



10 Years
HRD AWARDS

**10 Years of Recognising Resilience and
Courage of Frontline Defenders**



*National Coalition of
Human Rights Defenders
Kenya*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the following Embassies for hosting the Human Rights Defenders Awards since its inception in 2016.

2016



Kingdom of the Netherlands

2017

2018



EMBASSY OF
BELGIUM

2019



AMBASSADE
DE FRANCE
AU KÉNYA

*Liberté
Égalité
Fraternité*

2020



Norwegian Embassy
Nairobi

2021



Sweden
Sverige

2022

2023



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF DENMARK

Denmark in Kenya

2024

10 YEARS, 1 MOVEMENT, COUNTLESS CHAMPIONS: OUR LAUREATES

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Foreword

The European Union is honoured to co-host the 10th anniversary of the Human Rights Defenders Awards

and celebrate the tremendous work of human rights defenders in Kenya over time, in the recent past and in 2025. Over the past decade, this initiative has become a valued platform for recognising the courage, dedication and resilience of individuals and organisations who stand up for others and work tirelessly to promote and protect human rights across Kenya.

Human rights defenders play a vital role in a democratic society. Their commitment, knowledge and persistence give voice to the vulnerable, hold institutions accountable, and contribute to building more inclusive, just and resilient communities. Their work often comes with considerable personal risk, yet they continue to stand firm in defence of the rights and freedoms that underpin democracy and peaceful, sustainable development.

The promotion and protection of human rights are at the heart of the European Union's values. As part of the EU–Kenya Strategic Dialogue, we share a commitment to advancing democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental freedoms. Upholding human rights is essential to



***H. E. Henriette Geiger,
European Union Ambassador to Kenya.***

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achieving sustainable development, strengthening democratic institutions, and ensuring that all members of society can participate fully and equally in public life.

The European Union firmly believes that development must be grounded in a human rights-based approach. From my perspective, this means placing people, their dignity, rights and voices at the centre of our efforts. By promoting participation, accountability and access to justice, we can better address the inequalities that lie at the root of many challenges and empower individuals and communities to shape their own futures.

As we mark the 10th anniversary of the Human Rights Defenders Awards, we are reminded of the remarkable contribution of Kenya's vibrant civil society and the many human rights defenders who work across the country, often very locally, quietly and without recognition, to protect the rights of others. Their courage and dedication strengthen Kenya's democratic fabric and bring

to life the values enshrined in the country's Constitution. The European Union is proud to stand alongside these defenders and, together with our Kenyan partners, will continue working to ensure that civil society organisations and activists can thrive in an open, safe and inclusive environment.

Finally, I would like to pay particular tribute to women human rights defenders, whose courage and leadership continue to advance equality, standing at the forefront of efforts to challenge discrimination and defend the rights of women and girls, often in the face of serious challenges.

I warmly congratulate all the nominees and award recipients recognised today, and I pay tribute to the many human rights defenders whose courage and dedication continue to inspire us all.

Asanteni sana,

H.E. Henriette Geiger
Ambassador of the European Union
to Kenya



“The European Union firmly believes that development must be grounded in a human rights-based approach.”

A Word from our Executive Director

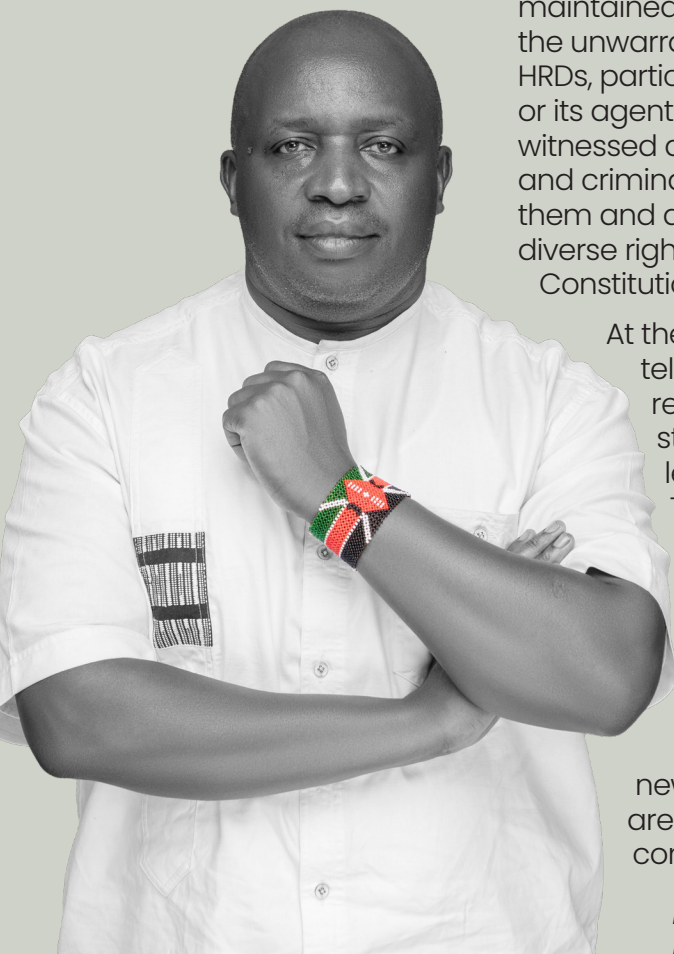
Esteemed colleagues, partners, distinguished guests and honoured defenders,

