

HAKI NEWS

JANUARY-MARCH 2025 ISSUE // A PUBLICATION OF THE DEFENDERS COALITION

A clarion call to safeguard women's rights

Defenders Coalition
conferred
the 2025 FR.Kaiser
Human Rights
Awards

Empowering
WHRDs to tackle
climate change and
provide sustainable
adaptation solutions





Friends and Supporters of Human Rights Defenders in Kenya!

We champion the safety and security of Human Rights Defenders in Kenya

What we Do

-  Supportive Policy, Legal and Institutional Frameworks
-  Human Rights Defenders Safety and Security.
-  Enhancing the Socio-Economic Wellbeing of HRDs
-  Institutional Excellence

Follow and interact with us on our social media handles:



Defenders Coalition



DefendersKE

Contents

Executive Director Remarks	04
A clarion call to safeguard women's rights at the 6th NiMama Forum	06
Defenders Coalition conferred the 2025 FR.Kaiser Human Rights Awards	08
Strengthening Civic Space and Solidarity Networks in Kenya	09
UPR Pre-Session 49 Periodic Review	10
Capacity Building for Effective Human Rights Communication	10
Strengthening Skills for Advocacy and Engagement through a Training of Trainers	11
Sector Working Groups Engagement	12
Protection Interventions	14
Strengthening the Protection Framework	15
Global Forum for Digital Rights and Innovation	16
Strengthening Digital Capacity of Human Rights Defenders	18
Providing Psychosocial Support to Human Rights Defenders	20
Conquering New Heights For Justice	21

Executive Director Remarks

At the Defenders Coalition, we take immense pride in being at the forefront of initiatives that uplift and empower Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), particularly in regions facing complex challenges such as climate change, socio-economic inequality, and human rights violations. The initiatives highlighted in this newsletter highlight our unwavering commitment to ensuring HRDs are equipped to continue their vital work, despite the many obstacles they encounter.

This quarter, the Defenders Coalition has made significant progress in advancing the protection of human rights defenders (HRDs) and pushing for positive change.

In March 2025, we marked International Women's Day at the Sixth Annual Ni Mama Forum in collaboration with the End Femicide Movement, bringing together 170 Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs). The forum focused on accelerating action to

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



address femicide and gender-based violence. We launched the 'Mtetezi Application' pilot programme to empower WHRDs in reporting human rights violations and presented a key memorandum to the government's Technical Working Group on Gender-Based Violence.

In February 2025, we hosted a convening with Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI) to assess the Collective Civic Space Protection and Solidarity Networks, ensuring HRDs remain resilient in an increasingly restricted civic space. We also engaged in the UPR Pre-Session 49 advocating for stronger protections for HRDs ahead of Kenya's review at the UN Human Rights Council.

Our Training of Trainers in March 2025 equipped 15 HRDs with advocacy and facilitation skills to effectively advance their work at national and international levels. Additionally, our Communications and Peer Learning Training enhanced HRDs' abilities to engage with the media and communicate human rights issues.

We continued our involvement in sector working groups, such as Police Reforms and the Missing Voices Coalition, to address extrajudicial killings and enforce accountability. Our Livelihood Diversification Training in Isiolo and Marsabit empowered WHRDs with sustainable skills for resilience.

As we move into the next quarter, we remain committed to supporting HRDs and advancing human rights through collective action and advocacy.

We invite you to engage with this newsletter and share with your networks.



Women Human Rights Defenders from Isiolo and Marsabit sharing their live experiences after setting up their Kitchen gardens



Martha Karua was joined by duty bearers and rights defenders at the International women's day celebration



Collective Protection partners engaged in a brainstorming session in Naivasha



Defenders Coalition staff, along with our development partner at the Fund for Global Human Rights



Friends and supporters of Climb for Justice pose for a picture at the peak of Elephant hills



Participants of the TOT advocacy training hold their written commitments of their action plan



