkana governor in funerals, barazas, and churches without adhering to proper due process. These actions undermine the principles of fairness and equal opportunity fundamental to our democratic system. We demanded accountability from our leaders and insisted on ending the culture of favoritism and nepotism perpetuating injustice. This caught the eyes of many people, who reacted by calling for accountability through a public uproar on social media and other platforms.”

In the course of his work that is considered sensitive, Epakan has faced pushback, personal safety issues, harassment and intimidation, particularly in his fight pushing the government to lower the cost of living, taxes and the fight against discrimination of LGBTQI individuals. He has been subjected to online trolling and even physical intimidation by those who oppose his principled stance on human rights issues including from government officials and occasionally the community who are incited against him by the officials.

“In 2019, when Egalan, Salman, and

**“Climate change and conflict in Turkana County are two perennial issues that threaten the lives of the community, which predominantly relies on pastoralism.”**

Danson were beaten and arrested, MCA Kanamkemer ward was heard telling the goons who were doing the operations of arresting comrades saying, “Tutafute mkubwa wao yuko Nairobi amejificha uko!” After being told that I had to switch off my phone and shift to my friend’s place, where I stayed for 3 weeks.”

Despite these challenges, he remains steadfast in his commitment to transparency and accountability. In all of Epakan’s human rights, the community- rights holders are the pillar of his advocacy with the duty bearers.

Climate change and conflict in Turkana County are two perennial issues that threaten the lives and livelihood of the community, which predominantly relies on pastoralism as a means of livelihood. These issues, especially climate change, need more attention from advocates.

## // 2023 Nominees

Makambo is a pastoralist land rights activist from Turkana County in North West Kenya. Makambo uses the Sarima Indigenous Peoples Land Forum (SIPLF), an organization he co-founded, to advocate for his community's land rights in the face of large-scale infrastructures. The land is central to the pastoralists' livelihood, and any annexation without due process disenfranchises them.

Makambo was at the center of mobilizing northern Kenya communities around the impact of the Gilgel Gibe III hydroelectric dam built on River Omo - a river that drains into Lake Turkana- by the Ethiopian government due to the fears of the dam's impact on the populations whose livelihoods relied on Lake Turkana. Approximately, 300,000 people relied on Lake Turkana for their existence.

Additionally, Makambo was at the center of mobilizing communities from northern Kenya to protest and litigate against the grabbing



Makambo  
Lotorobo  
(Turkana County)

of 150,000 acres of community land to establish the Lake Turkana Wind Power (LTWP) Project.

As an activist working on land rights, he is concerned with the private developer tactics of fighting back the community's resistance. This is because the company constructed barriers along a local public road that connects South Horr to Loiyangalani. These illegal barriers by the private company on a public road facilitated monitoring the movement members, especially the most vocal posing the danger of elimination. During the construction of the LTWP any dissent was not tolerated by the company for fears that it will derail their project activities. Activists faced multiple threats from state agencies, the military, and the police. Any person seen advocating for the community in the Lake Turkana Wind Power (LTWP) was de facto deemed anti-government. The community is accustomed to the police's intimidation and threats.

Despite the risks, Makambo has been consistently fighting the annexation of 150,000 acres, 607 km<sup>2</sup>- the size of Nairobi County to the Lake Turkana Wind Power (LTWP), a private company, without the community's consent. They took the matter to court. The High court in Meru court ruled in favor of the community.

"...a lawsuit was filed in October 2014 at the Meru High Court, with

the objective of nullifying the titles and returning the land to its original status as community land. Despite the injunction issued by the Court, President Kenyatta came in person to bulldoze our land in order to launch project construction. Among the strategies that we employed include; petitions in 2012, to funders (Follow the money) i.e; Google and Overseas Private Investors Corporation (OPIC) to withdraw support."

Makambo is among few human rights activist fighting against the annexation of indigenous land in a marginalized pastoralist land community. The land is crucial to sustaining pastoralist livelihood, and annexing it without their consent will negatively impact their lives and livelihood.

**"Despite the risks, Makambo has been consistently fighting the annexation of 150,000 acres, 607 km<sup>2</sup>- the size of Nairobi County to the Lake Turkana Wind Power (LTWP), a private company, without the community's consent."**

# Njeri Gateru and National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (Nairobi County)

## ABOUT THE HRD

Njeri is a Human Rights Lawyer and defender working for the National Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission in Kenya. Njeri's organization has been at the centers of a case that has highlighted the struggle for equality and human rights for all people with a bias towards sexual and gender minorities.

