

**FRONT LINE
DEFENDERS
AWARD FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS
AT RISK**

2023 GLOBAL LAUREATES



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ABOUT FRONT LINE DEFENDERS

Front Line Defenders is an international human rights organisation founded in Dublin in 2001, with the specific aim of protecting human rights defenders at risk (HRDs).

Front Line Defenders works to improve the security and protection of human rights defenders and organisations around the world at risk for their peaceful and legitimate human rights work. As identified by human rights defenders themselves, the organisation responds to protection and security needs by providing support through grants, capacity building, visibility, networking, and advocacy, at the international, regional and local levels. Front Line Defenders has been awarded the 2018 United Nations Human Rights Prize.

Front Line Defenders maintains its headquarters in Dublin, an EU Office in Brussels, and regionally-based field staff in the Americas, Asia, Africa, Europe & Central Asia, and the Middle East.

ABOUT THE FRONT LINE DEFENDERS AWARD

The annual Front Line Defenders Award was established in 2005 to honour the work of human rights defenders who are courageously making outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of the human rights of others, often at great personal risk to themselves. The Award focuses international attention on the work and

struggles of HRDs, providing a greater national and international platform to speak about and advocate for the human rights issues they are defending. The Award focuses international attention on the human rights defender's work, thus contributing to the recipient's personal security.

Up until 2018, Front Line Defenders named one Global Laureate each year. Since 2018, Front Line Defenders began honouring five Regional Award Winners, with the Irish jury selecting one among them as the Global Laureate. In 2021, Front Line Defenders began recognising all regional winners as Laureates.



Olivier Bahemuke Ndoole

CO-FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF NGO "ALERTE CONGOLAISE POUR
L'ENVIRONNEMENT ET LES DROITS DE L'HOMME"
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC)

Olivier is a Congolese environmental rights defender and lawyer from North Kivu, **Democratic Republic of the Congo**. He has dedicated his life's work to advocating for environmental rights, land rights and land justice; pushing for transparent, accountable, and sustainable governance of land tenure regimes for the country's lands. In 2008, he co-founded the NGO "Alerte Congolaise pour l'Environnement et les Droits de l'Homme", through which he has actively supported and represented local communities, groups and individuals working on the environment for over 15 years.

As the second-largest tropical forest in the world, the DRC has exceptional natural resources. The country has faced a complex humanitarian crisis since 1994; plagued by war and violence in the Eastern regions which has led

to conflict, poverty, malnutrition and recurring epidemics. Correspondingly, human rights defenders (HRDs) in DRC work in an extremely hostile and insecure context; vulnerable to attacks, intimidation, killings, threats, judicial harassment and physical assault, worsened in areas where there is ongoing conflict. More so, those working on land and environmental rights are seen as threats to economic interests, and their access to certain areas to monitor and report on human rights violations is often impeded, creating further barriers to their work.

Olivier has been persecuted and faced grave danger due to his human rights work, targeted by recurring death threats and an attempted assassination, which caused him to flee his home country and go into exile for his own protection. He has been severely beaten

and tortured by security forces; once to the point of needing hospitalisation for 12 days. His organisation has also faced attempts of sabotage such as robbery and break-ins. Despite these harrowing circumstances, he is hopeful and inspired to continue securing justice for the victims of land and environmental injustices in the DRC, especially at-risk and vulnerable groups like women and children.

Aside from his active human rights work, Olivier has a number of academic accolades behind his name as well; including being an alumni of the Elaw Fellowship, a member of the International Network of Lawyers Elaw, the face of International Union for Conservation of Nature, and has participated in a number of projects working with several highly ranked international universities.



Olivier is known as the “Green Lawyer” in North Kivu because of his defence of Virunga Park and its workers and people. The communities he has represented face economic

expropriation and exploitation of their land and resources. In the context of the DRC, this has affected women and children most – many women have lost their husbands in the conflict and are

left vulnerable. They are then driven off their land, which has plunged them into grave insecurity. Olivier has ensured that they, and other vulnerable victims, are not forgotten.



... Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN)
(PNVI), appuyé par Virunga Foundation
2022



Since 2013, he has worked on a number of public interest cases. An important part of his work, as pictured here, is training and educating the communities he works with on understanding the law, courts and legal processes; and he conducts regular training with them to help them understand what they need to know.

“ Nature has rights to be defended through the acts of lawyers, judicial decisions, and fair and sensitive policies and standards. Let us use our legal knowledge and unite the community at the service of our only planet Earth, so that we have a safeguard for the future.”

