



Kingdom of the Netherlands



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Background information

While women human rights defenders (WHRDs) are at the forefront to tirelessly protect and support inclusive peace, human rights and gender justice all over the world, their work and existence is under increasing threat. Human rights defenders (HRDs) around the globe face social, political, and economic restrictions, violence, and other kinds of pushback. They are being harassed and attacked, not seen as legitimate participants in decision-making processes, structurally monitored and underfunded. WHRDs face additional challenges that intersect with those regular challenges. Unlike their male counterparts, WHRDs are often also the main caretakers of their families and (young) children. They are therefore less independent or mobile to get themselves to safety. Moreover, most WHRDs, volunteers and professionals, do not see their activism as programmatic work that they can stop at any time. For (young) WHRDs, their activism is a life mission. They fight for who they are: non-traditional, sometimes non-cis, independent and/or critical young people and women. Characteristics that in themselves can be sufficient for those in power to feel threatened.

Feminist (grassroots) WHRDs are often automatically seen as opponents, for example to conservative regimes, to powerholders, as they challenge the status quo, by advocating for equal division of power and by addressing violations of (young) women's rights. Conservative fundamentalists and violent extremists not seldom target WHRDs as part of their political agendas. These attacks often are early warning signs of wider violations of human rights. Indigenous WHRDs face additional challenges as their culture, religion and territory are not recognized nor protected. They have limited access to public life. When indigenous WHRDs address human rights violations of authorities and the private sector, their work is often criminalized.

Also, the types and amount of pushback, threat and harassment differ for WHRDs from the pushback male HRDs face. Reports show and WHRDs signal an increasing and extreme amount of sexual violence, (cyber) harassment, restrictive laws and other forms of physical, mental and economical harassment and attacks. In that light, WHRDs require support and protection that integrates a gender and intersectional lens and is specifically tailored to their challenges and circumstances. In any support for WHRDs, the agency of WHRDs and women's rights organizations, as well as attention for the intersectional diversity amongst women, is key.

In the spring of this year WHRDs from Afghanistan, Burundi, Uganda, Guatemala, Libya and Kenya met with heads of several Dutch missions, to share and discuss a variety of recommendations to Dutch diplomatic missions to bridge the needs gap. Altogether they underline the importance of understanding and considering WHRDs' experiences in specific circumstances or environments, while at the same time recognizing the comparability of obstacles and challenges that WHRDs face across countries and regions.

All recommendations are consolidated in the paper: **Protection of Women Human Rights Defenders: How can diplomatic missions support?** which will be presented online by WHRDs on October 27th.