I welcome you to the HRD Awards 2025, to honour the exemplary work of courage by various individuals at the frontline defending rights. We are also celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Human Rights Defenders (HRD) Awards. Every year, since 2016, Defenders Coalition and the Working Group of HRDs has recognised and celebrated resilience and courage of frontline defenders, those who have dedicated their time, energy and resources to champion for change and the protection of rights and freedoms of the many within

their communities. This initiative, that has been maintained, has served as a platform to counter the unwarranted and negative narratives about HRDs, particularly those perpetuated by the state or its agents. Indeed, in recent times, we have witnessed an increase in the negative profiling and criminalisation of HRDs, all aimed at silencing them and discrediting their work while defending diverse rights and freedoms as guaranteed in the Constitution and international law.

At the HRD Awards, we showcase innovation, tell our stories, bolstering solidarity, building resilience, fostering partnerships and strengthening of networks at various levels including grassroot communities. The testimonies of past awardees, affirms that the HRD Awards, open doors and create opportunities thus propelling their work to greater heights as they continue to champion for rights and freedoms within their communities. It is through such impactful testimonies, that new, younger and vibrant defenders are inspired, to continue defending their communities. To veteran HRDs, the Awards

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



rekindles the passion and zeal for defending human rights, a beautiful reminder that their calling and commitment to respect for the rule of law, safeguarding democracies and promoting good governance, is relevant now, as was the case when they were at the frontline.

It cannot be ignored that the 10th HRD Awards are being held at the backdrop of serious human rights violations and abuses not only at the community level, but also regionally and globally. We have witnessed the impacts on the shrinking civic space, cases of police brutality, government excesses, abductions, involuntary and enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. The enactment of regressive laws and policies or amendment to existing laws, equally remain a challenge, given that such actions serve to clawback on the significant gains made in safeguarding rights and freedoms. Transborder repression of human rights defenders remains of great concern at a time when human rights violations are on the rise. Reduced funding, competing interests and the rise in anti-gender and anti-rights movement which further contributes to the shrinking civic space. The advancement of technologies on its part has become a double edge sword, facilitating advocacy on one hand, while facilitating GBV on the other, thus impacting on women and girls including women human rights defenders negatively. Despite these challenges, HRDs have remained resilient and courageous in the

face of adversities, and have been steadfast in championing for change, albeit slow, within their communities.

The nominees of the 10th HRD Awards are individuals and collectives who have demonstrated courage and resilience in their work. From advancing the rights of persons with disabilities, seeking redress for victims of human rights violations, pushing for environmental rights and climate justice, empowering the youth to spotlighting repression through media at a regional and global scale, speaks volume to the dedication, commitment, zeal and passion in the work that they do.

The success of the HRD Awards is an attribution to solidarity among different actors committed to a common cause. I wish to thank the host embassies, jury panel, the planning committee as well as the HRD Working Group comprising of foreign missions, the UN and CSOs. All the co-chairs of the HRD Working Group from 2016 to present and the Defenders Coalition Secretariate for the continued commitment in ensuring the HRD Awards are always a success.

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. This year's awardees exemplify courage, innovation and resilience, embodying our collective commitment to human rights for all.

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 non-state groups who make use of various forms of repression to silence them. The “Declaration of the Rights and Responsibilities 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 Award was launched in 2016 by 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:

- 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 HRDs in Kenya;
- To enhance the safety and protection of all HRDs in Kenya.

At the inception stage, three categories were identified to honor outstanding and innovative work of HRDs that had great impact despite adversities; recognize promising innovative work of upcoming rights defenders 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, with the objectives of 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 a permanent co-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:

recognizing Individuals or movements active for 0–5 years who have shown exemplary courage in overcoming challenges and advancing human rights.



Human Rights Defender of the Year Award: recognizing Individuals or movements who, within the past year, have demonstrated outstanding courage in addressing and challenging current human rights issues.



Munir Mazrui Lifetime Achievement Award: recognizing Individuals or movements for their long-term commitment, courage, and significant contributions to the protection and promotion of human rights.



The Global Solidarity Award: recognizing international Individuals or movements, who have made significant contributions to advancing human rights in Kenya through solidarity at regional or global levels.



Popular Award: this award allows participants at the ceremony to vote for a nominee who has done impressive work but was not selected as a winner in the primary categories.

Cash Awards

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

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

In addition, the Award Winners,

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

The Selection Criteria

The following are taken into consideration:

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

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

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.

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:



Defenders Coalition will host the 10th HRD Awards ceremony on date 27th March 2026 and will bring together human rights defenders, CSOs, the UN, government agencies, representatives from the international missions and the media. The Award Ceremony presents a platform to honour and celebrate formidable HRDs who have done exceptional work in defending human rights and fundamental freedoms.

TESTIMONIALS

From Past Winners



Hussein Khalid

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.