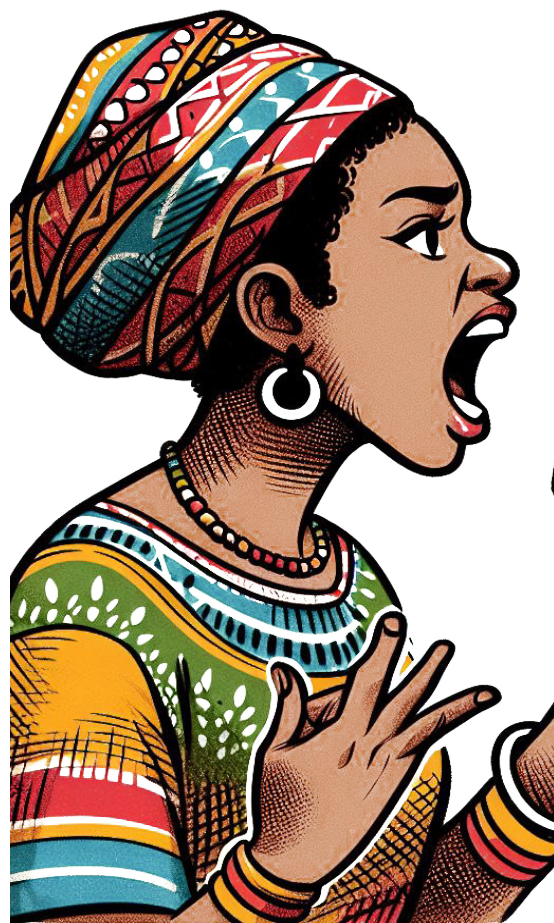
Defenders Coalition staff during a wellness walk at the Ololua nature walk



Kamau Ngugi ,Executive Director ,Defenders Coalition giving his opening speech during the International women's day celebrations

A clarion call to uphold women's rights at the 6th NiMama Forum 2025

The NiMama network convened 170 women from the 47 counties in Kenya to mark the International women's day.



In Commemoration of International Women's Day 2025, the Defenders Coalition collaborated with the EndFemicideKe Movement in hosting the Sixth Annual Ni Mama Forum with 170 Women Human Rights Defenders taking part.

The theme for the forum was in line with the global call to **"Accelerate Action"** towards the eradication of violence against women and girls despite the presence of legal frameworks that lay the ground for the enjoyment of the rights of women and girls. Notably, there was a significant rise of cases of femicide, with vocal women and girls being subjected to untold violence.

The Forum which was held between 6 – 8 March 2025 was graced by relevant state actors including women legislators, Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). Additionally, national human rights organizations and development partners attended the event in a bid to join the calls for ending violence against women in Kenya.

WHRDs were sensitized on gendered monitoring, documenting and reporting of human rights violations with the highlight being the launch of the 'Mtetezi Application'- a mobile application that allows users to timely report incidents of human rights violations.



Women human rights defenders and Defenders Coalition partners at the opening of the NiMamanetforum.

Further, the WHRDs compiled a Memorandum of Reasons and Understanding that was presented to the Chairperson of the Technical Working Group on Gender Based Violence including Femicide.

Read more about the memorandum report here;

<https://defenderscoalition.org/memorandum-submitted-to-the-technical-working-group-on-gender-based-violence/>



Defenders Coalition conferred the 2025 FR.Kaiser Human Rights Awards



Kamau Ngugi, Executive Director of Defenders Coalition, receives the 2025 Fr. Kaiser Human Rights Award, presented by the Law Society of Kenya (LSK) team at their Annual General Assembly in Kisumu



Gloria Madegwa, Head of Programs at Defenders Coalition, and Kamau Ngugi, Executive Director, proudly holding the 2025 Fr. Kaiser Human Rights Award.

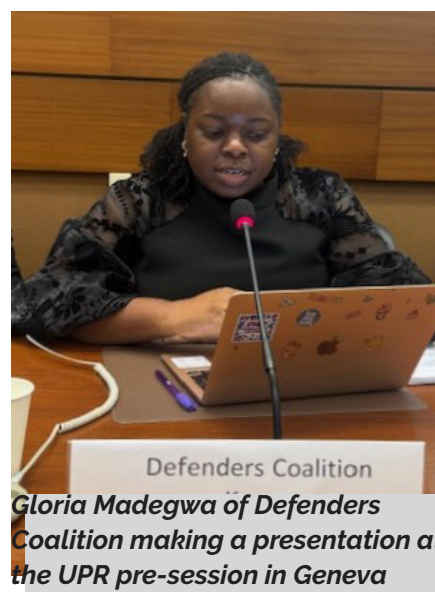
On 28th March, 2025, the Defenders Coalition was conferred the prestigious Fr Kaiser Human Rights award in recognition of its exemplary service in supporting frontline human rights defenders in promoting and protecting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law by the Law Society of Kenya (LSK) during its Annual General Assembly held in Kisumu.

