

## INVITATION - ProtectDefenders.eu Annual Meeting

ProtectDefenders.eu, the [EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism](#) implemented by international civil society, is pleased to invite you to its Annual Meeting, to be held next 8 November 2017 in Brussels, under the motto:

**“Champions of change -**

*Human Rights Defenders at the forefront of Development and Democracy”*

This annual meeting will allow taking stock of the most pressing protection challenges for human rights defenders at risk and operating as leaders of today's human rights and development agenda.

*Unique and prime EU gathering of defenders working on the frontlines for change*

It will allow to identify best practices from protecting human rights defenders, based on the achievements of the first two years of [ProtectDefenders.eu](#), and draw relevant conclusions on how to counter some of the most difficult protection challenges, while setting a positive narrative for human rights defenders as champions of change for human rights, social justice and development.

The meeting will provide a remarkable opportunity to engage and share experiences directly with a cross section of **Human Rights Defenders** working across the globe in particularly difficult environments and often under great risk, and who have benefited from the support of the EU's Human Rights Defenders mechanism, ProtectDefenders.eu, over the last two years. The meeting will be joined by leading experts and personalities on and in the protection of human rights defenders, universal and regional protection mechanisms, and representatives of various EU institutions implicated in the protection of human rights defenders and today's development agenda.

In a distinctive feature, the meeting will also include members of the EU Temporary Relocation Platform, providing a growing vital lifeline and rest and respite support to defenders under threat with the support of Protectdefenders.eu

*Setting a progressive development and protection agenda:*

The meeting will highlight the crucial role and impact of human rights defenders around the world as **promoters of a sustainable development**, and will engage development actors in how to integrate the protection of human rights defenders as part of an effective development and protection agenda. It is those actors on the ground who will be the key protagonist of the meeting.

This meeting will also address the widespread attempts to de-legitimise human rights' discourse and human rights defenders' work worldwide, by **promoting a positive narrative** grounded on the universality and indivisibility of human rights and its contribution to more advanced and developed societies. Human rights defenders and high level speakers will share strategies to enhance the protection of those who strive to defend human rights, and to develop a positive narrative on the human rights' work, legitimising their work at the local level and taking back the human rights discourse to the centre of the international agenda.

ProtectDefenders.eu  
is the EU Human  
Rights Defenders  
Mechanism,  
implemented by a  
Consortium of 12  
NGOs

Front Line Defenders

Reporters sans  
frontières

OMCT

FIDH

ILGA

EMHRF

Forum Asia

Protection International

Peace Brigades  
International

ESCR-Net

Urgent Action Fund

EHAHRDP



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The European Union

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This unique occasion will contribute to provide the necessary tools for reflection from the field in order **to shape the international and EU agenda for the protection of human rights defenders**, by bringing together the key stakeholders involved in the international human rights scene and addressing the most challenging issues faced by the human rights defenders' community.

The working agenda of this event is attached.

Interpretation will be provided into English, French, Spanish and Arabic.

The event will be closed with a dinner for which a limited number of places is available. Kindly fill out the [registration form](#) before **October 30th**. If you have any questions, please contact Javier Roura at [contact@protectdefenders.eu](mailto:contact@protectdefenders.eu)

We are very much looking forward to welcoming you.

With best regards,

PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU



## AGENDA - ProtectDefenders.eu Annual Meeting 2017

### “Champions of change - Human Rights Defenders at the forefront of Development and Democracy”

Wednesday, 8th November 2017  
La Tricoterie, Rue Théodore Verhaegen 158, 1060 Bruxelles, Belgium

