THE OBSERVATORY
for the Protection of
Human Rights Defenders

SOS-TORTURE / BURUNDI

IMLU
Independent Medico-Legal Unit

Out of Reach, Not Out of Risk:

Transnational Repression of Human Rights Defenders in East Africa



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FIDH INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

OMCT SOS-Torture Network

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Executive Summary

Human rights defenders (HRDs) who are forced into exile do not necessarily escape repression. For many, crossing an international border changes the form and location of the risks they face rather than ending them. This report examines transnational repression (TNR) against exiled HRDs in East Africa, with a particular focus on HRDs living and working in Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda.

TNR is the deliberate targeting of diaspora members, activists and HRDs by a state, or its proxy, to deter, silence or punish dissent, criticism or advocacy, expressed from outside its territory.[1]

The study draws on interviews with 50 HRDs from Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, conducted between March and November 2025. Of those interviewed, 40% were in Kenya, 33% in Rwanda and 27% in Uganda. Twenty-three of the 50 HRDs (46%) reported being specifically targeted in exile because of their human rights or journalistic activities. The study was complemented by 14 interviews with government representatives, United Nations (UN) agencies, human rights and civil society organisations, psychosocial support providers, academics and researchers.

The evidence indicates that TNR in East Africa frequently operates through a layered sequence rather than through a single act. Across the cases examined, public visibility was sometimes followed by surveillance or photographing, unsolicited approaches framed as "dialogue", digital or reputational pressure, administrative or mobility-related pressure and, in a smaller number of cases, physical interference. Among the 20 respondents whose accounts contained sufficiently detailed descriptions of threats to identify specific forms of TNR, 65% reported surveillance or approaches linked to embassies or host-country environments, 30% reported digital targeting, 10% reported legal or migration-related pressure, and 10% reported direct physical interference. In some cases, these categories overlapped.

The report identifies three interconnected dynamics that shape TNR in East Africa. First, origin-state repression can extend across borders, with surveillance, intimidation, digital targeting and mobility-related pressure continuing after HRDs leave their country of origin. This suggests that exile may change the form of repression rather than end it. Second, host states actively shape the risk environment: they may protect HRDs, fail to prevent or investigate abuses, or, in some cases, facilitate removal or other forms of pressure. Third, repression is increasingly regionalised, as information, security cooperation, diaspora networks and cross-border mobility connect multiple jurisdictions. Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda therefore emerge not as isolated settings, but as interconnected points within a wider regional system in which pressure can travel and accumulate. Together, these dynamics show that TNR is a distributed process involving origin states, host states and regional networks, with the cumulative effect of restricting HRDs' ability to move, organise and advocate safely.

The report situates these findings within Africa's longer history of cross-border repression. Contemporary TNR is not entirely new. What has changed is the scale, speed, portability and combination of tools available to states and state-linked actors. Digital technologies, administrative systems, migration controls and international security cooperation allow pressure to be reproduced across borders through methods that may be less visible and more difficult to attribute.

The report therefore argues that asylum protection alone is insufficient. Protection must extend across the entire "exilic arc": departure, residence in exile, cross-border advocacy and the possibility of safe and voluntary return. Origin states must remain accountable for repression that they initiate or sustain beyond their borders, while host states must exercise due diligence to protect HRDs on their territory, investigate foreign-linked threats, uphold non-refoulement and prevent immigration, security or cooperation procedures from being misused to target protected human rights activity.

The report proposes a transnational human rights framework for exile centred on prevention, protection, accountability and remedy.

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1. See Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), **"Transnational Repression"**, Civic Space Brief, June 2025.

Abbreviations

ACAT	*Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture* (Action by Christians against Torture)
ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)
CAT	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
FIDH	International Federation for Human Rights
HRD	Human Rights Defender
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICCT	International Centre for Counterterrorism
ISHR	International Service for Human Rights
IMLU	Independent Medico-Legal Unit – Kenya
MLA	Mutual Legal Assistance
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NISS	National Intelligence and Security Service – Sudan
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OMCT	World Organisation Against Torture
OPBP	Oxford Pro Bono Publico
PBI	Peace Brigades International
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SNR	*Service national de renseignement* (National Intelligence Service) – Burundi
TNR	Transnational repression
UN	United Nations

1. Introduction

Human rights defenders (HRDs) play a critical role in promoting and protecting human rights. Yet in many countries, threats, harassment and persecution have become so severe that HRDs are forced to leave their homes and seek protection elsewhere. In some cases, human rights work can only be continued from exile, leading HRDs to move within and beyond continents in search of safer environments.