Njeri, through her organization access to justice through a free legal aid clinic for anyone who had been discriminated against or violated on the grounds of their SOGIE. Njeri also engages in strategic litigation and advocacy towards equality for LGBTIQ persons in Kenya.

The primary barrier against advocating for LBGTIQ in Kenya is equal access to rights under the current legal dispensation. Kenya still retains the colonial Penal Code that contains prohibitions on consensual adult same-sex intimacy in private. The public further confers 'criminal' to anyone perceived to be a sexual or gender minority due to the existence of this law.

Njeri notes: "In the last two years, I have experienced a different kind and perhaps more terrifying aggressor in the form of a Social-Cultural outfit (the Council of Gikuyu Culture) who had issued numerous threats including death threats, surveillance and a physical/automotive attack"

Despite the legal and social barriers, Njeri has notched some impressive impacts through the commission.

"in my time at NGLHRC, we have attended to over 6000 clients, trained over 1500 LGBTIQ paralegals, represented clients in over 450 cases, trained thousands of stakeholders across the governmental, private and civil society sector. NGLHRC has successfully litigated for registration of LGBTIQ organizations and ending forced anal examinations."

Njeri's work is essential and challenging, and she understands the formal and social costs of doing what she does, making her a worthy awardee.



# Sankara Nyangaya (Kajiado County)

## ABOUT THE HRD

Sankara is a grassroot human defender and a member of the Ngong social justice and

Environment center. Sankara advocates for ecological and social justice. He advocates against police brutality, gender based violence, land grabbing and river pollution through influencing change in public attitudes, policies and laws to create an inclusive, clean, friendly and socially just society.

“My most notable success is the reclamation of public land that acted as a dumpsite for a period of time. The grabbing of this piece of land saw my arrest and that of a 11 other youths who come out in defense of this land. We suffered torture and atrocities for refusal to keep quite about the grabbing of this land.”

Sankara observes that environmental advocacy, especially on the land question, particularly when public land

grabbing is involved, attracts severe response from the violators, in some cases, with connivance of the state agencies.

“...during my advocacy works against the violation of waste pickers rights, in line with the community land we were being evacuated from, I was arrested tortured and locked behind bars for a period of two weeks for leading protest against the grabbing of those pieces of land and standing ground against the violation of fellow youths working in this sector. I have also suffered torture, intimidation and violations including dispossession of personal items for being vocal against grabbing of public land and public spaces around Ngong.”

Sankara is an exceptional HRD who demonstrates leadership through the cultivation of diverse and inclusive workforce, continuous learning and championing toward talent development, social justice and

**“I was arrested tortured and locked behind bars for a period of two weeks for leading protest against the grabbing of those pieces of land and standing ground against the violation of fellow youths working in this sector.”**



# Shikoh Kihika (Nakuru County)





## ABOUT THE HRD

Shikoh works to address the negative impact of ethnicity among Kenyan youth. Through Tribeless Youth, Shikoh works on shifting the politics from ethnicity to one based on issues, thus promoting peaceful co-existence. The group utilizes activism, social media engagement, and traditional communication methods. Tribeless Youth's decentralized leadership and operational structure, broadly online, gives it an edge over the traditional formal human rights advocacy outfits.

Since the outfit Shikoh works with, the Tribeless Youth, is self-organized and mobilized, they face the challenges of raising funding for some of their activities. Members have also "experienced people sent as spies to our meetings, being followed home, and intimidations from some quarters of the county in the county government."

"One of the significant issues we have addressed is arbitrary arrests, which often target young activists advocating for a more just society. By raising awareness about these injustices and utilizing our network, we have successfully contributed to the release of unjustly detained activists and raised the profile of these issues, leading discussions towards positive changes within the legal system."

Addressing the negative ethnicity is a positive undertaking, especially considering its impact on governance. The targeting of the youth, and the point where they spend of most of their time, on social media platforms, and through other medium that suits them is admirable.

**"One of the significant issues we have addressed is arbitrary arrests, which often target young activists advocating for a more just society. By raising awareness about these injustices and utilizing our network, we have successfully contributed to the release of unjustly detained activists."**

# Pema Kenya (Mombasa County)

## ABOUT THE HRDS

Pema is a human rights organization that works on advocating for Gender and Sexual Minorities in Kenya. Pema Kenya promotes inclusivity of Gender and Sexual Minorities (GSM) through advocacy and capacity building with a vision of a society that embraces justice and diversity. They deploy the use of biometrics and health data, community-led monitoring; Conduct health outreaches; sensitization of sub-county health facilities through various approaches like Utu barazas with the health service providers and mental health interventions on GSMs.

