



9TH HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AWARDS

Celebrating the Courage, Innovation,
Creativity and Resilience of Human Rights
Defenders in Kenya



*National Coalition of
Human Rights Defenders
Kenya*



**MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF DENMARK**
Denmark in Kenya

"Thank you for the steadfast resistance demonstrated by Kenyans against the reactionary click within our national leadership, be it in politics or mainstream academia. Your collective efforts in thwarting attempts to erase cherished memories from the consciousness of our beloved nation are deeply appreciated."

–**2022 Munir Mazrui Lifetime Achievement Award**



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Foreword

DENMARK IS PLEASED to once again host the Human Rights Defenders Awards Ceremony, having had the honour of also doing so in 2023. This event, that is in its 9th Edition, is an important and welcome occasion that puts a spotlight on the defence and promotion of human rights in Kenya.

I laud the exceptional conviction, passion and courage of the human rights defenders. It is indeed a privilege to serve as the co-chair of the Human Rights Defenders Working Group alongside the Defenders Coalition.

Adherence to human rights is essential to guaranteeing harmonious co-existence, mutual respect and sustainable development. It is in furtherance of this, that implementing a human rights-based approach in development, is key. Through this approach, we are able to apply international human rights standards to promote and protect human rights. This approach enables having a clear understanding of inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems.

The operationalization of a human rights-based approach to development, can only work with robust defence of human rights. The Right to Defend Rights enables people to freely express



H.E. Stephan Schønemann
Ambassador of Denmark to Kenya

their opinions, share ideas, access publicly relevant information, peacefully protest, and to form and join associations. Being able to access justice and find remedy when the exercise of these rights is violated or abused, is also an important part of enjoyment of this right.

This year's Awards coincide with the International Day for Women Human Rights Defenders, which celebrates the outstanding contribution of women in advancing human rights. These human rights warriors are at the forefront of challenging discrimination and inequality, and they do so willingly, often despite risks to their personal safety. It is therefore, fortuitous that the Awards and recognition of these brave women human rights defenders are happening on the same day.

In October of this year, Kenya was elected to serve as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council for the period 2025 to 2027. This is an excellent opportunity for Kenya, as pledged, to engage in a collaborative journey of advancing and protecting human rights for all, through partnerships built on equality, constructive dialogue and a shared commitment to include all stakeholders. Fulfilling this pledge will advance the human rights

environment in Kenya, anchored on the country's progressive Constitution.

Denmark's partnership with Kenya is a longstanding one and this year marks 60 years of this friendship. As we continue with this engagement, we shall continue to collaborate with state and non-state actors to advance human rights. Our commitment to this is also articulated in our "Strategy for strengthened Danish engagement with African countries" that states:

"Danish engagement with African countries must continue to build on strong values and the wish for well-functioning international cooperation and respect for international law; Democracy and human rights; Rights for women and girls, workers and minorities; the freedom to express oneself, think, believe, and assemble freely; and the right to a life free of torture".

Let me conclude by extending my hearty congratulations to all the human rights defenders that have been recognized at today's ceremony. I also salute the many other seen and unseen human rights champions!

Shukrani sana!
H.E. Stephan Schønemann
Ambassador of Denmark to Kenya

"The operationalization of a human rights-based approach to development, can only work with robust defence of human rights."

A Changing Human Rights Landscape

Esteemed colleagues, distinguished guests, and honoured defenders,

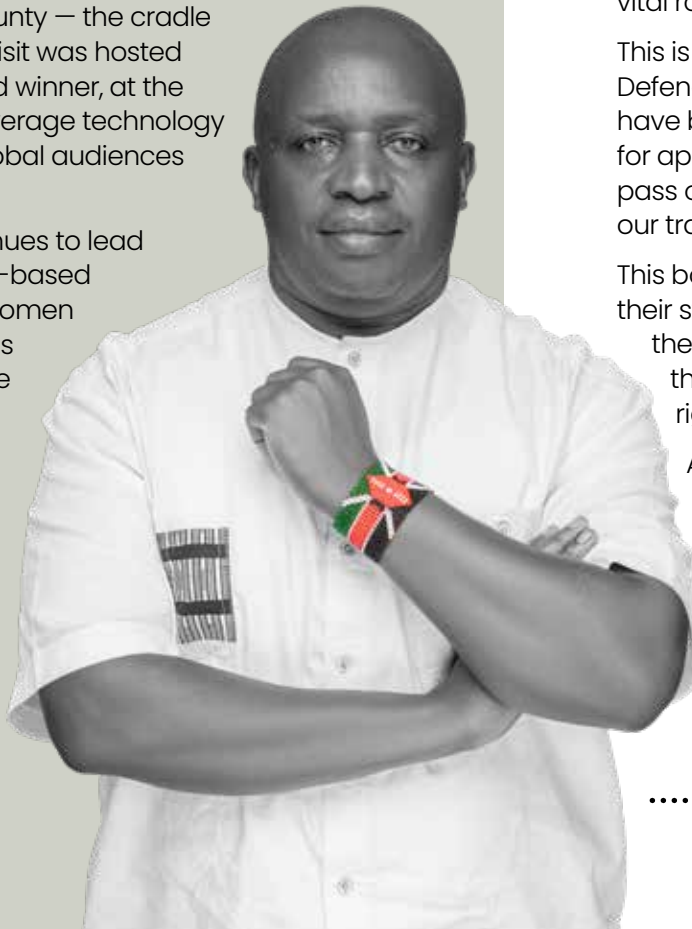
On behalf of the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders (Defenders Coalition), I welcome you to the Ninth Edition of the Human Rights Defenders (HRD) Awards.

Nine years ago, the HRD Awards initiative was launched as an annual campaign to publicly honour and recognise the incredible work carried out by human rights defenders. This initiative, conceptualized by Defenders Coalition, serves as a counterpoint to the unwarranted public vilification activists often face from both state and non-state actors. The HRD Awards highlight the innovation, courage, and resilience of human rights defenders who bravely champion justice despite the risks involved. This unique event is made possible by the commitment of like-minded partners in civil society, development organizations, foreign missions, and UN agencies, all working collectively within the Working Group on Human Rights Defenders in Kenya. I extend my heartfelt thanks to each member of this Working Group for their unwavering dedication.

This year, the impact of the HRD Awards came to life as past award jurors and laureates from 2016 to 2023 gathered in Turkana County – the cradle of humankind – to share insights and experiences. This visit was hosted by Brizan Were, the 2016 Upcoming HRD of the Year Award winner, at the Learning Lions facility, where youth are empowered to leverage technology for human rights work, enabling them to connect with global audiences while building sustainable livelihoods.