Over the past decade, HRDs – including activists, journalists, lawyers and civic leaders – in East Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region have faced arbitrary arrest, surveillance, stigmatisation, legal harassment and threats to their lives, particularly in Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya and Tanzania. Many flee to regional hubs such as Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda.

Crossing a border, however, does not necessarily bring safety. Instead, it can reconfigure the geography of repression, as threats and forms of coercion may continue beyond the territory of the state of origin. Forty-six per cent of the 50 HRDs interviewed for this study reported being targeted in exile by their home state because of their ongoing human rights or journalistic activities. Reported forms of pressure included surveillance, intimidation, digital attacks, administrative and mobility restrictions, pressure on relatives and disruption of professional activities. These experiences demonstrate that exile can create new vulnerabilities rather than provide a clear break from repression.

This risk is particularly significant in East Africa, a region characterised by cross-border displacement, political contestation and closely connected civic and diaspora networks. Nairobi, Kampala and Kigali serve as important hubs for journalists, activists, lawyers and civil society organisations (CSOs) working on human rights and political developments across the region. The same regional connections that facilitate solidarity, advocacy and access to protection can also enable surveillance, information-sharing and coercive pressure to cross borders.

This report examines transnational repression (TNR): state or state-enabled actions that cross international borders to silence, punish or constrain individuals because of their actual or perceived exercise of protected rights. TNR may involve physical attacks, abductions and renditions, but contemporary repression also operates through less visible and more easily deniable means, including surveillance, digital attacks, smear campaigns, passport restrictions, denial of consular services, immigration and administrative pressure, threats of prosecution, and the misuse of counter-terrorism or security frameworks.

Not every harmful act against a person abroad constitutes TNR. Crimes, personal harassment or conflicts within diaspora communities may involve threats, surveillance, intimidation or violence, but they are generally not considered TNR unless they are linked to a state, or to actors supported or enabled by a state, and the person is targeted because of their actual or perceived exercise of protected rights. The distinction is therefore not based simply on the seriousness of an incident or the fact that it occurs across a border. It depends on whether coercive conduct is connected to state power or state-enabled action and is used to suppress, deter or constrain protected activity.

For HRDs, these practices can directly interfere with rights protected under international and regional human rights law, including freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly; privacy and family life; freedom of movement; personal security; and freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The phenomenon also exposes a gap in existing protection frameworks. Refugee and asylum systems are essential safeguards, particularly through the principle of non-refoulement and access to protection, but they do not fully address the risks that HRDs continue to face after crossing a border. TNR may form part of a broader continuum of repression that begins before departure and continues during exile. It can restrict HRDs' ability to work, move freely, organise and participate in public life, and may also undermine the possibility of safe and voluntary return.

Much of the existing research and public documentation on TNR has focused on political opposition figures and high-profile individual cases, including those involving Rwanda, Eritrea and Algeria, as well as on host-state contexts such as South Africa. This has contributed to a documentation landscape in which the experiences of HRDs are often subsumed within the broader category of "dissidents". This report addresses that gap by placing HRDs at the centre of analysis and examining how TNR affects their ability to exercise and defend human rights across borders. By focusing specifically on HRDs, the report brings freedom of expression and association, civic participation and the specific protection obligations owed to human rights defenders into the analysis.[2]

This report therefore develops a transnational human rights framework for exile of HRDs, recognising that their protection must extend across the full exilic arc, from departure and residence abroad to continued human rights activity and, where possible, safe and voluntary return. It examines the experiences of exiled HRDs in East Africa, situates those experiences within the region's longer history of cross-border repression and applicable international and regional legal frameworks, and identifies measures required of both origin and host states to prevent, investigate and remedy TNR.