Winning the 2024 Human Rights Defender of the Year Award by the Defenders Coalition was a deeply humbling and transformative moment in my human rights journey. It served not only as a personal recognition of my work but also as a powerful validation of the collective struggles and sacrifices of countless ordinary citizens across our region who continue to stand up against injustice, often at great personal risk. The award renewed my energy and conviction, reminding me that the fight for human dignity, freedom and accountability is not in vain. That every act of courage, no matter how small, contributes to the larger tapestry of change.

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Beyond the personal inspiration, the award significantly amplified the visibility of our work at VOCAL Africa and strengthened our credibility with partners, policymakers and grassroots movements. It opened new doors for collaboration, advocacy and resource mobilization, enabling us to expand our reach and deepen our impact across East Africa. Most importantly, it reaffirmed that defending human rights is not a solitary endeavor but a shared responsibility. One that thrives on solidarity, recognition and an unwavering belief in the power of people to transform their societies..

Hanifa Safia

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

Winning the Human Rights Defender of the year award in 2024 became a powerful affirmation of collective struggle and solidarity. It reminded me that our work, often done in the face of resistance and danger, does not go unseen. The recognition renewed my sense of responsibility and deepened my commitment to defending the rights and dignity of ordinary Kenyans, especially the young people who stood up fearlessly during last year's protests.

The recognition amplified my voice in policy and advocacy spaces and allowed me to build stronger networks with both grassroots activists and international human rights actors. It gave credibility to the causes I champion—justice for protest victims, accountability in governance, and protection for vulnerable groups making it easier to mobilize support and resources for affected communities.

Most importantly, the award became a reminder to others that courage is contagious. Many young people reached out saying it inspired them to speak up, organize, and reclaim their power as citizens. That, to me, has been the most meaningful impact, seeing more people realize that human rights work is not reserved for a few, but a shared duty to humanity.



Ross Alwala

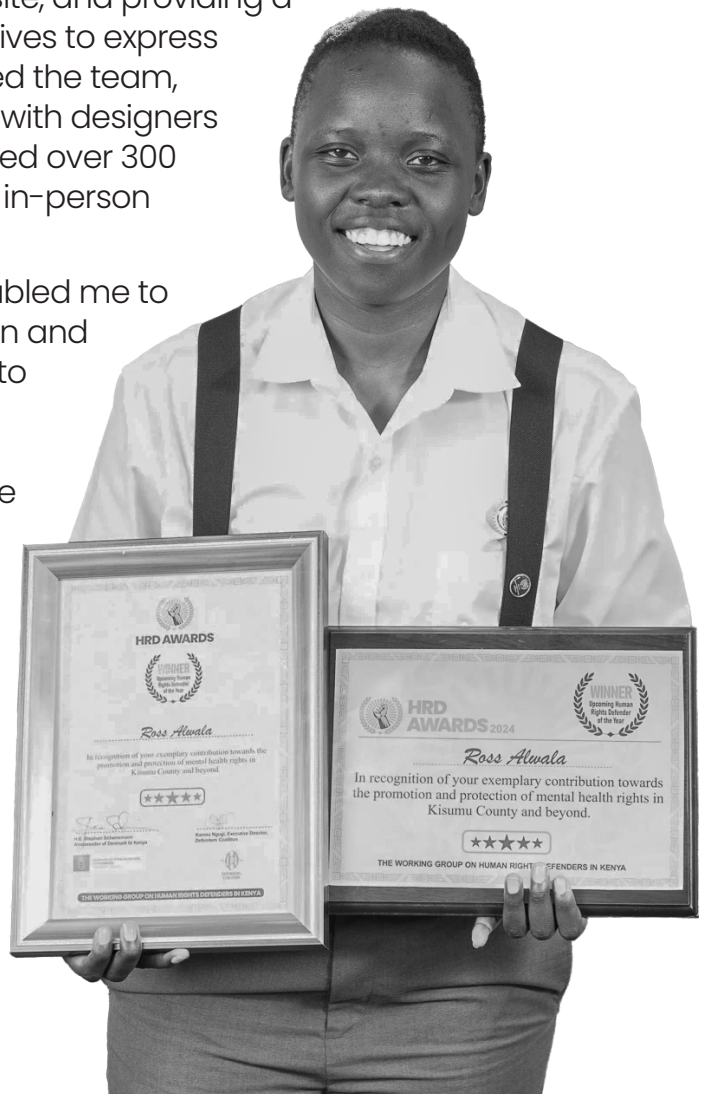
A trailblazing mental health advocate and social entrepreneur whose work has transformed mental health accessibility for underserved communities, particularly young people.

Winning the Upcoming HRD of the Year Award has been a transformative milestone for me and my mental health work particularly through my initiative, Train Your Brain. The recognition has amplified my visibility and credibility, positioning me as a trusted voice in mental health innovation. Since receiving the award, Train Your Brain was named a finalist for the InsideOut Awards in the UK under the Best Use of Technology category, and I was internationally recognized as one of the Top 15 Young Geeks in Africa by Geekulcha (Class of 2025) for innovation in mental health.

The cash prize from the award has helped me strengthen the Train Your Brain brand by refining the website, and providing a vibrant platform for young creatives to express themselves. I have also expanded the team, forged impactful collaborations with designers and tech developers, and reached over 300 people through both online and in-person outreach programs.