The Fr Kaiser Award was started by the Law Society of Kenya (LSK) in 2003 and named after the Mill Hill Missionary priest Fr John Kaiser of Ngong' Diocese who was killed mysteriously in 2000. The Human Rights Award honors individuals and institutions that have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to justice and the promotion of human rights.

Engagement at the UPR Pre-Session 49 Periodic Review



Gloria Madegwa ,Kamau Ngugi ,Obino Nyambane with the Norway diplomatic mission in Geneva



Gloria Madegwa of Defenders Coalition making a presentation at the UPR pre-session in Geneva

In February the Defenders Coalition participated in the UPR Pre-Session 49 of the Human Rights Council Session in Geneva, where we shared critical information with Permanent Missions, on the situation of human rights defenders, freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of association and freedom of expression in Kenya since. This engagement is in preparation for Kenya's upcoming Universal Periodic Review (UPR) exercise before the United Nations Human Rights Council on 1 May 2025.

Notably, members noted with concern that the civic space in Kenya is shrinking with the continued violation of rights and freedoms by state actors, their agents or

persons with authority. The aim of engaging with this mechanism is to ensure that we not only champion for human rights but also call for change in the societal landscape where all can thrive and relish their rights and freedoms. The sessions accorded the Defenders Coalition an opportunity to make a presentation and submit a statement while equally engaging with diplomatic missions in a quest to galvanize support for their issues and adoption of their recommendations.

Read more about our report submission here - <https://defenderscoalition.org/statement-upr-pre-session-on-kenya-in-geneva/>

Strengthening Civic Space and Solidarity Networks in Kenya

In February 2025, Defenders Coalition in collaboration with its implementing partner – the Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI) hosted a two-day convening whose aim was to assess the impact and evolution of the Collective Civic Space Protection and the Solidarity Networks in Kenya. The meeting brought together human rights defenders

(HRDs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and development partners to review the progress made since the project's inception in 2020 and identify areas

for strengthening collective protection Collective Civic Space Protection and the Solidarity Networks Programme was launched in Kenya in 2016 and has continued to play a crucial role in enhancing the safety, resilience, Strengthening Civic Space and Solidarity Networks in Kenya and solidarity of HRDs operating in an increasingly restrictive civic space.

Over the past 8 years, the network has successfully mobilized advocacy groups, women HRDs, social justice centers, media, indigenous communities, and grassroots organizations to counter systemic threats .



The collective protection partners in Naivasha

Capacity Building for Effective Human Rights Communication

On 26th to 27th March 2025, The Defenders Coalition brought together 14 HRDs for a communication and peer-learning training designed to enhance their skills across various communication channels. The training covered topics such as: articulating community issues, building and maintaining media relationships, handling live interviews, public speaking, engaging through new media, and personal branding, among others.

Communication plays a key role in promoting and protecting human rights, allowing Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) to interact with diverse audiences including stakeholders. The Defenders

Coalition is keen to realize enhanced visibility of its work and that of HRDs. To achieve the latter, the Defenders Coalition must be deliberate in sharpening the skills of HRDs on communication on all fronts.



Participants engage in a role play during an interview skills session

Strengthening Skills for Advocacy and Engagement through a Training of Trainers



Participants engaging in an outdoor session at the TOT Advocacy training

Defenders Coalition held the Training of Trainers on Effective Advocacy and Facilitation Skills from 10th March 2025 to 14th March 2025.

The five days training brought together 15 human rights defenders (HRDs) who advocate for diverse rights to include, women's rights, queer and gender minority rights, indigenous women, land and environment rights from across the country.

The training aimed to enhance the capacity of HRDs on effective advocacy not only at the national level but also at the regional and international levels through the utilization of existing mechanisms at these levels. In addition, the HRDs were to be equipped with

the essential facilitation skills to ensure that they have the requisite skills to facilitate training sessions as trainers. Further, HRDs made commitments to continue championing for the various rights and freedoms within their communities.



A participant receiving a certificate



POLICE REFORMS WORKING GROUP

Defenders Coalition, a member of the Police Reforms Working Group (PRWG) was represented and participated in the PRWG retreat held on 3rd to 6th of February 2025, in Machakos. The retreat accorded members the opportunity to develop a report on the state of human rights in the country. In addition, members were to develop a comprehensive alternative to the National Policing Policy.