11.00	<b>REGISTRATION OF PARTICIPANTS</b>
11.30 - 13.00	<p><b>OPENING SESSION - Setting the stage</b></p> <p>Threats, attacks and criminalisation illustrate the current plight of HRDs worldwide. In this session, human rights defenders will address the most pressing concerns and protection challenges when carrying out their work and share their inspiring stories of resilience in the most complex environments. Also, the strategies to counter these phenomena will shape the debate on what can be done to claim the human rights work while enhancing the protection of defenders around the world and engaging all actors involved in the protection of HRDs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Which protection challenges are defenders still facing? What are the specific regional challenges?</li> <li>- How has the protection and assistance channelled by ProtectDefenders.eu contributed to counter the threats faced by human rights defenders?</li> <li>- What is the relationship of protecting human rights defenders and the sustainable development, how can the development agenda help to protect human rights defenders?</li> </ul> <p>Opening remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gerald Staberock, Chair of Protect Defenders, Secretary General World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)</li> <li>• Regional reports by a representation of human rights defenders benefiting from ProtectDefenders.eu support</li> </ul> <p>Keynote opening speech:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• STAVROS LAMBRINIDIS - European Union Special Representative for Human Rights</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussion and Q&amp;A</b></p>
13.00-14.15	<b>NETWORKING LUNCH</b> - Human rights defenders will have the opportunity to interact and engage bilaterally with EU, NGO and international civil society representatives.
14.15-16.00	<p><b>PANEL SESSION - "Human Rights Defenders as agents of development - ProtectDefenders.eu case studies."</b></p> <p>Human rights defenders play a key role as contributors to a sustainable and equal development within their societies. However, often they carry out their work in a context of widespread stigmatisation and are frequently portrayed as anti-development activists, especially when opposing economic projects or trade negotiations, but also when they advocate for fundamental rights in repressive contexts. Development and human rights communities are frequently disconnected or divided and international actors reluctant to integrate a clear defenders' protection agenda into their policies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the role of the development sector on the work of human rights defenders? And what is the role of Human Rights Defenders work in creating sustainable development?</li> <li>- Can the Sustainable Development Goals' agenda be linked to the protection of human rights defenders in the communities where they are most at risk?</li> <li>- Can business play a positive role in promoting and legitimising human rights and those who defend them?</li> <li>- How can development work and traditional development funders play a role in legitimising the work of human rights defenders?</li> </ul>

	<p>- What should be the role of the EU institutions and other development and aid donors when sustaining the human rights defenders' work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderated by ANNE-SOPHIE SCHAEFFER, Programme Director, Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders</li> <li>• <b>Testimonies and case studies of ProtectDefenders.eu beneficiaries</b>, including human rights defenders working on land and environmental rights, promoting fundamental rights in repressive contexts and defenders working in a development context.</li> <li>• Participation of representatives of European Parliament, DG DEVCO, DG TRADE and International private sector</li> </ul> <p><b>Q&amp;A</b></p>
16.00 - 16.30	<b>COFFEE BREAK</b>
16.30-18.00	<p><b>DEBATE - "Building support to the human rights discourse within society".</b></p> <p>Human Rights Defenders protected by Protectdefenders.eu face both personal defamation, harassment and also operate in a hostile discourse surrounding them despite their efforts and positive role for society and development agendas. The session will discuss strategies to counter those discourses, and work towards setting more positive and thus more protective narratives for human rights defenders. Defenders and representatives of international institutions and NGOs will share their views and different approaches on how to bring universal human rights back to the centre of the national and international agenda, in a context of reported dilution of human rights standards -even in advanced democratic societies. This conversation will focus on potential strategies to reinforce the role and commitment of civil society and society at large towards human rights and those who defend them.</p> <p>- Which steps can local and international actors (both NGOs, countries and donors) take in order to counter the stigma on human rights work?  - What can be done to build a narrative that portrays defenders as key actors of positive change in contexts of de-legitimation of human rights work?  - What are the main strategies to reinforce the perception of the civil society and wider public towards the role of human rights defenders? What can be done to counter the anti-human rights propaganda that HRDs face in some countries?  - How can EU and international civil society contribute to a shift on the perception of human rights work in the most repressive contexts?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderated by ANTOINE MADELIN, FIDH International Advocacy Director and member of the Board of ProtectDefenders.eu</li> <li>• <b>Testimonies and case studies of ProtectDefenders.eu beneficiaries</b>, including human rights defenders countering the negative narrative and working amidst de-legitimation contexts</li> <li>• Participation of EEAS, EU Fundamental Rights Agency, United Nations Special Mandates and European Parliament representatives.</li> </ul> <p><b>OPEN DISCUSSION</b></p>
18.00 – 18.30	<p><b>CLOSING SESSION – Shaping the human rights defenders agenda for next years</b></p> <p>Based on the inputs from the human rights defenders and the debate with key international players, the main issues will be summarised on how ProtectDefenders.eu and its partners can extend their protection work beyond the response to the immediate threats faced by HRDs. Suggestions made and lessons learned will be presented in order to propose how ProtectDefenders.eu and EU partners can broaden their protection work of HRDs to create more sustainable protection and enhanced support for HRDs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>WRAP-UP REMARKS</b> - ANDREW ANDERSON - Executive Director, Front Line Defenders and member of the Board of ProtectDefenders.eu</li> <li>• <b>KEYNOTE CLOSING SPEECH</b> - FEDERICA MOGHERINI–High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (to be confirmed)</li> </ul>
19.00 -...	<b>Dinner</b>