The visibility from this award enabled me to pitch my initiative Train Your Brain and secure second place for the Verto Awards. This award came with a 3,000 USD cash prize which has allowed us to develop our mobile app prototype and establish ourselves as a mover in the mental health space. The Upcoming Human Rights Award from Defenders Coalition continues to open more windows of opportunity for me and inspires me to continue working on promoting mental health rights for all.

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Word from the Jury

Bold, resilient and courageous human rights defenders have remained steadfast in defending rights and freedoms as guaranteed in our Constitution and regional and international laws. This year, we witnessed a gross violation of human rights, regressive laws that contribute to the shrinking civic space.

The Human Rights Defenders Awards, 2025 remain a powerful platform to celebrate courage, solidarity, zeal, resilience, amidst challenges and risks that come with defending rights and freedoms. This year's HRD Awards are being held in the backdrop of gross human rights violations, abductions, involuntary and enforced disappearances and extra judicial killings. Proposed regressive laws that clawback on gains made, remain of great concern. These Awards, spotlight, those who defended constitutionalism, pushed for access to justice, strengthening the rule of law and raising their voices for the marginalised and vulnerable within our communities.

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 organisations in the face of adversity. The themes of the nominations provide a stark reminder of the critical role HRDs play in safeguarding our freedoms and the shared struggles that unite us in the pursuit of justice.

Championing Human Rights Through Themes


Disability rights and inclusion: persons with disabilities have been sidelined in diverse aspects, where they have been left to address their own concerns. The Persons with Disabilities Act, 2025 was enacted into law, a gateway to ensure that their rights and freedoms are respected and upheld. It is encouraging to note that there are those who have taken up the mantle to champion and defend the rights of persons with disabilities within our communities. It is important to note that discussion on issues impacting persons with disabilities cannot be held without in their absence.

Good governance and social 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.

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

Rights of children: advocating for the rights of children, in all their diversity is a constant reminder that there is a need to protect and safeguard them to include ensuring they have access to quality education, health care and they are allowed to relish in their childhood in a safe and secure environment.

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



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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 Importance of the HRD Awards in 2026

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.

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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.



The Nominees

Category 1

Upcoming HRD of the Year Awards

Daniel Musyoka

Daniel Musyoka is a dedicated advocate and champion for disability inclusion in Kenya, particularly inclusion of the deaf community.

A passionate sign language interpreter, he is also the co-founder of Equitable Futures Think Tank, which focuses on advancing disability mainstreaming, bridging communication gaps, and promoting inclusive practices across various sectors. In his 5 years working with Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs), he has been able to make significant contributions through the creative use of social media and incorporating acting and storytelling, which has helped in breaking down complex information and making it more accessible to deaf audiences.

Daniel's journey began in 2016 as a sign language interpreter, relaying breaking news and current affairs to the deaf community. This sparked his interest in advocating for inclusive communication, using his skills to sensitize deaf individuals on their rights, available opportunities, and civic issues, ensuring that no one is left behind due to communication barriers. His work is rooted in the deep commitment to equality, accessibility and the empowerment of persons with disabilities.

Through the Meru Deaf Women Empowerment Self-Help Group, where he is a founder, he has been able to support deaf women in Meru County through social and economic empowerment. The group has become a safe space for women to learn, grow, and advocate for their rights, reflecting



Daniel's belief in community-led change. Additionally, he has helped deaf individuals join the Nyota Program, which has provided opportunities to access education and personal development, mentoring numerous young people, guiding them to become professionals and utilize digital platforms to make a living. Focusing on language inclusion, accessibility, and representation of PWDs, Daniel has reached over 1500 deaf youth, providing information on safety, health, and civic education.

Despite facing challenges such as limited resources, the risk to personal safety, and policy neglect, Daniel has been steadfast in advocating for the rights of PWDs through digital advocacy, community mobilization, direct interpretation, and human rights education through content creation.

Damaris Aswa

Damaris Aswa is a human rights defender, and founder of Youth for Integrity Building (YIB- a dynamic organization that empowers young people and women to champion anti-corruption, democracy, and social justice. Through civic education, digital literacy, and media well-being, Damaris has carved out a space where youth are not only informed but equipped to act.

Her work is rooted in seeking addressing both grassroots struggles and global issues. From mobilizing communities in Kilifi and Vihiga to representing Kenya in international spaces like the U.S. State Department's Community Solutions Program, UNITE2030, and the HackCorruption Hackathon, Damaris has consistently pushed boundaries. She's served on selection committees, moderated communities of practice, and contributed to global conversations on governance and human rights.

In 2019, she launched the Youth for Integrity Fellowship, an annual program that trains young people in civic engagement, digital advocacy, and project development, with successful fellows receiving seed funds to conduct community projects. This initiative has helped youth gain technical skills, find employment, and steer clear of crime and drugs. Damaris has also been instrumental in promoting digital activism by utilizing digital spaces to combat disinformation. Through the 'Integrity Link Tuwajibike' app and the 'Chanuka na Digi Skills' program, she has

empowered young people to defend truth online and use advocacy to push for justice.

Despite her impact, Damaris has faced challenges including adapting to a new environment far from home, and bridging the gap between the youth and officials within the country for ease of collaboration and growth. The civic space is constricted, and funding has declined, but she navigates these hurdles through local and international networks. She also leverages crowdfunding to sustain her work. Despite the thankless nature of human rights work, she remains committed especially as a young woman speaking out against femicide in a patriarchal society.