This policy is critical in reforms within the policing sector granted it creates a blueprint of these reforms are to be achieved. The PRWG is keen that the policy is anchored on the respect of human rights and

fundamental freedoms within the country. Further, the policy is to be developed and implemented focusing on a human rights-based approach guided by the provisions of the Constitution and international law.

Additionally, action plans and advocacy strategies were developed with the aim of guiding the group on how to best implement the strategies developed with the aim of advancing the desired changes within the policing sector. A comprehensive presentation was made highlighting the significant role the The Defenders Coalition remains committed to pushing for police reforms within the country.

MISSING VOICES COALITION ENGAGEMENT

The Defenders Coalition participated at a Missing Voices Coalition meeting held on 22nd February 2025 hosted by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

The engagement accorded the members present to address pertinent issues to include the recruitment of the MVC coordinator and data analysis, annual work plan.

In addition, the engagement presented a chance for the introduction of new members, those equally committed to witnessing the end of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. Data remains critical in ensuring that the advocacy

strategies and are to be implemented are evidence based, it thus becomes prudent to ensure that proper tools are utilized in a quest to attaining and analysing verifiable data. To this end, having a competent data collector and analyst becomes prudent.

Defenders Coalition continues to contribute significantly to ensuring the end of cases of abductions, extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances in the country through its membership in the Missing Voices Coalition.

LGBTQ ROUNDTABLE

Defenders Coalition was privileged to be part of the LGBTQI+ Working Group, convened by HIAS Kenya, on 12th February 2025. HIAS Kenya organized and hosted a roundtable engagement on inclusion of displaced queer and gender minorities within the region. The main purpose was to discuss how best displaced LGBTQI+ persons can be integrated not only within communities by addressing their plight, but also in the strategic advocacy work by national human rights organizations in the country.

It is acknowledged that queer and gender minorities continue to endure significant risks and challenges to include threats, harassment, physical and online attacks, as a result, they endure abuses thus a violation of their rights and freedoms.

It is prudent that human rights organizations collectively work to ensure that queer and gender minorities, to include those displaced are protected and their rights and freedoms promoted and safeguarded.



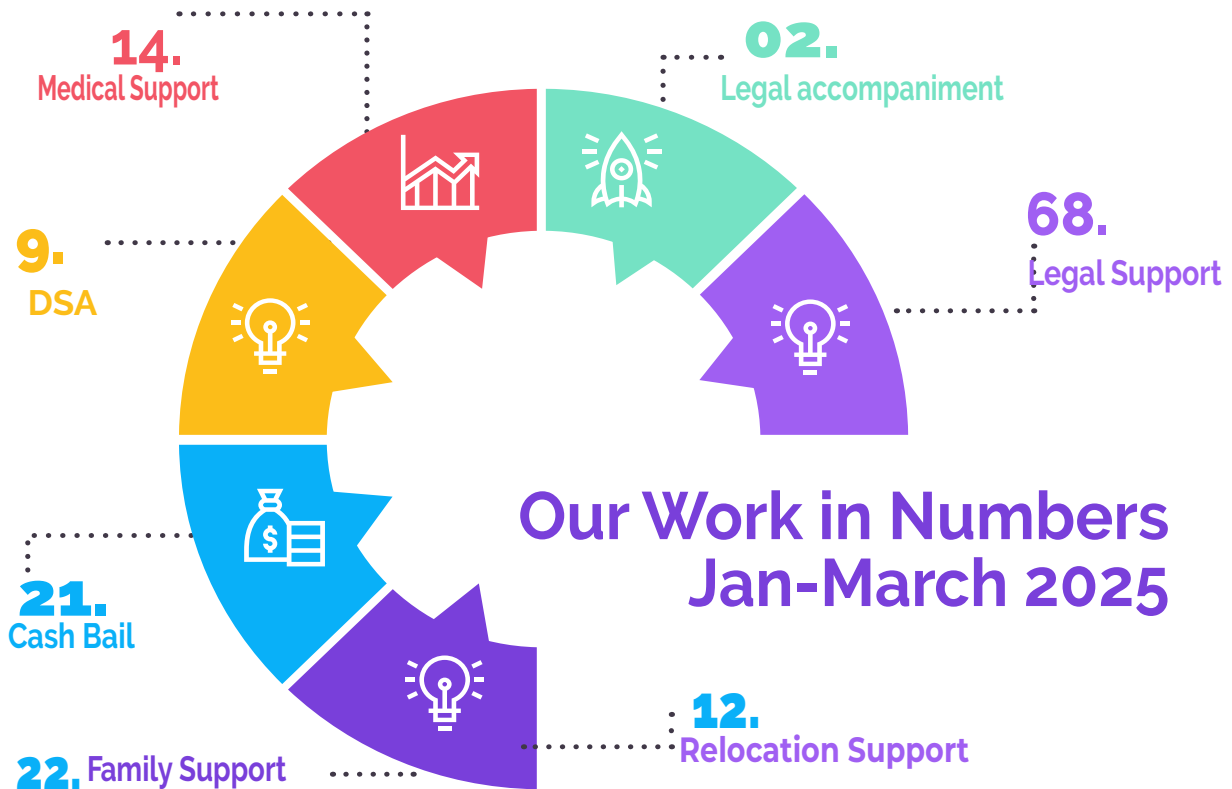
Police Reforms working group in Machakos