2. Human Rights Watch, ***We Will Find You: A Global Look at How Governments Repress Nationals Abroad***, 2024.

2. Methodology

This study was conducted jointly by the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and three members of OMCT's SOS-Torture Network: the Independent Medico-Legal Unit – Kenya (IMLU) and SOS-Torture Burundi.

Between March and November 2025, an Observatory research team travelled to Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda and conducted in-depth interviews with 50 HRDs from Burundi, DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, who had been forced to leave their countries and seek refuge elsewhere in East Africa. The research team used a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative research. Of the HRDs interviewed, 40% were in Kenya, 33% in Rwanda and 27% in Uganda. These figures refer to the interviewees' countries of residence and should not be interpreted as reflecting the country-of-origin composition of the sample.

The 50-person interview sample was used to assess the overall prevalence and broad forms of reported targeting. A more detailed analysis of the sequence and modalities of repression was conducted only for the 20 respondents whose accounts contained sufficiently specific information to identify the relevant incidents and their relationship to the defender's activities. The figures drawn from these 20 accounts therefore describe the distribution of reported modalities within that subset and should not be interpreted as prevalence rates for the full sample of 50 interviewees.

Interviews were conducted in person or remotely, depending on security and logistical considerations. Researchers adhered strictly to the "Do No Harm" principle, taking measures to protect participants' safety, confidentiality and well-being. All participants provided informed consent. The three SOS-Torture network members helped identify and contact HRDs for interview, supported the data-collection process and, where needed, facilitated psychosocial assistance following interviews. Their involvement was also essential to ensuring that the research process remained sensitive to the security and well-being of participating HRDs.

Some HRDs agreed to have their names disclosed, while others were anonymised. Anonymised participants are identified in this report by numerical codes, such as HRD 01 and HRD 02, as referenced in the footnotes.

The analysis was complemented by 14 interviews with stakeholders involved in protecting HRDs, including representatives of government bodies, UN agencies, international and local NGOs and human rights organisations, psychosocial support organisations, and academics and researchers. These additional testimonies enabled the research team to cross-check information provided by HRDs and situate individual experiences within broader institutional and regional contexts.

3. Transnational Repression of HRDs in Africa: Concept, History and Contemporary Practice

3.1. Concept

Transnational repression (TNR) refers to actions by states, including through proxies or other state-enabled actors, that reach beyond their borders to silence, intimidate, punish or otherwise constrain individuals because of their actual or perceived exercise of protected rights. The concept has gained increasing recognition in UN and policy discourse. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) defines TNR as acts conducted or directed by a state, or its proxy, to deter, silence or punish dissent, criticism or human rights advocacy towards it, expressed from outside its territory. OHCHR identifies a broad range of practices, including digital surveillance and harassment, legal and administrative measures, threats, renditions and extraditions, and, in the most serious cases, abduction, arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearance and killing.[3]

Three features distinguish TNR from other forms of harm: a nexus to state power or state-enabled conduct, a cross-border dimension, and a coercive or repressive connection to the target's actual or perceived exercise of protected rights.

States may extend repression across borders through direct, administrative, legal, diplomatic or digital means. These may include surveillance at public events, unsolicited approaches presented as "dialogue", passport cancellation or review, visa restrictions, misuse of international legal cooperation, *in absentia* proceedings, threats of extradition or prosecution, digital impersonation, phishing, spyware, doxxing and smear campaigns.[4] Measures that may appear lawful or routine in isolation can amount to TNR when they form part of a broader exercise of coercive state power aimed at suppressing or deterring the exercise of protected rights.

The central analytical question is therefore whether state or state-enabled coercion is exercised across borders in a way that restricts protected rights. For HRDs, this may involve silencing speech, limiting movement, obstructing participation in public life, undermining professional activity or preventing safe and voluntary return. The study accordingly considers who exercises the coercive power, how it is exercised, and how responsibility may be distributed among origin states, host states and other state-enabled actors.

3.2. A Longer African History of Cross-Border Repression

Although transnational repression is a relatively recent concept, the cross-border targeting of political opponents and dissidents has a much longer history in Africa. The practice can be traced through successive political periods: the struggles surrounding decolonisation and independence; the consolidation of authoritarian regimes and the emergence of organised opposition in exile during the 1970s-1990s; and, from the 2000s onwards, conflict, political entrenchment and the diversification of repression through legal, administrative and digital tools.