Olivier



Part of the work Olivier and his organisation does, is to sensitise and educate military officers monitoring the region (who are allies) on land rights, environmental law and conservation. The military, in turn, assists to protect the land and its defenders from armed groups. This collaboration, driven by Olivier, has resulted in successful prosecutions and convictions of armed officers involved in illegal exploitation, and has created a partnership between communities and the military.





Segundo Ordóñez

**COMMUNITY
REPRESENTATIVE,
ECUADOR**

**AMERICAS
REGIONAL
WINNER**

Segundo Ordóñez is an Afro-descendant human rights defender from Esmeraldas, **Ecuador**. His family migrated from Tumaco, Colombia when he was a child, due to the violence and poverty they experienced there. For most of his life in Ecuador, he lived and worked on *abacá* (Manila hemp) plantations with *abacaleros* (Manila-hemp worker), for the Japanese company “Furukawa Plantaciones C. A” – a company which produces and exports *abacá* fibre. *Abacá* is formed from the stalks of banana trees, used and exported to the US and Europe for paper money, rope, teabags, cars and more. Ecuador is the second largest exporter of *abacá* fibre, yet those who farm the raw materials have done so under slavery-like conditions.

Hundreds of families in the Esmeraldas area worked for this company and lived in camps on the company farms for generations; enduring conditions of poor pay, exploitation, lack of access to adequate basic services, education, healthcare and more. *Abacaleros*, including Segundo, united after years of discrimination, and took the company and the State of Ecuador to court, accusing them of plunging at least three generations of impoverished rural workers into conditions of modern slavery. With the support of the civil society solidarity committee “Furukawa Nunca Más”, constitutional and criminal proceedings were instituted against the company but so far they have not achieved justice or any type of reparation for the *abacaleros*. When the case became public in 2019, the company retaliated and demolished

some of the camps where *abacaleros* and their families lived, and evicted hundreds of other families from the camps. Segundo, along with a group of *abacaleros*, resisted the evictions by remaining in two of the camps owned by the company – an occupation which continues four years on.

As a result of his resistance, he has been targeted in a number of ways ranging from consistent harassment, “SLAPP” and other lawsuits filed by the company to intimidate and discredit him, and more recently, death threats. Moreover, having lost his job with the company and being victim of smear campaigns, he now struggles to find a new job in the region and access a fixed income. Nonetheless, he has persisted in the fight for justice and reparation for his community.



© Nicolás Coronel Araúz

Inspired by his bravery and ability to maintain community cohesion, Segundo became the representative of his community in legal proceedings, playing a key role in confronting the company in court and in public, which has also come at a risk to his life.



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“Freedom is something everyone, all human beings need. To be free and know our rights.”

Segundo

DEFENSORIA
DEL PUEBLO

Defensoria
del Pueblo







Jeany Rose Hayahay

**SPOKESPERSON OF THE
SAVE OUR SCHOOLS NETWORK
(SOS NETWORK), PHILIPPINES**

**ASIA AND
THE PACIFIC
REGIONAL WINNER**

Jeany Rose Hayahay is an indigenous woman human rights defender based in Mindanao, **Philippines**. She advocates for indigenous peoples' rights, focusing on children's right to education. Rose played a significant role in uniting indigenous and community-based schools in Mindanao and coordinated with national groups on a campaign to stop militarisation, environmental plunder and land grabbing of ancestral lands. She has faced violence from different authorities many times during peaceful protests, yet she has persisted in her cause with courage, leadership, and dedication. She became the spokesperson of the Save Our Schools Network (SOS Network) in 2019, a network of child-focused NGOs, church-based groups and other stakeholders who bring attention to, and take action regarding the ongoing violation of

children's right to education, particularly in the context of militarisation and attacks on schools.

Since the implementation of the "war on drugs" by the previous Duterte administration in 2016, human rights violations and impunity has become more rampant in the Philippines. The stringent laws and policies were aimed at small-time drug pushers and "addicts" but were also inflicted on human rights defenders to quash any dissent against the government. In 2018, the Philippines was declared as the most dangerous country for land and environmental defenders by Global Witness.