Protection Interventions

As part of Defenders Coalition core mandate to champion Safety Security and Well-being of Human Rights Defenders, Defenders Coalition intervenes in a timely way whenever HRDs are at risk and deliberately establishes strategic partnerships with complementary referral systems in order to ensure a systems approach to HRD support.

Since the beginning of year 2025, Kenya's human rights environment has been characterized by significant political, socio-economic, and civil society developments impacting human rights defenders (HRDs) and the broader human rights landscape Operating Context



POLITICAL CONTEXT

Kenya faced significant political unrest marked by enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and government suppression of dissent. The [Kenya National Commission on Human Rights](#) highlighted cases like that of Brian Odhiambo, a missing fisherman, and the killing of human rights defender [Richard Raymond Otieno](#). Protests against government abductions in December 2024 led to [arrests](#), with opposition leaders accusing police of complicity in the disappearances. In January 2025, reports revealed police cover-ups of protester killings. The government also cracked down on digital criticism, and a global civil society alliance downgraded Kenya's civic space rating to "[repressed](#)" due to widespread harassment, surveillance, and suppression of protests.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT

Kenya faced pressing socioeconomic challenges, with [rising fuel and electricity prices](#) straining citizens' economic and social rights, particularly impacting vulnerable populations. The [Kenya National Commission on Human Rights \(KNCHR\)](#) criticized government policies, including the Social Health Insurance Fund, oppressive taxation, and discriminatory development programs, for worsening social and economic inequalities. In a significant legal development, the [Kenyan High Court](#) [declared laws criminalizing attempted suicide unconstitutional](#), ruling that they violated the right to the highest attainable standard of health and marked a step forward in addressing mental health issues and reducing stigma.

CIVIL SOCIETY CONTEXT

The combination of political repression and economic challenges has led to a shrinking civic space in Kenya. The government's crackdown on protests, suppression of dissenting voices, and threats to freedom of expression, particularly in digital spaces, have contributed to a repressive environment for civil society. This situation has raised concerns among human rights organizations and the international community regarding the erosion of [democratic freedoms in the country](#).

Strengthening the Protection Framework

The Protection Working Group (PWG) convened for a two-day strategic retreat on 18th and 19th March 2025.

Hosted Defenders Coalition, this pivotal gathering brought together 12 human rights organizations involved in the protection of HRDs as well as the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) to assess the security and operational environment for HRDs, analyze emerging risks, and develop a five-year strategic roadmap for coordinated responses. A key takeaway from the discussions was the development of a strategic paper that will guide the working group with key strategies to ensure timely and well-coordinated interventions for HRDs at risk.

The retreat took place against the backdrop of increased enforced disappearances, abductions, threats, and administrative repression targeting HRDs.

The Protection Working Group (PWG) was established to enhance coordination among organizations providing protection to HRDs, ensuring an efficient referral system and minimizing duplication of efforts.





Empowering WHRDs to tackle climate change

Between 27th and 31st January 2025, Defenders Coalition conducted a Livelihood Diversification Training for Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) from Isiolo and Marsabit counties. The program, designed to offer alternative solutions for empowering WHRDs to confront climate change as well as providing sustainable adaptation solutions, is yielding positive results. Kitchen gardens are thriving, with WHRDs successfully cultivating household vegetables despite the challenging climate conditions in arid and semi-arid regions.