Through mentorship, she has nurtured a new generation of defenders. Her organization is run by young people, giving them jobs, leadership roles, and a sense of purpose in a country where youth unemployment is high.



Walid Said Sketty

Walid Said Sketty, is a 28-year-old human rights defender from Kenya who embodies courage, resilience, and a deep passion for human rights work. Born and raised in the Kisauni slums of Mombasa, Walid's early life was shaped by the harsh realities of poor governance, where many of his peers succumbed to drugs and unemployment. These experiences ignited his passion for social justice.

He began his legal career at Abdulrahman Saad and Associates, gaining valuable experience. Compelled to address systemic injustices more directly, In 2022, he joined politics as one of the youngest aspirants, vying for the MCA seat in Mjambere Ward.

Walid's human rights work began at Haki Africa, where he worked for six months, engaging in grassroots human rights work, including monitoring the Kwa Binzaro exhumations. In 2023, he joined Accept International and later at Vocal Africa, deepening his understanding of the intersection between security and human rights, particularly in efforts to counter terrorism and armed gangs.

A bold and radical voice, Walid has organized and participated in protests and demonstrations, including the Gen Z protests in 2024, where he led vigils for victims of police brutality and mobilized against the abduction of protesters. This however came with its own challenges. His work has led to arrests, court cases, and threats to his life, forcing him into safe houses. He has been a victim of state surveillance and intimidation. In his activism work, Walid takes to several strategies including petitions, social



media advocacy and formal inquiries among others. "Social media tools have been of great use especially in mobilizing my target audience and passing information." He says.

One of his most tangible impacts was his relentless push for the reinstatement of public participation in county budget matters, which was finally achieved in July 2025. Walid has cemented his advocacy by presenting petitions to the County Assembly, Parliament, and embassies, advocating for human rights causes. He continues to hold the county government accountable on stalled projects and strategically using the media through press briefings to raise awareness on human rights violations.

Walid integrates grassroots mobilization with social media activism, ensuring local struggles resonate nationally. His ability to combine physical organizing with digital advocacy has broadened his impact and reached diverse audiences.

Precious Victoria

Precious Victoria is a passionate 12-year-old human rights defender, born in Giminoi village, Vihiga County. She is a fierce advocate for children's rights; opposing child labor and gender-based violence.

Victoria's journey into human rights began in 2021, when she courageously stood up for two classmates who were being bullied due to their HIV status. She reported the incident, prompting the school to invite Utubora Community-Based Organization (CBO) for a sensitization session on health rights. Moved by the experience, Victoria approached the CBO leaders, expressing her desire to learn more and ensure her peers understood their rights. As a mentee of Utubora Social Justice Centre she went on to form the Utubora Children's Club, where she now serves as President. Through the help of Utubora, she has facilitated provision of necessities for school going children including sanitary towels, soap, clothing, underwear and food.

Over the past three years, Victoria has actively championed children's rights, leading peer-led groups in her school and mentoring fellow students. She facilitates sensitization sessions in schools and churches, empowering children to speak up about abuse, neglect, and stigma. Her advocacy has led to tangible impact such as raising the alarm about a girl being molested by her father, who was subsequently rescued and placed in a safe center. She also mobilizes sanitary pads for girls, helping reduce period shame and build confidence among her peers.

Victoria's human rights work involves,

stigma reduction for children living with HIV, environmental advocacy, including tree planting and animal rights, health rights, especially for children with unrecorded TB cases and creative engagement, encouraging anonymous writing to report abuse and mentorship. In her advocacy for both child and health rights, she has successfully created a network of empowered girls who have overcome period shame in seeking support for their peers. Her peers are confident in giving views and expressing concerns. As a role model she has improved their self-esteem and promoted harm reduction among cases of HIV/AIDS as well as malaria. This demonstrates her commitment and dedication to improving children's lives and promoting justice.

Precious, often reflecting on what previous advocates may have missed out in their work, believes in critical thinking and problem solving. By interacting with the local social Justice Centre, Utubora, she has been exposed to the use of social media in highlighting her work and reaching wider audiences. Victoria dreams of becoming a lawyer to better serve her community.





Shee Kupi Shee

Shee Kupi Shee is a renowned peacebuilder, humanitarian leader, and grassroots human rights defender from Lamu County, Kenya.

At 38 years old, Shee has spent his life working in one of Kenya's most fragile regions where violent extremism, poverty, and recurrent disasters have deeply affected communities along the Kenya-Somalia border and within the Boni Forest.

Working as the Director of Peacebuilding and Disaster Management in Lamu, he has led transformative initiatives that blend civic empowerment, humanitarian response, and counter-radicalization. In 2025, he launched the Refugee Integration Program in Kiunga, enabling refugees and host communities to share fishing grounds peacefully. He has also championed interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians and built trust between communities and security agencies.

Shee founded the Lamu Emergency Operations Centre, which responds to cholera outbreaks, floods, and terror attacks. He's one of the few public figures in Kenya to openly condemn enforced disappearances and abductions, showing rare courage in holding state actors accountable.