The 2020 Upcoming HRD of the Year, Naila Abdalla, continues to lead her organisation, Sisters for Justice, in addressing gender-based violence, legal rights, and social justice issues affecting women and girls. The Social Justice Centres Travelling Theatre has also made significant strides by using drama and theatre as tools for advocacy and societal change across Kenya while Willy Oeba's "Oeabism Experience" has pioneered innovative civic education approaches that have earned him recognition, including a Ford Foundation Fellowship. These inspiring journeys showcase how the HRD Awards motivate defenders to achieve even more in their human rights advocacy.

This year's HRD Awards come amidst a time of rapid technological advancement, with innovations such as artificial intelligence, digital surveillance, social media,



and blockchain reshaping Kenya's human rights landscape. While these technologies provide powerful tools for citizen empowerment, digital activism, and government accountability, they also bring significant challenges, including risks to data privacy and misuse for surveillance. Yet, technology has played a crucial role in combating corruption and impunity, holding authorities accountable, and addressing the misuse of public resources – It has reminded us that corruption and bad governance undermine good governance, weaken institutions, and divert funds from essential services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure, which are vital for improving citizens' quality of life.

The nominees have made incredible personal sacrifices, often at great risk to their own safety and well-being. These brave individuals have faced extreme threats, some having to flee their homes, leaving behind family and a sense of normalcy, all in pursuit of justice and equality. Many have endured degrading conditions in police detention and carry physical and psychological scars as a result. Despite these hardships, they wake up each day uncertain of what the future holds, driven by an unwavering commitment to their mission, they stand firm, their resilience as unbreakable as their commitment to human rights.

Honouring the extraordinary work of these defenders reminds us of the sacrifices made by these selfless individuals and their organizations, whose contributions often go unnoticed until they face arrest, injury, or worse. The HRD Awards create a rare safe space where activists can come together to celebrate, connect, and be recognized for their courage and dedication. Through these awards, we raise public awareness of the vital role human rights defenders play in our society.

This is the second year the Embassy of Denmark has co-hosted this event with us, Defenders Coalition. We are grateful for the Embassy's leadership and resources, which have been instrumental in ensuring that this program continues to grow as a platform for appreciation and recognition of human rights defenders. The Embassy will soon pass on the stewardship to the next host for the 2025 and 2026 awards, in keeping with our tradition of biannual transitions.

This booklet highlights the inspiring work of all the 2024 HRD Awards nominees, sharing their stories and achievements that often remain unseen. I congratulate each one of them and hope that their work will inspire other human rights defenders, as well as those who may not identify as such, but contribute to the advancement of human rights in diverse ways.

As we celebrate these remarkable individuals, let us honour all human rights defenders who risk so much to fulfil the promise of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The 2024 HRD Awards Winners exemplify courage, innovation, and resilience, embodying our collective commitment to human rights for all.

Congratulations to the winners!

***Kamau Ngugi,
Executive Director,
Defenders Coalition***

Word from the Jury

IN THE HEART OF A COUNTRY GRAPPLING

WITH mounting threats to civic space, the Human Rights Defenders (HRD) Awards Kenya stand as a powerful testament to the resilience, courage, and transformative impact of those who champion human rights. Against a backdrop of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, increased cases of femicide, legislative crackdowns, rising of a well resourced anti-gender and rights movements, and negative rhetoric targeting Human Rights Defenders (W/HRDs), the awards shine a spotlight on those who dare to fight for justice, equality, and dignity for all.

This year's nominations highlight the diversity, depth and intersectionality of human rights issues in Kenya and beyond, showcasing the tireless work of individuals, social movements and organizations in the face of adversity. The themes of the nominations provide a stark reminder of the critical role (W) HRDs play in safeguarding our freedoms and the shared struggles that unite us in the pursuit of justice.



Rachael Mwikali, HRD Awards July Chairperson.

Championing Human Rights Across Themes

Gender Justice and Ending Femicide: The scourge of femicide continues to claim countless lives of women and girls in their own diversity, underscoring the urgency of movements like the End Femicide Movement in Kenya. By amplifying survivor voices, demanding systemic change, and advocating for justice, this movement exemplifies the courage, fighting spirit and resilience of women, girls in their own diversity, allies and supporters confronting entrenched gender-based violence and criminalisation of Sexual reproductive health and rights.

Good Governance and Accountability: Activists demanding transparency and accountability have exposed systemic corruption, ensuring that power is wielded in service of the people rather than against them. These defenders remain beacons of integrity in a world often marked by impunity.

Climate Justice and Environmental Rights: In the face of environmental degradation and climate inaction, HRDs have stood firm, protecting ecosystems and vulnerable communities while championing sustainable development goals. Their work highlights the inextricable link between environmental preservation and human survival.

Political Rights and Cross-Border Solidarity: Movements such as the Gen Z protests against the Finance Bill 2024 showcase the power of youth-led activism in defending political rights and challenging policies that undermine economic justice. Beyond our borders, HRDs have forged global solidarities, connecting struggles in Kenya with those in Palestine, Sudan, and Congo, proving that human rights transcend national boundaries.

Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs): Advocates have spotlighted the systemic discrimination faced by PWDs, pushing for inclusive policies that ensure dignity and equity for all.

Food, seeds, Rights and Sovereignty: Defenders of food and seeds sovereignty have stood firm against the criminalization of peasant farmers and the imposition of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), advocating for policies that respect traditional pan-African farming practices and the rights of local communities.

Mental Health and SGBV: Amid increasing cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and a growing mental health crisis, HRDs have worked to destigmatize mental



The scourge of femicide continues to claim countless lives, underscoring the urgency of movements like the End Femicide Movement.

health struggles and provide critical support to survivors and strengthen community collective care and well being .

The Importance of the HRD Awards in 2024

This year’s HRD Awards are not just a celebration; they are a rallying cry for action and solidarity. In a challenging period marked by violence, increased resourced,anti -Gender, choice,rights movements ,smear campaigns, and legal restrictions, HRDs have remained steadfast. Their work is a reminder of the Constitution’s promise to uphold fundamental rights and freedoms.

By recognizing their contributions, the HRD Awards amplify their voices, shed light on the challenges they face, and inspire a broader commitment to defend human rights for all . The awards provide protection by publicly and positively profiling and enhances visibility of HRDs ,ensuring their work is seen and supported both locally and globally.