The primary challenges Pema and other groups advocating for GSM face is government's policy and the social-cultural pressure. The current laws for instance, Penal Code 162, 165 is conveniently interpreted to discriminate GSMs. And there is a potential of a far more restrictive laws in the form of the draft Family

Protection Bill which presents an existential challenge for Pema-Kenya and its work

Despite the challenging legal and social reality, Pema continues to deliver on critical areas.

"Pema spearheaded county-level advocacy initiatives in Mombasa County by establishing a cohort of moderators comprised of key stakeholders (police officers, health workers, local administrators, and religious leaders) who work together in one space at the institution of service delivery to create safe space within the institutions for GSM community to access services."

Pema play a critical role in a restricted and increasingly hostile environment where the state restricts civic space through legal, policy and administrative tools, and society through cultural means.

**"Pema spearheaded county-level advocacy initiatives in Mombasa County by establishing a cohort of moderators comprised of key stakeholders (police officers, health workers, local administrators, and religious leaders)"**

# Popular Vote Award

To submit your vote for the Popular Vote Award use the following:

1. Open your smartphone browser and go to [live.voxvote.com](https://live.voxvote.com) enter the following numbers **PIN: 348256**  
Voting is anonymous. Screen name or (nick)name is optional.  
(You can scan the QR code below to open link directly)

SCAN ME



# Black Lives Matter Movement: Global Solidarity Award

#BlackLivesMatter was founded in 2013 and has grown to a global organization with roots in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes by combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy.

The Black Lives Matter movement is a collective of liberators who believe in an inclusive and spacious movement that brings all black lives to the forefront including Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. The call for Black lives to matter is a rallying cry for ALL Black lives striving for liberation.



**“The Black Lives Matter movement is a collective of liberators who believe in an inclusive and spacious movement that brings all black lives to the forefront.”**



# SC. PAUL K. MUIITE: Munir Mazrui Lifetime Achievement Award



**PAUL KIBUGI MUI TE, S.C. IS A SENIOR LAWYER** and an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya with 51 years of legal practice. He was admitted as an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya in June 1970 and signed the roll of Senior Counsel in 2003.

Paul K. Muite is an active member of the Law Society of Kenya (LSK) having served as its President in 1990/91

Muite has had a remarkable legal career characterized with a passionate and strong commitment to upholding human rights principles. Over the years he has used his expertise in constitutional law to advocate for the protection of individual liberties and justice.

During the period of the struggle, he was targeted by former President Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi and planned to flee Kenya. However, his passport was seized by the government rendering him unable to flee Kenya. He became an internal refugee as a result.

His contribution is greatly acknowledged in the "Struggle for the Second (2nd) Liberation" and the fight for multi-party democracy, where he played a key role in providing political leadership that promoted the rule of law and respect for human rights.

This struggle motivated him to push his legal skills and experience to Parliament and in 1992 he became the

member of parliament for the then Kikuyu Constituency, a position he held until 2007.

During this time, he chaired both the Parliamentary Committee on Administration of Justice and Legal Affairs and the Select Committee on Constitutional Reforms. His conviction and belief in changing and influencing positive governance led him to establish the Safina party, which faced great opposition when it was first formed and it was not until 1997 when it was recognized as an official party.

Muite was a key figure in advocating for constitutional reforms in Kenya in the 1980s and 90s with his extensive legal knowledge coming in handy during the formation of Kenya's 2010 constitution where he ensured that it reflects the principles of human rights, inclusivity, and democracy and good governance.

Paul K. Muite continues to support constitutional/democratic growth and his passion for human rights issues has distinguished him as a fearless defender of the Bill of Rights championing for minority groups rights.

Muite's consistency in challenging oppressive regimes continues to contribute to the development of the laws that continue to advance Kenya's current constitutional order.

# PROGRAMME OF THE AWARDS CEREMONY

## **2.00 – 6.00 PM**

Arrival Of Guests

Entertainment

Opening remarks - Defenders Coalition

Welcome Speech from Host Ambassador

Introduction of Selection Panel and Speech Chairperson

Testimony from past year's Winners

Chief Guest Remarks

Award Ceremony

Upcoming HRD of The Year Award

HRD of The Year Award

Lifetime Achievement Award

Global Solidarity Award

Entertainment

Announcement – Winner Of Popular Vote

Vote of Thanks