In advocating for human rights, he has reached over 20,000 people in areas of peacebuilding, good governance, social accountability, climate justice and protection of marginalized groups in Lamu county. He has worked on women's rights through empowering women and girls to participate in peace and security processes, and by protecting them from violence in conflict-affected zones. In promoting youth empowerment, he has mentored the youth by promoting alternatives to counter radicalization which has reduced extremist recruitment in Lamu, subsequently advancing security and protecting youth rights.

At the core of Shee's activism, is addressing environmental and climatic justice. Through disaster preparedness and response operations such as the 2024 flood interventions, he coordinated lifesaving disaster responses that saved over 20,000 lives, reducing climate-related vulnerabilities.

The work that Shee does in safeguarding not without challenges. These include insecurity and threats from extremist groups, intimidation from security agencies, poor infrastructure and limited resources. Not only has advocating for accountability provoked resistance from authorities but also contributed to heightened community tensions in cases where resources are scarce. He has overcome these challenges by fostering deep community trust, using non-violent methods, and mobilizing people to act within the law.

Category 2

Human Rights Defender of the Year

Jamil Longton

Longton Jamil Hashim is a human rights defender from Kitengela, Kajiado County – a community he has served for over a decade, amplifying the voices of the marginalised and oppressed. His work spans police brutality, abductions, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and sexual and gender-based violence. He has been particularly fierce in fighting early child marriages and FGM in the county, efforts he credits for the significant reduction of both practices in the area. He also champions youth inclusion and disability rights in mainstream conversations.

Jamil serves as chairperson of the Kajiado Human Rights Defenders Network and the Kitengela Muslim Association – platforms he has built into safe spaces for defenders to articulate pressing community issues. He is also a member of the Kitengela Business Community, which he leverages equally for advocacy. Through capacity building, digital platforms, and civic education, he has mentored individuals to speak out against injustice and engage in governance processes.

His advocacy has teeth. He has stood with hawkers harassed by county askaris for refusing to pay bribes, challenged political favouritism blocking students from accessing education bursaries, and used litigation as a strategic tool for justice. In Human Rights and Constitution Petition No. 17 of 2019, he successfully challenged the harassment of hawkers at the High Court in Kajiado – the court awarded petitioners KShs 2.5 million

against the County Government. A separate case, MCCR 786 of 2018, delivered another win on community land rights.

Defending human rights comes at a price. Following this year's nationwide protests, Jamil and his younger brother – fellow defender Bob Njagi – were abducted and held incommunicado for 32 days. Both were reportedly tortured for information about the protests. It was not his first brush with state-directed intimidation: in 2018, he was arrested, charged with forgery, and sentenced to a year in prison on charges he maintains were fabricated to silence him.

Despite it all, Longton Jamil Hashim has not stopped. He remains a steadfast defender – ensuring the vulnerable are heard, that justice is accessible, and that women, girls, the youth, and persons with disabilities are protected and included in the spaces that shape their lives.



Lady Dr. Wangu Kanja (ogw)

Armed with the vision and deep desire to end all forms of gender and sexual violence and femicide, Lady Dr. Wangu Kanja, for the last two decades, has been at the forefront in seeking redress for these vices. Wangu is the Founder and Executive Director of the Wangi Kanja Foundation. Through her organisation, founded to address these pressing issues, she has been able to offer support to women and girls who were victims/survivors of gender-based violence in the country. She has seen six survivors, who were violated in tea farms, following a BBC documentary, supported during their petition before the High Court of Kenya. Through their interventions and support, 77 survivors of these ordeal received ex gratia payments from their employer. In addition, they provided financial management, mental health and coping skills training and sexual violence training for them. At least 12,000 survivors of sexual and gender-based violence have been supported through Wangu Kanja including receiving legal, medical, livelihood and psychosocial support. In 2019, WKF pioneered innovation in the application of technology in the collection of evidence through DNA Kits in low resource settings. 1,200 DNA Evidence Kits distributed to various health facilities across Kenya.

Appreciating the need for collaboration and joint efforts in combating GBV and sexual violence, Wangu Kanja founded and is the convenor of the Coalition Against Sexual Violence, which brings together seventeen national organisations that work on diverse aspects of sexual violence. Wangu Kanja

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takes pride in having founded the only network of sexual violence survivors in Kenya, the Sexual Survivors Network.

Despite the selfless efforts made by Lady Wangu on the fight against sexual violence, the same has come with challenges. She has been a victim of online backlash, where smear campaigns, mis and dis information has been shared about her, thus creating a negative perception about her and the work that she does. Limited funding remains a challenge, given the volume of work and the many sexual violence survivors who require assistance on an almost daily basis. Following her involvement and the support she offered at the petition, her house was broken into, as a way to harass, threaten and intimidate her. Despite these challenges, she remains steadfast in ensuring that women and girls live and exist in safe and secure environment. Her work has not been without recognition, where she has been recognised and received various awards, a testament to the commitment in advancing change for a better tomorrow for women and girls.





Julius Kamau

Theatrics, drama, and drawing attention — these are the tools Julius Kamau has chosen to highlight pressing human rights issues. To some, his methods have raised questions about his state of mind. To those who understand the work, he is a true champion for social justice: raising his voice against corruption, the misuse of public resources, and seeking redress for victims of police violence, abductions, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings. Julius embodies courage, resilience, and a deep desire for transformation.