A Call to Action

As Kenyans, we owe an immense debt to HRDs who risk everything to protect the rights of others. Their courage emboldens us to envision a future where justice prevails, gender justice is realized, environmental preservation is prioritized, and every individual’s voice matters.

Let us honor their sacrifices by championing the causes they hold dear and holding space for the critical conversations ,their work ignites. The HRD Awards are not just a recognition of their efforts but a call for collective responsibility in building a society where human rights are not merely an aspiration but a reality.

This year, as we celebrate the nominees and winners across categories such as the Munir Mazrui Lifetime Achievement Award, let us recommit to standing solidarity with HRDs in Kenya and beyond. Their fight is our fight; their victories are our hope.

Special Note of Recognition: The End Femicide Movement in Kenya

The End Femicide Movement stands as a beacon of hope in the fight against gender-based violence and criminalization of sexual reproductive health and rights in Kenya. In a nation where femicide remains a grim reality, this movement of activists, feminist survivors, and advocates has courageously confronted a pervasive culture of silence and impunity. Through their unwavering commitment to justice, they have brought the issue of femicide to the forefront of public discourse, catalyzing systemic change and respect for women rights.

Their work in raising awareness, supporting survivors, and lobbying for policy reforms is not just about preventing and ending femicide but about transforming Kenya into a nation where every woman and girl can live free from fear. The End Femicide Movement embodies the power of collective action, turning grief into resilience and advocacy into tangible change. For their relentless pursuit of justice and their fearless defence of



women’s rights, they deserve our deepest respect and unyielding support.

Special Note of Recognition: The Gen Z Movement on Anti-Finance Bill 2024 Protests

The Gen Z Movement has redefined the landscape of youth activism in Kenya. In opposing the oppressive Finance Bill 2024, they have demonstrated remarkable bravery, resilience, and ingenuity. Mobilizing protests, sparking public debates, and engaging in civil disobedience, they have fearlessly challenged policies threatening economic justice and social equity.

In the face of intimidation, violence, and smear campaigns, these young activists have remained steadfast, inspiring a nation to reimagine the role of youth in governance and accountability. The Gen Z Movement and Gen Zote are a powerful reminder of the transformative potential of intergenerational advocacy and the necessity of holding leaders accountable.

Their courage and determination have sparked a movement that transcends the

“In opposing the oppressive Finance Bill 2024, they have demonstrated remarkable bravery, resilience, and ingenuity.”

protests themselves, embodying the spirit of democracy and the promise of a more equitable Kenya. For their tireless commitment to justice and equity, we salute the Gen Zote Movement and stand in solidarity with their fight for a better future.

About the Human Rights Defenders Awards

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.

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

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

E. HRD AWARDS SELECTION PANEL

1. Rachael Mwikali - Jury Chairperson
2. Andrew Maina- Jury Vice - Chairperson
3. Dr. Willy Mutunga - Member
4. Njeri Kabeberi - Member
5. Ikal Ileng’e - Member
6. Kamanda Muccheke - Member
7. Grace Lolim - Member
8. Geoffrey Mwampembwa - Member

HRD Awards Selection Panel



Rachael Mwikali
Chairperson



Andrew Maina
Vice Chairperson



Dr. Willy Mutunga
Member



Njeri Kabeberi
Member



Ikal Ileng'ei
Member



Kamanda Mucheke
Member



Grace Lolim
Member



Geoffrey Mwampembwa
Member

The HRD Award 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.

Shortlisting:

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:

Defenders Coalition and the panel verifies the HRD's human rights work through field visits, and interviews with the nominators, the nominees and their references.

Selection:

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.

Award ceremony:

The host for the 2024 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.



Testimonies From 2023 Winners

The Social Justice Centers Travelling Theatre

Comrades, partners, and friends, we, The Social Justice Centers Travelling Theatre, stand here tonight humbled and deeply honoured to have received the Upcoming Human Rights Defenders Award of 2023.

We are a vibrant collective of cultural workers from Nairobi's informal settlements. We use the power of theatre and art to amplify social change and champion human rights. This recognition by the Human Rights Defenders Award continues to affirm our mission and strengthens our resolve.

Winning this award has been a turning point. Driven by the unwavering belief that art can be a force for good, we bring theatre directly to communities. Our stories, both intimate and universal, offer safe spaces to confront uncomfortable truths. The award fuels our energy and resilience as we tirelessly empower communities with the knowledge to speak out against human rights violations. We strive to ignite change, restore dignity, and give voice to the voiceless.

This award is a testament not only to our hard work, but to the collective resilience of every individual who dares to fight for a just world. It belongs not just to us, but to the communities that welcomed us, the voices that gave us strength, and all the artists and activists who breathe life into this movement. Young thespians, poets, writers – you share this honour. It emboldens us to keep pushing for a more equitable future.

The award has fostered a bridge between generations of artists. Through workshops in our meeting space, artists of all ages share experiences, identify challenges, and learn from each other. We've also nourished our community with knowledge by hosting book cafes, where partners, and community members explore diverse challenges and seek solutions. Our "Kiwake Festival" (Swahili for "Ignite") stirred the spirit of constitutionalism within communities, reminding everyone of their responsibility to uphold its principles.

Through street theatre and participatory educational programs, we engage directly with communities, sparking conversations around their unique problems. These dialogues have shifted mindsets and opened doors to positive change.

The award has elevated our profile, allowing our thespians to travel across the continent and share our story of resilience on a global stage. We've also connected with international allies who amplify our call for social justice.

Winning this award has redefined our role. We're no longer just entertainers; we're



We are a vibrant collective of cultural workers from Nairobi's informal settlements. We use the power of theatre and art to amplify social change and champion human rights.

recognized as community organizers. We extend our deepest gratitude to the Defenders Coalition for recognizing selfless individuals and organizations at the forefront of social justice. You validate our work and acknowledge the crucial role of creative platforms in this fight.

As we celebrate tonight's nominees and winners, we recommit ourselves to our mission with renewed passion and dedication. We will not rest until every voice, no matter how small, is heard and valued.

Congratulations to all nominees and winners! To our supporters, friends, and partners, thank you for your unwavering belief. We stand here representing countless artists and the global movement for social justice. We will continue to carry the torch, lighting the way towards a more just, loving, and inclusive world.

Long live social justice! Long live community organizing!

Ekaale Epakan

I'm a climate and social justice human rights defender based in Turkana County. The award has given me relevance in my community – motivated them to seek my guidance whenever they want to address issues related to human rights. As a result, I have also enlarged and strengthened my network.