The training, which focused on agroecology and sustainable kitchen gardening, took place in Logo Logo, Marsabit, and in Burat, Isiolo County, benefiting a total of 40 WHRDs.

The WHRDs took part in the training

where key topics covered included challenges WHRDs face in setting up home kitchen gardens, organic pest control using indigenous knowledge, water recycling techniques, drought-resistant trees, and factors to consider in establishing a kitchen garden.

To support their implementation, the WHRDs received two vertical kitchen garden bags, kales, spinach, chili, cowpeas, onion seedlings, pesticide, a hand sprayer, and a watering can each.



Engagement in Partner Outcome Harvesting

The Hivos Kenya Partners' Outcome Harvesting Work Shop, held on February 3rd-4th, 2025, in Murang'a County, was a critical component of the Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA) programme. The two-day workshop focused on identifying and verifying the partners' key project outcomes, emphasizing how local civil society and underrepresented groups are shaping just climate solutions.

Defenders Coalition will continue engaging with Hivos to document further outcomes as the project progresses.



Ahmed Shire, ICT Manager and Defenders Coalition ICT personnel, representing at RightsCon

Global Forum for Digital Rights and Innovation

The Defenders Coalition took part in the Rights Con global event which took place in February in Taiwan, focused on pressing digital rights issues such as privacy, surveillance, artificial intelligence, and online freedom.

RightsCon is the leading global summit on human rights in the digital age, bringing together experts, policymakers, and industry leaders to discuss the intersection of technology and human rights. Participants engaged in workshops, discussions, and collaborative sessions aimed at shaping policies and best practices for a safer

digital world.

A key highlight of RightsCon 2025 was the unparalleled networking opportunities it provided.

Defenders Coalition connected with tech industry leaders, digital security specialists, and human rights advocates to exchange insights on protecting digital spaces. These engagements strengthened collaborations, opened doors to new partnerships, and facilitated knowledge-sharing on emerging threats and innovative solutions in digital security and human rights advocacy.

Strengthening Digital Capacity of Human Rights Defenders



Pastoralist Alliance for Resilience and Adaptations Across Nations (PARAAN) members in attendance at the

SECURITY MANAGEMENT TRAINING

Key to the effectiveness of human rights defenders' work is the capacity to manage personal and organizational security. As such, the Defenders Coalition makes deliberate efforts to strengthen capacities of HRDs on various components of security management.

Between March 24th-27th, The Defenders Coalition conducted a capacity enhancement exercise for 25 (twenty-five) HRDs from Pastoralist Alliance for Resilience and Adaptations Across Nations (PARAAN) aimed at enhancing both physical and digital safety management. This training provided HRDs with practical tools to navigate threats and protect their advocacy work. Indigenous peoples' livelihoods, rooted in security mechanisms, and HRDs working to protect indigenous rights face high risks.

DIGITAL SECURITY HELP-DESK

Between 6th-8th March ,2025 ,at the Ni Mama Forum, Defenders Coalition set up digital security help desk that assisted 35 women human rights defenders (WHRDs) facing digital challenges with their devices.

This initiative included sharing our digital security pamphlet and providing personalized digital security guidance. Rapid response remains a crucial pillar in our support system, allowing us to provide immediate support to those facing urgent security risks.

LAUNCHING THE MTETEZI-APP PILOT PROGRAMME

During the Ni Mama Forum, we had the opportunity to launch the pilot program for the revamped Mtetezi application. The Mtetezi Application is a monitoring and reporting tool designed to enable Human Rights Defenders in Kenya to document and report human rights violations effectively.

During the session, participants had the opportunity to interact with the application, test its features, and share their valuable feedback.

This initiative involved training women human rights defenders (WHRDs) on the app's functionalities, ensuring they could navigate its features effectively. The session also provided a valuable platform to gather real-time feedback, test the app's performance across different mobile devices, and identify areas for improvement.

As we continue refining the application, the selected pilot group remains actively engaged in testing and providing feedback. Their insights are instrumental in shaping the final version of the app, ensuring it is both user-friendly and responsive to the needs of human rights defenders. The ongoing feedback loop will help us finalize the revamping process and strengthen Mtetezi as a critical digital security tool.

ORGANIZATIONAL SECURITY AUDITS

The Defenders Coalition conducted physical and digital risk assessments for three (3) human rights organizations in Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kwale counties with the view of assessing their capacities and strengthening the same.