With civic space shrinking, Julius has been vocal against the erosion of fundamental rights and freedoms — peaceful assembly, association, access to information, and expression. He has pushed back against regressive laws seeking to claw back constitutionally guaranteed protections. And he does not need a crowd to make his point. His signature ‘one man show’ protests

speak of a boldness and conviction that a better tomorrow is possible, despite everything stacked against it.

His journey has been marked by serious personal cost. Julius has faced police brutality, arbitrary arrests, death threats, trumped-up charges, and torture. On one occasion, a screwdriver was inserted into his ear — a deliberate act of intimidation meant to break him. It did not. His zeal to champion rights and freedoms has only grown stronger.

His placards — simple, direct, impossible to ignore — have become synonymous with who he is. From shouting in the streets to refusing silence in courtrooms, Julius remains unbroken.

He is not just an activist. He is the raw expression of proletarian frustration and outrage — a man who tells the story of a broken system in ways every Kenyan can recognise. He channels the daily frustrations of Wanjiku into collective outrage that anyone who has faced injustice, poverty, or police brutality can claim as their own. His protests are classrooms. His placards are essays. By fusing art, defiance, and ideology, Julius Kamau has turned streets and courtrooms into arenas of political education — and in doing so, built a living curriculum of resistance.

Larry Madowo

Larry Madowo is a celebrated Kenyan journalist, and international correspondent who holds a Masters in Business and Economics Journalism from Columbia University. Known for his fearless reporting and sharp storytelling across various global media platforms, Larry is recognised as one of Africa's most influential journalists. Currently with CNN, he has previously worked with BBC, CNBC Africa, and NTV Kenya, covering impactful stories on cross-cutting human rights issues like media freedom, social justice and good governance.

His work has recently included, publicly criticizing the Tanzanian government's refusal to grant accreditation for independent reporting, bringing out the growing concern of press freedom and transparency. Additionally, as he covered the anti-government protests in Kenya, Larry, reported being targeted by hired goons who were allegedly paid to attack him and destroy his equipment, highlighting the challenges journalists face in the course of their work.



Category 3

Munir Mazrui Life Time Achievement Award

David Kuria

David Kuria, popularly known as “Western,” is a veteran human rights defender who has spent over thirty years fighting impunity, protecting freedoms, and advancing justice for the most vulnerable. His journey began in the early 1990s as a founding member of Release Political Prisoners (RPP) during Kenya’s struggle for multi-party democracy. At a time when speaking out was dangerous and often life-threatening, he chose courage over silence, standing firm in pursuit of a better future for generations to come. Driven by a deep passion for change, he founded the Nakuru County Human Rights Network (NAHURINET) to amplify the voices of those silenced by poverty, violence, and systemic injustice. A cause

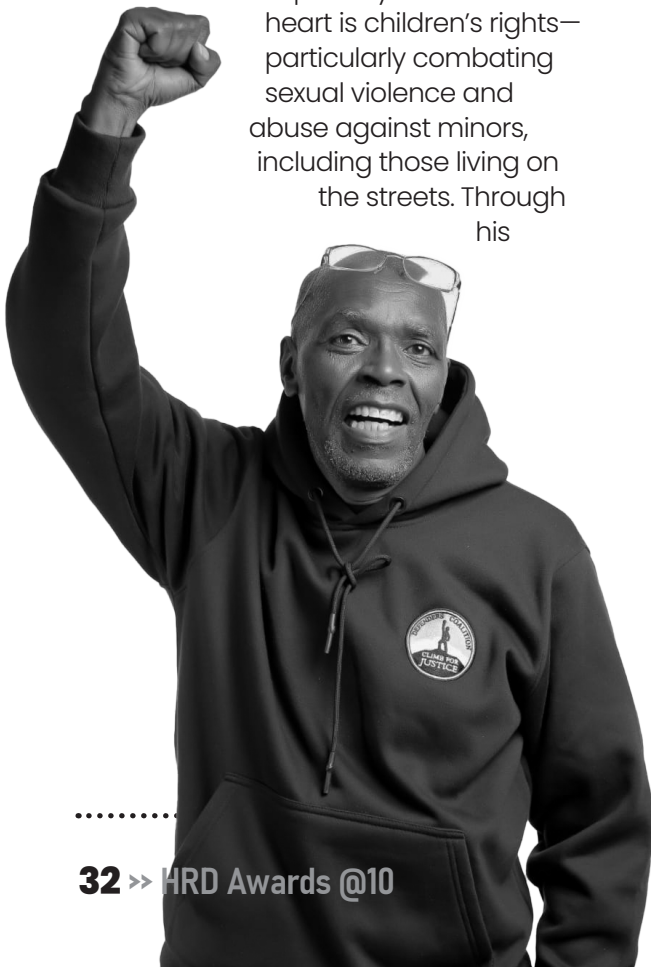
especially close to his heart is children’s rights—particularly combating sexual violence and abuse against minors, including those living on the streets. Through his

efforts, more than 500 victims of defilement have accessed justice. In one notable case, after a perpetrator had initially gone free, David intervened by writing to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Inspector General of Police. This led to the arrest, prosecution, and a 20-year sentence for the offender.