Additionally, I have built a relationship with local authorities, and they now see me as a change-maker. I have been invited to speak at various media outlets and forums discussing issues related to women, youth, persons with disabilities and minority groups. Local civil society organizations have engaged me to train other human rights defenders on topics such as human rights and climate change. Thanks to the award, I have also had the opportunity to join international masterclasses focused on youth constituencies.

As I continue to advocate for a better society, a cause that comes with many challenges, I am aware that I have the support of my people, who understand my work. This motivates me to keep fighting for what I believe in, 'One day Kenya will be a better and safer place for all of us, and for the future generation.'

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Nominees

CATEGORY 1

Upcoming HRD Of The Year Nominees

Roselyn Njoki Nyagah

Roselyn Njoki Nyagah has overcome her physical limitations, and now, a household name in Trans-Nzoia County well-known for her advocacy for the rights of girls and women living with disabilities.

Her commitment to fighting for human rights over the past nine years has seen her rise to become the secretary of Trans-Nzoia Youths Living with Disability (CBO) and CHEKISAE, a women's group that champions the rights of persons with disabilities.

Roselyn's notable contributions include mobilisation of women and girls with disability to write and submit a petition to the county government on the need for a policy for women and girls with disability in Trans-Nzoia County. She has engaged in efforts to rescue girls with disability from gender-based violence, advocated for access to healthcare and promoted education for children with disabilities by advocating for their allocation of bursaries.

The nominee has managed to overcome threats and challenges that come with her work by networking and collaborating with CSOs within and outside the county for moral and financial support. She has also utilised the existing referral systems including reporting incidents of threats and intimidations.

Additionally, Roselyn uses social media platforms to raise issues of women and girls with disabilities. This has eliminated many barriers related to physical distance, enabling her to broadly participate in sharing her advocacy work, collaborating with other stakeholders and accessing information without having to physically be present.

“Roselyn’s notable contributions include mobilisation of women and girls with disability to write and submit a petition to the county government on the need for a policy for women and girls with disability in Trans-Nzoia County.”



Ross Alwala

Ross Alwala is a trailblazing mental health advocate and social entrepreneur from Kisumu County. Her work has transformed mental health accessibility for underserved communities, particularly young people. She is the founder of "Train Your Brain," an initiative that leverages Artificial Intelligence technology to make mental health services more affordable and accessible.

Ross has made significant strides in Kenyan mental health policy. In July 2023, she presented a petition to decriminalize suicide, initiating crucial discussions in the Kenyan Parliament about this often-overlooked issue. This step toward policy reform reflects her commitment to breaking stigma surrounding mental illness and challenging outdated legal frameworks.

Ross's personal journey and vision for a fairer society drives her activism. Coming from a single-parent family in Nyalenda, Kisumu, she has faced financial and health-related challenges, which have fuelled her resilience and dedication.

Deeply passionate about making a difference, she is partly inspired by her late aunt, Bernadette Awuor, a counsellor whose legacy lives on through Ross's work. "She worked to make a difference in our community, but her work was cut short by a sudden death. Her spirit lives on through me and I work to channel her vision in my work", notes Ross. Ross additionally struggled with mental illness and did not have somewhere to go or someone to turn to. This personal connection to mental health issues has motivated her to create resources and support for young people who lack access to care.

Through "Train Your Brain," Ross has reached over 1,500 individuals on social media, facilitated affordable therapy for 100 young people, and created job opportunities for psychologists in Kenya. She's also a mentor, educating young people on building mental resilience and encourages open discussions about mental health.

Although Ross had financial challenges when starting out, her advocacy and outreach continues to grow. Her innovative use of technology, strategic partnerships, and ability to mobilise resources have enabled her to make a tangible impact on Kenya's mental health landscape. Her work exemplifies the essence of human rights advocacy, promoting equity, inclusion, and resilience. The award would amplify her efforts, attract valuable partnerships, and enhance her capacity to drive long-term changes in mental health care accessibility.

"My work is an embodiment of my commitment to mental health reform and my vision for a society where mental health care is accessible, affordable, and stigma-free" - Ross.



Abdifatah Sirat (Siraji)

ABDIFATAH MOHAMED SIRAT, A PASSIONATE ADVOCATE from Garissa and Wajir counties, recently shared insights into his journey as a human rights defender and his dedication to social justice, citizenship rights, and digital inclusion in Kenya.

During the conversation, he explained his primary motivation – addressing the deep-rooted challenges faced by marginalised and pastoralist communities in Northern Kenya, especially in accessing basic services and legal identification.

The digital activist described how his work focuses on advancing citizenship rights, emphasising that many individuals in pastoralist communities lack essential identification documents, which are critical for accessing healthcare, education, and other social services. He noted that this issue often leaves people feeling excluded from their own country and unable to claim their rights. To tackle this, Abdifatah founded the Generation Nomad Organization, a platform that provides these communities with crucial support and guidance in navigating the legal processes required to obtain identification.

Through Generation Nomad, Abdifatah collaborates with organisations like Namati, Haki na Sheria, and the Commission on Administrative Justice to advocate for policy reforms and raise awareness about citizenship rights. He explained that these partnerships enable him to address issues at both the grassroots and policy levels. “Working with these organisations allows us to achieve systemic change,” he said, highlighting that collaborating with well-established bodies strengthens his advocacy work.

In addition to citizenship rights, Abdifatah is an active member of Amnesty International, focusing on digital inclusion. He shared that, in his view, digital access is essential for all communities in Kenya, including those in rural and underserved regions.

Abdifatah emphasised that bridging the

digital divide is a critical aspect of his work, as he believes technology can empower individuals to access information, connect with resources, and advocate for their rights.

Abdifatah also discussed his approach to community empowerment. He shared how he organises workshops, community sensitization forums, and advocacy campaigns aimed at educating communities on their rights and encouraging individuals to claim their identities. These efforts, he said, go beyond simple awareness-raising; they empower individuals to take concrete steps to secure essential services. “Empowerment begins when people know their rights,” he said, adding that his role is to facilitate that knowledge and make people aware of the support available to them.

Gender equality and peacebuilding are also critical parts of Abdifatah’s work. He explained that by addressing gender-based violence, promoting peace, and facilitating dialogues between conflicting groups, he hopes to foster greater social cohesion in the region. Abdifatah expressed pride in his gender equality initiatives, noting that they help empower women and youth while promoting stability within communities. He said he believes that peacebuilding is essential to creating lasting change, especially in areas affected by conflict and historical marginalisation.