The Lumads of southern Philippines live in resource-rich hotspots for mining, plantation, and logging projects. Consequentially, anyone defending their

rights from the impacts of exploitation have faced violence, displacement, red-tagging*, harassment, aerial bombings, and militarization. The environmental, cultural, and socio-political attacks that the Lumad community face continue to erode their culture, destroy the environment, and marginalise them further. One of the most significant targets are the teachers and schools of the Lumad community. Red-tagging of the schools and teachers as well as bomb threats led to the forced shut down of 216 Lumad schools and disenfranchised at least 10,000 Lumad students. In July 2019, the Department of Education suspended the Lumad school which Rose taught at, accusing it of being a "training ground for rebels".

* red tagging - blacklisting individuals or organisations who are critical of the government administration.



© Save Our Schools Network



© Save Our Schools Network

Rose's journey began as a volunteer teacher for the Lumad communities in Mindanao, during which time she raised awareness on the human rights violations the Lumads were facing. Beyond basic education, Rose also taught practical skills such as agriculture that would help students enrich their environment, culture, and defend their ancestral lands. Rose helped build a communal farm in several schools for students to have hands-on experience with agriculture.



© Venice De Castro Atienza




© Venice De Castro Alentza

Rose was a part of the “Lumad Bakwit school” from 2018 until 2021, where hundreds of indigenous students from southern Philippines gather in main cities to protest against human rights violations of indigenous and minority groups. As the spokesperson of SOS Network, she is at the forefront of many public gatherings, protests

and meetings, and is consistently red-tagged and monitored as a leader, facing reprisals and threats, both directly and indirectly. She is at high risk of being killed, arrested or imprisoned yet continues to lead at the forefront with determination and courage.



A photograph showing three young women in a dark room. The woman in the center is holding a tablet, and the other two are looking at it. The scene is dimly lit, with the light from the tablet illuminating their faces.

“When I saw Lumad children deprived of education, their parents deprived of healthcare, and their ancestral lands taken away from them, when soldiers threatened them even in their supposed sanctuary, when even my mother was taken by those soldiers, and when teachers like us were tagged as terrorists for teaching children about human rights, I knew that I would dedicate my life to fighting for justice, not just for the Lumads, but for all oppressed and marginalised people.” **Rose**



Digital Security Lab Ukraine

**KYIV BASED HUMAN
RIGHTS ORGANISATION,
UKRAINE**

**EUROPE AND
CENTRAL ASIA
REGIONAL WINNER**

Digital Security Lab Ukraine (DSL) was established in 2017 to address digital security concerns of human rights defenders and organisations in Ukraine. Civil society voices have always been strong in Ukraine, reaching a peak in 2013 with the EuroMaidan clashes, aimed at overthrowing a pro-Russian government. Russia's war in Ukraine, that started with occupation of Crimea in 2014 and destabilisation and shadow support to the so-called separatist movement in Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine, has posed a grave danger to human rights defenders in the occupied territories. Human rights defenders in the rest of Ukraine, addressing issues like corruption, nepotism, LGBTIQ+ and refugee rights, faced targeting from the authorities and far-right groups. Witnessing a transition to an increasingly digital world, DSLU recognised that digital security had become a very real and central concern for human rights defenders and their

work, potentially exposing them to vulnerabilities which could impede their work. Their goal in starting DSLU was to support human rights organisations and defenders in Ukraine by addressing their digital security challenges in a sustainable, flexible manner to minimise their exposure to risk and vulnerabilities.

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, human rights defenders and groups experienced blackouts and disruptions in communications due to Russia's shelling of Ukraine's critical infrastructure. There have been significant fluctuations in internet connectivity in many regions of Ukraine, impeding the ability to document and report on war crimes and human rights violations. DSLU's work has been integral to rebuilding digital security infrastructure and documentation of war crimes, ensuring that organisations could continue to operate by providing

and setting up satellite internet kits for teams working on documenting and reporting war crimes.

Despite the circumstances of the war, while many fled to safety, DSLU stayed on the ground, recognising the crucial digital needs of the context. This was not easy and came with significant safety and security challenges. They continue to work hard to combat online censorship and provide means of communication during the invasion to ensure that crucial information can be shared and exchanged despite the barriers. Despite growing physical security risks amid the ongoing conflict, they continue to provide digital security support to HRDs and HROs in Ukraine.

Beyond this, they are important and leading voices in the broader digital freedom and security space, and conduct their own advocacy pushing for digital rights and freedoms in local and global contexts.

Through its "Як?" platform, DSLU has offered digital security guidelines for HRDs and HROs who continued working in the newly occupied territories of Ukraine. In 2022, they had more than 450 consultations with civil society actors in Ukraine, supporting them with digital security audits, training, emergency incident responses and consultations, and technical support and supplies.