His work extends to addressing abductions, enforced disappearances, gender-based violence, police brutality, and extrajudicial killings. Committed to justice for victims and their families, he has participated in over 100 postmortems related to extrajudicial killings—an emotionally taxing role he endures in the pursuit of accountability. His documentation has contributed to at least 60 cases recorded by IPOA, and he has been a petitioner in several court cases, some of which have successfully reaffirmed the rights of marginalized communities.

These achievements have come at a heavy personal cost. In 1997, his sister was killed during a protest linked to his activism. He has faced death threats, harassment, police brutality, and the destruction of his businesses. Yet, despite these challenges and limited resources, David remains unwavering in his mission to secure justice.

Though he does not seek recognition, his courage has earned him national and international honors, including the Munir Mazrui Lifetime Achievement Award, the Giraffe Heroes Award (Kenya), and inclusion in the Natalia Project. David Kuria stands as a powerful reminder that resilience and conviction can drive meaningful change, even in the face of great adversity.



Khelef Khalifa

When speaking of formidable and courageous human rights defenders in Kenya, the name Khelef Khalifa stands out. His journey began in the 1990s during the country's struggle for multi-party democracy. As part of the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK), Khalifa helped organize mass actions in Mombasa, including the historic general strike of May 1993. These efforts later contributed to the founding of Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI) in 1997, which he co-founded with Willy Mutunga and Alamin Mazrui in response to communal violence and land injustices following the Kaya Bombo clashes. That same year, he began documenting abuses and pursuing legal action, setting the tone for a lifelong pursuit of justice.

From the late 1990s, Khalifa led bold campaigns against land grabbing and the privatization of public spaces. At Mama Ngina Drive, he personally dismantled illegal barriers and filed cases to protect public land. His landmark case, Civil Case No. 613 of 2001, challenged the irregular allocation of Dickson Garden and established him as a pioneer of public-interest land litigation.

Khalifa's work is deeply intersectional, addressing land rights, enforced disappearances, police brutality, and broader human rights violations. He collaborates with diverse community groups, offering legal guidance, following up on cases, and working with organizations to pursue justice. Between 2005 and 2009, he served as a commissioner at the Kenya National



Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), where he led the Police Reforms Working Group and documented extrajudicial killings, including those targeting suspected Mungiki members, raising national awareness of police abuse. He has also played a key role in electoral justice. In 2017, he joined Maina Kiai and others in petitioning presidential election results and successfully challenged the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), securing a landmark ruling that declared polling station results final.

Despite harassment, surveillance, and repeated threats, Khalifa remains resolute. From land rights to electoral transparency, his unwavering courage continues to inspire the fight for justice and constitutional freedoms.

Category 4

Global Solidarity Award

Hon Dr Solomon Ayele Dersso (PhD) *Commissioner, ACHPR*

Hon Dr Solomon A Dersso (PhD), an Ethiopian legal scholar and human rights expert is the founder and current CEO of Addis Ababa-based Amani Africa, a pan-African policy research think tank (<https://amaniafrica-et.org/>).

Hon Solomon Dersso currently serves as a Commissioner with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), country rapporteur for Kenya and the chairperson of the Working Group on Extractive Industries, Environment and Human Rights Violations of the ACHPR. While serving as the Chairperson of the Commission, between 2019 to 2021, he was focal and supportive to the protection of human rights defenders and addressing the human rights situation in Kenya. As country rapporteur, Hon Dersso has remained instrumental in receiving and reviewing reports from local civil society organisations, and has made pertinent statements touching on human rights situation in Kenya during the ordinary sessions of the African Commission.

On 18th June 2024, Hon Dersso, through the ACHPR made a statement on the human rights situation in the country following the protests witnessed against the then proposed Finance Bill, 2024. He highlighted the urgent need engage in inclusive and constructive dialogues, exploring alternative measures for financial resourcing, respect the right to peaceful protest, release of the protesters and ensuring the respect of data privacy and protection for all citizens.



Hon Dersso has always lent a listening year to Kenyan civil society organisations, where he has had the opportunity of receiving first-hand information on the situation of human rights in the country, and taking all necessary action where he can.

Hon Dersso, remains a formidable human rights defender who has utilised national, regional and international spaces to ensure the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms with communities and fostering solution-oriented changes in addressing human rights situations at diverse levels. He remains a true testament that courage, deliberate intention and collaborative efforts can birth change and better tomorrow where people and persons' can relish in rights and freedoms guaranteed and, national, regional and international laws.

PROGRAMME OF THE AWARD CEREMONY

1:00 PM – Arrival of Guests

1:40 PM – Entertainment

2:05 PM – Opening Remarks and Welcome Speech

2:25 PM – Introduction of the Selection Panel and Remarks

2: 35 PM – Testimonies

2: 45 PM – Chief Guest Remarks

3:00 PM – Awards Announcements

Upcoming HRD of the Year Award

Lifetime Achievement Award

HRD of the Year Award

Global Solidarity Award

3:45 PM – Entertainment

4:00 PM – Announcement of the Winner, Popular Vote

4.05 PM – Congratulatory Comments

4.15 PM – Vote of Thanks

4:15- 7:00 p.m. – Entertainment and interactions until close of Event









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