Reflecting on the impact of his work, Abdifatah noted that hundreds of individuals have successfully obtained identification documents through his advocacy, granting them access to essential services. He added that his digital rights campaigns have significantly improved information access for rural communities. “Knowing that our efforts are making a real difference in people’s lives is incredibly fulfilling,” he shared, emphasising the personal motivation that drives him.

However, Abdifatah’s path hasn’t been without challenges. He admitted to facing personal risks, threats, and resistance from conservative elements within his community. Despite this, he remains steadfast. He explained that building trust within the community and working alongside local leaders has allowed him to navigate these complex socio-political environments. “It’s about resilience and never losing sight of why you started,” he reflected.

“My primary motivation – addressing the deep-rooted challenges faced by marginalised and pastoralist communities in Northern Kenya, especially in accessing basic services and legal identification.”



Nominees

CATEGORY 2

HRD of the Year Nominees

Noor Bashir

NOOR BASHIR SHURIA, FOR CLOSE TO A DECADE, has dedicated his life advocating for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Garissa, Northern Kenya.

Noor's awakening on human rights advocacy came following the terror incidents in Ijiara and Hulugho Sub Counties when the towns experienced violent retaliation from both security forces and Al Shabaab militia, leading to a rise in arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. Witnessing the pain and suffering of the victims' families motivated the 31-year-old to monitor, document, report and follow up on such cases, which are prevalent in Garissa County.

Noor's work includes civil and political rights, pushing for the freedoms of assembly, association, and expression. He believes that citizens should be able to exercise their rights as enshrined in the law, advocates for reforms and accountability in a country struggling with resource wastage, poor governance, and diminishing accountability.

"Noor Bashir emphasises the importance of research and documentation, recognizing that data is critical for effective advocacy."

Noor recognizes that socio-economic rights are equally important, actively promoting the right to health and education. He asserts that a healthy and educated population is empowered and capable of withstanding challenges and adversities.

The conversation around environmental protection and climate justice is also integral to Noor's work. He acknowledges the importance of a clean and healthy environment, incorporating environmental rights into his advocacy efforts. He emphasises that refugees, migrants, and displaced persons also have rights and freedoms, which must be upheld within existing legal frameworks. This focus leads him to address the plight of



displaced individuals and seek ways to facilitate their integration into communities and broader society.

Noor takes pride in his work and has strategically employed various methods to ensure that his efforts are meaningful. He emphasises the importance of research and documentation, recognizing that data is critical for effective advocacy. Additionally, through lobbying and engagement, he has successfully connected with diverse policymakers and duty bearers, including regional and international mechanisms. By raising public awareness, utilising social media, and conducting community outreach programs, he has engaged with the community and empowered them through accurate information dissemination. His partnerships and networks further strengthen his mission of promoting and protecting rights and fundamental freedoms.

Despite challenges such as the vast area he covers, limited resources, and a lack of recognition from local administration, Noor is proud of the successes he has achieved. Although they may seem small, Noor celebrates victories in community empowerment, policy reforms, increased awareness, and some legal achievements (he has supported GBV case referral to the Garissa paralegals network whereby as the secretary and chief paralegal, Noor managed to support access to justice whereby as paralegals, they won 7 court cases on defilement and GBV within 3 years.)

The activist draws inspiration from survivor stories, grassroots movements, and collaborations with like-minded individuals. He acknowledges that his Bachelor's degree in Community Development from Garissa University has played a crucial role in his work, noting that timely interventions in cases involving security forces have averted potential catastrophes.

Currently, as a practising paralegal, Noor is committed to ensuring access to justice for victims of various injustices, including extrajudicial killings within Garissa County, despite facing significant security threats and cultural barriers in his human rights work.

Noor's contributions have earned him several certificates in recognition of his role as a community watchdog, as well as multiple paralegal and human rights defender awards. His unwavering commitment to justice, loyalty, compassion, and support for legal aid services has garnered him respect across diverse backgrounds and faiths, making him a beloved figure both in Garissa and beyond.

Jackson Kuria (Corporal Shakur)

IT'S GENERALLY UNDERSTOOD THAT GOVERNMENT employees are expected to maintain a level of allegiance to the government. This loyalty often bars public dissent against government policies or actions. However, Jackson Kuria, a Prison Officer popularly known as Corporal Shakur, defied this expectation choosing to prioritise human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Kuria's courageous stance gained national attention during the Finance Bill 2024 protests (popularly recognised as Gen-Z protest). Despite the risk of losing his job as a prison warden, he publicly advocated for accountability and good governance while in his official uniform. His actions demonstrated remarkable courage, resilience and a deep-rooted belief in the importance of speaking truth to power.

Kuria's motivation stems from a desire to protect the rights of all Kenyans, especially those who have not violated any laws. Notably, he has actively pushed for investigations into cases of enforced disappearances which became widespread as a result of the Finance Bill 2024 protests. He is pleased that some individuals have been found, and investigations into related deaths are ongoing.

Kuria's unwavering dedication to justice and human rights has not come without challenges. He has faced interdiction from work, persecution, surveillance, and intimidation from government officials. Yet, these obstacles have only strengthened his resolve. His resilience, commitment, and unwavering spirit serve as an inspiration to others to stand up for justice, the rule of law, good governance, and human rights.



“Kuria’s motivation stems from a desire to protect the rights of all Kenyans, especially those who have not violated any laws.”

Hussein Khalid

Hussein Khalid is a towering figure in Kenya's human rights landscape. When discussing human rights and fundamental freedoms in Kenya, his is a name that cannot be overlooked. A distinguished human rights defender and lawyer, Khalid has been a pivotal figure in the country's post-independence journey, tirelessly advocating for the protection of rights and freedoms. Despite facing intimidation and threats, he remains unwavering in his commitment to this cause.

With over 25 years of experience in civil society, Khalid's work is centred on empowering individuals and communities. His journey began at Centre for Law & Research International (CLARION), where he gained invaluable experience in community mobilisation, human rights training, and community empowerment. This foundation laid the groundwork for his subsequent work with organisations like Youth Agenda, Non-Governmental Organizations Council of Kenya (NCEC), and The Constitution and Reform Education Consortium (CRECO).

Khalid's career took a significant turn when he joined the Kenya Human Rights Commission and was seconded to the Muslim for Human Rights (MUHURI). During his decade-long tenure at MUHURI, he played a crucial role in raising awareness of human rights issues in the Coast region, contributing significantly to the development of contemporary human rights advocacy in the area.