Building on these risk assessments, Defenders Coalition extended security enhancements to four organizations that had been previously audited. The support includes equipping them with capacities on safe storage, installation of counter-surveillance equipment as well as strengthening their digital infrastructure.

By continuously evaluating and addressing security gaps, we ensure that human rights organizations operate in safer and more resilient environments, empowering them to continue their critical work without undue risks.



Defenders Coalition staff during a security audit in Mombasa

Providing Psychosocial Support to Human Rights Defenders

Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) play a crucial role in advocating for social and political change while campaigning for the promotion and protection of civil and political liberties. However, this work is as perilous as it is essential. HRDs often face immense personal risks as they challenge the status quo, questioning government policies or private sector practices, enduring constant confrontation with policymakers, and sometimes facing security threats. These pressures can take a significant toll on their mental and emotional well-being. The intense emotional labor involved, combined with long hours away from family and little to no pay, makes their work even more challenging.

In response, Defenders Coalition is committed to providing psychosocial support to HRDs. During January, February, and March 2025, we offered mental wellness support to HRDs in Kisumu through group debriefing sessions aimed at fostering emotional resilience and psychological well-being in these difficult times.

Additionally, in partnership with the Bipolar Heroes Foundation, we marked World Bipolar Day in Kisumu. This event raised awareness about bipolar disorder, advocating for the rights of those living with the condition. It also provided an opportunity for screenings and support for affected individuals, including HRDs, reinforcing our commitment to supporting the mental health of those on the frontlines of human rights work.



Our toll-free Dial-a-Counselor line - 0800 724 280 is open

Connect with a professional counselor for your mental and psychosocial needs today.



Marvlyn Mbugua making a presentation at the World Bipolar Day commemoration in Kisumu



Conquering New Heights !

The Defenders Coalition has kicked off preparations for the second attempt to scale Mt. Kilimanjaro – the World's freestanding mountain – as part of a campaign to raise funds for setting up the first resource center for Human Rights Defenders in Kenya.

The first preparatory activity took place on January 25th, 2025, where 18 supporters of the Climb for Justice campaign hiked and successfully summited Elephant Hill in the Aberdare Ranges.

Elephant Hill towers approximately, at an elevation of 12,000ft (3,658m) above sea level. The 9.5 km hike trail starts at the Njabini Forest Station gate, at an elevation of 8,202ft (2,500m) above sea level. The terrain is mostly wet and slippery within the

bamboo forest, and rocky as you approach the summit. =

A huge thank you to everyone who participated and supported this important cause to champion human rights. The climb reminded us that the path to justice is never easy, but together, we can rise above every obstacle.

The climb continues as we now set our sights on the ultimate challenge to Mount Kilimanjaro on 3rd-10th May ,2025



Heading to Kilimanjaro in May 2025!

Exciting news for all adventurers and justice seekers! Our highly anticipated Climb for Justice expedition to Mt. Kilimanjaro now has new dates, and we're inviting YOU to join us in this incredible movement for change!

Kilimanjaro Expedition: 3rd-8th May The main aim of this pillar will be to facilitate timely and appropriate responses to all forms of threats or insecurities to HRDs.

This will be achieved by strengthening the capacities of HRDs and other service providers, more so, duty bearers, lawyers, medical personnel and counsellors among others. Defenders Coalition intervenes in a timely way whenever HRDs are at risk and deliberately establishes strategic

But First, We Prepare!

As we get ready for the Mt. Kilimanjaro expedition in 2025, we invite you to join us this April for a thrilling preparatory hike at the beautiful Mt. Kenya

Cost: Ksh 3,000

Payment Details:

M-Pesa Paybill Number: 810896

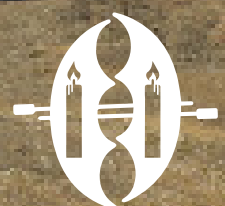
Account Name: Your Name

Don't miss this chance to enjoy stunning views, make new friends, and support the journey to Haki Village. Book your spot now and let's Climb for Justice!

**The National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders-Kenya
P. O. Box 26309- 00100, Nairobi.**

Contact Us On

Follow our handles on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok on @DefendersKE.
Website: www.defenderscoalition.org
Email: info@defenderscoalition.org
Phone: +254716 200100 / +254712 632390



**DEFENDERS
COALITION**