An early emblematic antecedent is the 1960 assassination in Geneva of Cameroonian anti-colonial leader Félix-Roland Moumié by a French intelligence operative,[5] reportedly in collaboration with

3. See OHCHR, **"Transnational Repression"**, Civic Space Brief, June 2025.

4. Idem.

5. Martial Manet, "La neutralisation des opposants politiques à l'étranger. Une étude à la lumière des obligations étatiques", *Annuaire français de droit international*, Vol. 2002 ,68. See also Musée d'ethnographie de Genève, materials on the assassination of Félix-Roland Moumié in Geneva on 3 November 1960.

Cameroonian authorities. Although this was an act of colonial rather than African state repression, it illustrates how political struggles concerning Africa already extended beyond territorial borders. In subsequent decades, African governments developed their own cross-border practices. Libya pursued opponents abroad during its campaign against political exiles;[6] Mobutu's government monitored Zairian opposition networks in Europe, including Switzerland; and neighbouring states sometimes facilitated the reach of origin states abroad.[7] In 1997, for example, Gabonese authorities arrested Equatoguinean opposition figures Felipe Ondó Obiang and Guillermo Nguema Ela, both recognised refugees, and transferred them to Equatorial Guinea.[8]

Historical examples can also be found in East Africa, although documentation is more fragmented. In 1989, Tanzanian authorities detained Rémi Gahutu, leader of the Burundian opposition movement *Parti pour la libération du peuple Hutu* (Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People – PALIPEHUTU), together with 14 other Burundian refugees. Gahutu died in Tanzanian custody in August 1990.[9] By the following decade, Rwanda provided more documented examples of violence targeting individuals abroad. Former Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) officer Théoneste Lizinde and Augustin Bugirimfura were abducted and killed in Nairobi in 1996. Former Rwandan Interior Minister Seth Sendashonga, who had become a government critic in exile, survived an assassination attempt in Nairobi the same year and was killed there in 1998. Human Rights Watch and FIDH reported that an employee of the Rwandan Embassy had been apprehended at the scene of the 1996 attack.[10]

From the 2000s onwards, the range of methods used became broader. Physical attacks, abductions and forced returns continued, but were increasingly accompanied by criminal proceedings, extradition and migration procedures, use of consular powers, travel-document controls and digital surveillance. Sudan illustrates this evolution particularly well. During the late 2000s, Sudanese Embassy officials conducted "re-documentation" interviews with Darfuri asylum seekers in UK Home Office premises. Subsequent research documented surveillance of Sudanese political activity abroad and cases in which information about activities undertaken in exile reportedly resurfaced during interrogation following return to Sudan.[11] Similarly, in 2018, Togolese authorities transferred Equatoguinean opponents Fulgencio Obiang Esono and Francisco Micha Obama to Equatorial Guinea despite the risk of torture; the UN Committee against Torture subsequently found that Togo had failed to respect its non-refoulement obligations.[12] In the same period, Cameroonian Anglophone leaders arrested in Abuja were transferred to Cameroon in circumstances later declared unlawful and unconstitutional by a Nigerian Federal High Court.[13]

This history shows that contemporary TNR in Africa is not a new practice, but an evolving one. Assassination, abduction and forced return have not disappeared. They now coexist with less visible forms of coercion involving legal procedures, administrative powers, surveillance and digital technologies. The novelty therefore lies less in the objective of controlling dissent beyond national borders than in the expanding range of means available to do so.

6. On Libya's campaign against political opponents abroad, see Amnesty International and historical documentation concerning the Libyan authorities' campaign against so-called "stray dogs" during the 1970s and 1980s.

7. Lisa N'Pango Zanetti, "Le rôle de la Suisse dans la répression des opposants congolais-zaïrois à Mobutu (1990-1980)", *Le Globe. Revue genevoise de géographie*, Vol. 2023 ,163, pp. 79-63.