In pursuit of justice, Khalid founded HAKI Africa, where he spearheaded groundbreaking work, including addressing the killings and disappearances of victims of counterterrorism. This bold stance led to the blacklisting of HAKI Africa and MUHURI by the government. Undeterred, Khalid continued his work, taking on major cases like the River Tana killings, River Yala killings, and the Shakahola massacre.

Khalid's interests extend to gender issues, free media, community building, peace promotion, sexual minority rights, social justice, governance, mental health, land and environmental rights, digital rights, access to justice, police reforms, and movement building. His dedication to human rights is motivated by a desire to create a just and free society where rights and freedoms are respected. Some of his significant contributions include:

- Civil society awakening and movement building in the Coast region
- Advocacy against extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances
- Campaigning for anti-torture legislation
- Exposing the River Tana killings and floating bodies
- Contributing to the drafting of Guidelines on Combating Enforced Disappearances in Africa
- Challenging the government's blacklisting of organisations
- Breaking the story of the River Yala bodies (together with Boniface Mwangi)

- Filing a court case to stop the sale of Mombasa port
- Led the Black Monday protests against the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) monopoly
- Breaking the story on Shakahola massacre (over 450 people have been reported dead and numerous still missing)
- Taking up cases on extra judicial killings and enforced disappearances which came about during the anti-finance bill
- Following up on Kware killings – this past July, close to 50 dismembered bodies placed in sacks were discovered in the Kware dumpsite in Mukuru Kwa Njenga, Nairobi.

Khalid's unwavering commitment to human rights has not been without its challenges. He has faced government attacks and suppression of his work, numerous arrests in various towns and forced to seek safety in safe houses due to threats to his life. However, his resilience and persistence have allowed him to overcome these obstacles.

Currently, as the CEO of VOCAL Africa, Khalid is focused on building a pan-African movement, coordinating local voices to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing. Throughout his career, Khalid has fearlessly confronted human rights abuses.

His legacy as a fearless advocate for human rights continues to inspire and motivate others to strive for a more just and equitable world.

“Hussein Khalid is a towering figure in Kenya's human rights landscape. When discussing human rights and fundamental freedoms in Kenya, his is a name that cannot be overlooked.”



Boniface Mwangi

Boniface Mwangi activated the Finance Bill protests of 2024. Soon after, activists and individuals from all walks of life, in various parts of the country, joined in championing for better governance of the country. Eventually, the government withdrew the Finance Bill and a new wave of holding the government accountable has been witnessed since.

This, however, is just one of the significant achievements in Mwangi's life. He epitomises a just society.

Mwangi has fearlessly defended victims of injustice. He is synonymous with the fight against social injustice, impunity, corruption, and bad governance. Known for his tagline "I speak courage fluently," Mwangi has remained steadfast in his commitment to constitutionalism, rule of law, and protection of human rights, despite threats and intimidation or often, putting his own safety at risk.

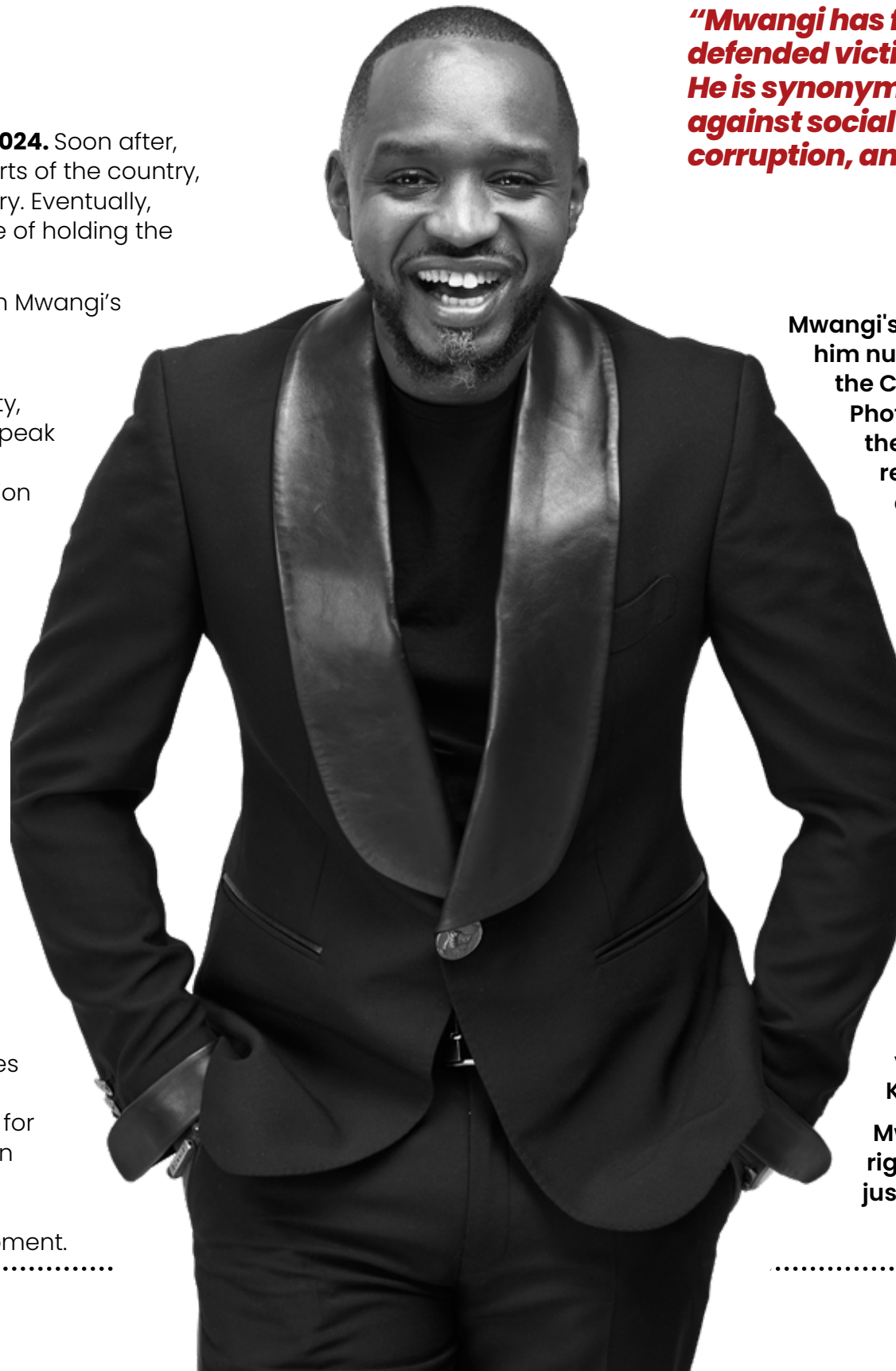
Mwangi's commitment to social change has also come with a heavy price for his family who have faced harassment and threats. The escalation of these hostilities has seen him threatened with harm and/or death by forces in government. Despite these challenges, he remains undeterred.