Digital
Security
Lab

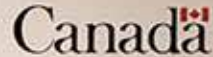


ÁTLAS WEEKEND
HÉRKÖZTŐS
FELTÁRÓ ÉS SZERZŐ
LÉTEZÉS
KARNA
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póczy music
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DEFEND DÉFENDRE
MEDIA LA LIBERTÉ
FREEDOM DE PRESSE

Global Conference | 10-11 July 2019 | Conférence Mondiale | 10-11 Juillet 2019



“I’m inspired by my team. They are not just experts and high-level professionals: they are first of all amazing people, who share the values that I also have.”

Executive Director Vita Volodovska
at the Global Media Freedom Conference in London.



Hala Ahed

**HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDER AND
LAWYER, JORDAN**

**MIDDLE EAST AND
NORTH AFRICA
REGIONAL WINNER**

Hala Ahed is a Jordanian woman human rights defender and lawyer. Born in December 1971 in Kuwait, Hala moved to Amman, **Jordan** when she was 10 years old, and has lived there since. Hala has conducted significant work in the human rights landscape in Jordan, and is well recognised in civil society as a trusted leader and ally. The focus of her work has been women's rights, but within the political context of Jordan, she has also worked across freedom of opinion and expression, labour rights, and trade union freedoms.

Since the Arab Spring in 2011, grass roots protests and dissent have emerged in Jordan, reflecting growing discontent with government corruption and wealth inequality, among other issues. The government has long-established 'red lines' for dissent and opposition, and uses methods of intimidation and punishment as a means to maintain 'stability' in the country, creating a hostile environment within which human rights defenders work. Arbitrary arrests and surveillance

of human rights defenders has increased, as well as severe restrictions on freedom of opinion and expression. Civil society is regularly monitored, surveilled and silenced.

Hala's interest in human rights began during her school years, driven by her lived experience as a woman living in a society where discrimination against women is still a norm. Women in Jordan still battle with receiving the same equitable rights, access, protection and opportunities as men. In wanting to pave a way for her own rights as a woman, she realised she could pave a way for a whole generation of other women.

After completing her Bachelor of Laws at the Al-Ahliyya Amman University, she became a trainee lawyer at the Jordanian Bar Association where she actively worked on the Freedoms and Human Rights Committee. Before actually practising as a lawyer, she went on to work with different organisations (including the Jordanian Women's Union); using advocacy,

campaigns, and training to address trafficking of women and girls, domestic violence, and discriminatory laws.

Despite her vital work and advocacy, Hala has endured various forms of intimidation and harassment, including being summoned multiple times by the Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate (GID). She has received threats from authorities who have gone as far as threatening her son in order to get to her. Hala grew her public legitimacy by increasing her visibility and public profile, and building a support network which has given her public credibility.

Most recently, Hala was a victim of NSO's Pegasus digital hacking spyware initiated by the government. It was found that she was being surveilled when her mobile device was infected with Pegasus in March 2021. In other instances, Hala was targeted with online defamation campaigns where government-backed social media accounts would storm her account with harassment.

Over the years as a lawyer, Hala represented and defended human rights defenders, activists, rights movements, civil society organisations and trade unions, making herself known as a strong ally for civil society in Jordan. She supported multiple unions with voluntary legal representation, including the Jordan Teachers' Syndicate which represents more than 14,000 teachers; and the Agricultural Association. Her human rights work goes beyond the realms of her desk and books.



© Hisham Abu Salah

“The issue of working on human rights is not only a matter of working for others. The human rights defender works for themselves before others. Some people believe that to be a human rights defender is to be free from selfishness, but it is not necessarily so, because you, as a defender, when you help people to reach their rights, you actually create a safe space for yourself and your children.”

Hala





Hala is part of a number of Committees representing marginalised groups. To mention a few, she defends prisoners of conscience in Jordan and is a member of the National Forum for the Defence of Freedoms, a group of lawyers dedicated to the defence of activists and human

rights defenders. She is the president of the Legal Committee of the Jordanian Women's Union, a member of the Freedoms and Human Rights Committee of the Jordanian Bar Association, and a member of the Jordanian National Committee for Pay Equity.



Despite all the obstacles, dangers and restrictions she faces for her human rights work, Hala continues to be dedicated in her pursuit of improving the human rights situation in Jordan for all. She is celebrated nationally as a leading woman human rights defender and has received multiple tributes for her work from various human rights groups and organisations, locally and abroad.



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