At 41 years now, Mwangi's journey as an activist began after the 2007 post-election violence, which he witnessed firsthand as a newspaper photographer. The trauma of covering the horrific events, perpetuated by the same politicians he was reporting on, fuelled his desire for change.

His first initiative, Picha Mtaani, was a travelling street exhibition showcasing photographs of the 2007 violence. This project aimed to spark dialogue and promote national healing. Subsequently, Mwangi launched initiatives like MaVulture and Team Courage, focusing on fighting impunity, challenging corrupt leadership, and advocating for peace. In 2010, Mwangi founded PAWA 254, an organisation that uses art to address social issues and empower communities. PAWA leverages the power of art to raise awareness, inspire change, and promote positive development.

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"Mwangi has fearlessly defended victims of injustice. He is synonymous with the fight against social injustice, impunity, corruption, and bad governance."



Mwangi's tireless efforts have earned him numerous accolades, including the CNN Multichoice Africa Photojournalist of the Year Award, the Prince Claus Laureate, and recognition from Time magazine as a Next Generation Leader.

He leverages his social media influence to address social ills and to inspire everyday Kenyans to aspire for a greater, better nation. His denunciations of corruption and impunity are strident convictions. Mwangi continues to wage a spirited campaign against oppressive establishments.

Although at one point he stood alone, today, Mwangi has created a movement – inspired by his vision and consistency – adding their voices to champion for a better Kenya.

Mwangi believes in the basic right of every human being to justice, equity, and freedom.

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Hanifa Safia

Hanifa Safia is a fearless young woman who has emerged as a powerful voice against injustice. Through social media, she has rallied young people to revolt against poor governance, corruption, and the misuse of public funds. Her pivotal role in the Finance Bill 2024 protests has made her a prominent figure in the fight for change.

Hanifa's passion for human rights, though, began in her childhood. Even as a young girl, she often stood up for her peers, in and out of classroom, in instances where they couldn't. She later witnessed firsthand injustices faced by women and marginalised communities which ignited her determination to fight for a more equitable society.

Hanifa has dedicated her life to advocating for the marginalised and vulnerable, particularly those living in low-income communities. She has led numerous campaigns, including bringing an end to the draining of a raw sewer in Korogocho slums, which had been going on for over 30 years. Through a three-month social media campaign on X (formerly Twitter), she successfully pressured authorities to rectify the issue – which majorly posed health risks to nearby residents, especially children. Hanifa was also instrumental in reclaiming land grabbed from a children's home in Ridgeway Area.

Additionally, Hanifa is particularly concerned about the lack of justice for victims of rape and sexual abuse. To illustrate this point, Hanifa shared a case where she assisted a mother whose 10-year-old daughter was raped by a Quran teacher in Mandera. While the case is ongoing, the perpetrator remains free and continues to harass the victim's mother.

Besides, Hanifa has organised successful fundraising campaigns to support victims with most notable ones being raising funds to cater for hospital bills for victims and families (all over Kenya) injured, murdered or assaulted during the Finance Bill demonstrations. Additionally, earlier in the year, she led a drive to raise money for families affected by floods.

“Hanifa is a symbol of hope for young people. Her unwavering dedication to human rights inspires others to stand up against injustice and strive for a better future.”

Hanifa's unwavering belief in the power of individual action has led to significant positive change. Her story is a testament to the impact that one person can make when they are committed to making a difference.

By building trust and fostering a supportive community, she has created a space where people can connect and address injustice together. This spirit echoes that of historical figures like Wangu wa Makeri and Mekatili wa Menza, who refused to be silenced in their pursuit of a better society.

Hanifa is a symbol of hope for young people. Her unwavering dedication to human rights inspires others to stand up against injustice and strive for a better future.



Nominees

CATEGORY 3

Munir Mazrui Lifetime Achievement Award

Benna Buluma (Mama Victor)

WHEN TRAGEDY STRUCK IN AUGUST 2017, BENNA BULUMA, affectionately known as Mama Victor, found herself a vocal advocate against injustice and impunity. The loss of her two sons, Bernard and Victor, to extrajudicial killings during post-election chaos was a devastating blow. The pain of losing a child is immeasurable, a wound that time cannot fully heal.

Determined to seek justice for her sons, Mama Victor embarked on a journey that would transform her life. She joined the Mathare Social Justice Centre, a community of like-minded individuals who shared her passion for human rights and social justice. This community empowered her to confront injustices and impunity head-on.

This newfound purpose gave her strength and direction, empowering her to fight for a better future for all.

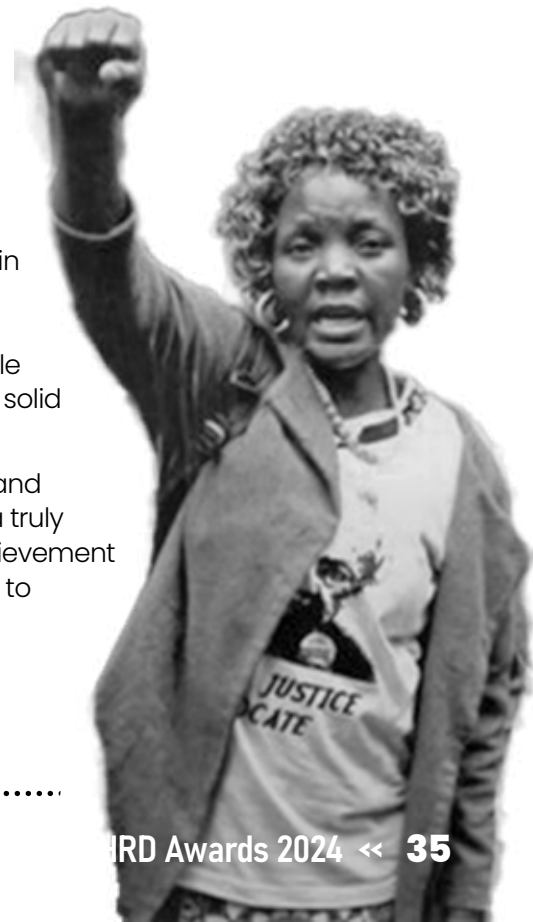
Recognizing the power of collective action, Mama Victor founded the Mothers of Victims And Survivors Network, Kenya. This platform brought together mothers who had also lost their children to extrajudicial killings, providing a platform for shared grief, mutual support, and collective advocacy. Together, they demanded an end to extrajudicial killings and fought for systemic change.

Despite facing numerous challenges, Mama Victor's unwavering resilience and dedication to justice inspired others. Her story serves as a testament to the power of individual action and the importance of community. She embodied the spirit of a true human rights defender, fearlessly confronting injustice and working tirelessly for a better future.

Tragically, Mama Victor's life was cut short by the devastating floods that ravaged the city. However, her legacy lives on. She is a beacon of hope, reminding us of the importance of defending human rights and fighting for justice, even in the face of adversity.

Her resilience in advocating for justice should remain an inspiration to all, that indeed we have a quest to conquer, a just society where human rights and fundamental freedoms are protected, where the rule of law is upheld, and Constitutionalism remains our solid guiding light.

Mama Victor's unwavering commitment to justice and her tireless efforts to empower survivors make her a truly deserving recipient of the Munir Mazrui Lifetime Achievement Award. Her story will continue to inspire generations to come, urging us to carry on the fight for a just and equitable society.





Caren Kiarie, Kisumu County

CAREN WAMBUI KIARIE IS A DEDICATED SOCIAL JUSTICE advocate and human rights defender with over three decades of experience addressing human rights violations in Kenya. She resides in Nyando, Kisumu County, where she founded and convenes the Nyando Social Justice Center and Nyabende Support Programmes. Through these initiatives, Caren has championed the fight against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) by rescuing and referring survivors while advocating for systemic change. Her work spans 31 years and includes empowering women through economic programs and mentoring them to become self-reliant.

Caren's advocacy extends to mobilizing and sensitizing communities on health rights, including HIV/AIDS, TB, and malaria prevention. Over the years, she has received extensive training from various partners, equipping her with skills to protect health and property rights and promote peaceful protests. Notably, she has collaborated with organizations like Legal Reform Foundation, KELIN, and Amnesty International, among others, to enhance her impact in defending human rights. Her approach combines advocacy, communication, and social mobilization to create lasting change in her community.

“Caren’s advocacy extends to mobilizing and sensitizing communities on health rights, including HIV/AIDS, TB, and malaria prevention.”

Among her many accomplishments, Caren has successfully assisted over 60 SGBV survivors in forming support groups that provide psychosocial and economic empowerment. Her mentorship programs have trained adolescent girls, young women, and boda boda riders to become human rights champions. She has also influenced policies on gender and child protection through her active participation in forums such as the Nyando Law Courts Users Committee and the County Gender Technical Working Group. Caren's unwavering commitment to justice has earned her recognition as a tireless advocate for the vulnerable.

Despite facing threats, arrests, and significant setbacks like the arson attack on her Justice Center in 2023, Caren continues to push forward. Her resilience and dedication have allowed her to rebuild and refocus on her mission to secure justice for women, girls, and other marginalized groups. Through her work, she remains a beacon of hope, ensuring that survivors of abuse and injustice have a voice and a pathway to healing and empowerment.



Nominees

CATEGORY 4

Global Solidarity Award

Mehdi Hassan

Mehdi Hasan is a prominent British-American journalist, broadcaster, author, and editor renowned for his fearless pursuit of justice and human rights. With a degree in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics from Christ Church, Oxford, Hasan began his career as a producer at ITV before progressing to roles at the BBC, Sky News, Channel 4, Al Jazeera and a columnist at The Guardian. Known for his analytical approach and commitment to social justice, Hasan has consistently shed light on marginalised communities and human rights abuses worldwide.

Further, Hasan hosted The Mehdi Hasan Show on NBC's Peacock and MSNBC, where he engaged in debates on contentious topics. His outspoken stance, particularly on Palestine, has garnered both support and criticism. During the 2023 Israel-Hamas war, Hasan faced additional challenges, including the cancellation of his show, which he attributed to a shift towards more neutral news reporting.

Similarly, he has exposed the exploitation of local communities and the destabilising influence of foreign entities in Congo. Hassan has also drawn attention to the ongoing genocide (what he refers to as a "forgotten genocide,") in Sudan, calling for international action to address the crisis. His commitment to truth and justice has led him to openly criticise governments and powerful institutions, advocating for accountability and equality.

Recently, Hasan launched Zeteo, a media organisation dedicated to providing diverse global perspectives and connecting present conflicts to historical colonialism. This initiative underscores Hasan's commitment to understanding how past injustices continue to shape contemporary geopolitical issues. His work consistently bridges historical context with current affairs, advocating for a nuanced understanding of human rights and social justice. Hasan's influence as a human rights advocate is profound, as he uses his platforms to foster empathy, question entrenched power structures and promote equity and accountability globally.

Hasan's international coverage reporting on Palestine, Sudan, and Congo is crucial as it brings attention to often-overlooked humanitarian crises. By highlighting the plight of Palestinians – highlighting the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank, exposing the ongoing violence and displacement in Sudan, and shedding light on the exploitation of communities in Congo, Hasan encourages the international community to address these urgent issues. His ability to link these crises to broader themes of colonialism and imperialism underscores the interconnectedness of global human rights challenges.

Mehdi Hasan's commitment to truth, justice, and human rights makes him a powerful advocate for social change. His work inspires empathy, promotes accountability, and calls for action on a global scale.



Excellency Monsignor Bert Van Megen

APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO KENYA, Hubertus Maria van Megen, has continued to be influential during pivotal moments in Kenya. Following the protests on June 25th, the Nuncio made a bold call for systemic change, stating that "the government cannot continue with business as usual; business has to change because our youth mean business." His remarks highlighted the urgent need for responsive governance and amplified the voices of Kenyan youth demanding justice and reform.

In his capacity as the Pope's representative, the Nuncio underscored the church's role as both a spiritual and physical sanctuary for those seeking refuge from violence, persecution, or legal threats. This advocacy sparked controversy, with the government accusing him of making inflammatory, one-sided comments that appeared to support the protests and criticize the administration. Despite this pushback, Nuncio's statements resonated with many, reaffirming the church's responsibility to speak out against injustices and champion the rights of the vulnerable.

"The Nuncio made a bold call for systemic change, stating that "the government cannot continue with business as usual; business has to change because our youth mean business."

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SCAN ME



PROGRAMME OF THE AWARDS CEREMONY

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Arrival Of Guests

Entertainment

Opening remarks - Defenders Coalition

Welcome Speech - Denmark Embassy

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, Popular Vote

Vote of Thanks

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