8. Amnesty International, "Gabon / Equatorial Guinea: Fear of torture / possible prisoners of conscience / refoulement", AI Index AFR 11 ,1997/028/02 November 1997; U.S. Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices – Equatorial Guinea*, 1998.

9. Amnesty International, "Tanzania: Death in detention / legal concern: Remi Gahutu, leader of a Burundi opposition group and 14 detained Burundi nationals", AI Index AFR 21 ,1990/010/56 August 1990.

10. Human Rights Watch and FIDH, "Human Rights Watch and the FIDH Condemn Assassination of Seth Sendashonga", 18 May 1998; Human Rights Watch, "Rwanda: Repression Across Borders", 28 January 2014.

11. Waging Peace, *Sudanese Embassy Interviews of Darfuri Asylum Seekers at UK Home Office Buildings*, 2007; Waging Peace and Article 1, *The Long Arm of the Sudanese Regime: How the Sudanese National Intelligence and Security Service Monitors and Threatens Sudanese Nationals Who Leave Sudan*, 2014.

12. Committee against Torture, *Concluding observations on the third periodic report of Togo*, CAT/C/TGO/CO/2019 ,3, paras 21-20.

13. Federal High Court of Nigeria, Abuja, decision concerning Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe and others, 2019; see also reporting on the judgment declaring their arrest, detention and deportation unlawful and unconstitutional.

3.3. Why This Moment is Different: The "Golden Age" of Transnational Repression

Contemporary research increasingly describes a "golden age"[14] of transnational repression worldwide: more origin states targeting more people across more host states, using a layered, deniable, and relatively low-cost array of tools. What distinguishes the present phase is not the practice of extending coercion across borders – which is longstanding in Africa – but the scale, speed, and portability of the methods now used. Three drivers stand out.

1) Administrative systems that travel

Digitised identity, e-visa platforms, biometric databases, and routine inter-agency data sharing allow authorities to immobilise HRDs without resorting to overt arrests: passport "reviews" or cancellations, visa churn (continual transition from one temporary visa to another) triggered by vague "security" notices, and in-absentia proceedings that make return hazardous. These legal and administrative levers are cheap to deploy, hard to contest from exile, and effective at constraining speech and movement precisely when cross-border advocacy may be most important.[15]

2) Digital vectors that globalise stigma

Labels attached to HRDs in their country of origin ("traitor", "spy", "criminal", "propagandist") now travel instantly. Following moments of increased public visibility, such as panel discussions, media interviews or testimonies), interviewees reported tightly timed increases in impersonation attempts, credential-phishing and coordinated smear campaigns recycling narratives promoted by origin states in diaspora spaces. These tactics can erode trust between exiled HRDs and their hosts and partners and make organisations and venues less willing to provide exiled voices with platforms.[16] Digital surveillance has become easier with spyware being deployed across borders against HRDs and political opponents. For example, reporting has documented the use of Pegasus by the Rwandan Government against political opponents living outside the country: "Pegasus appears to have been particularly useful in allowing the Rwandan government to attempt to silence political dissent outside of the country's borders. In addition to [Cyril] Ramaphosa, Rwanda used Pegasus to surveil former intelligence chief and opposition party co-founder Kayumba Nyamwasa, who is living in exile in South Africa and has survived repeated attempts on his life. The mobile device of Carine Kanimba, a U.S.-Belgian dual citizen and daughter of the activist who inspired the film Hotel Rwanda, was likewise compromised. Kanimba is fighting to free her father from prison after he was forcibly abducted by Rwandan authorities [in 2020] in Dubai".[17]

Digital forms of TNR present an even more complex challenge than physical forms. Digital technologies are versatile and adaptable, serving a range of purposes, including discrediting targeted activists through online disinformation and harassment and compromising their email accounts to identify family members or colleagues who may themselves be targeted.[18]

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14. Nate Schenkkan, "The Golden Age of Transnational Repression", Journal of Democracy, Vol. 4)36), October 2025.

15. Oxford Pro Bono Publico (OPBP) & International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), ***Transnational Repression of Human Rights Defenders: References, definitions and protections under International Human Rights Law, 2025***.

16. Freedom House, Transnational Repression of Journalists (Digital), 2023; Freedom House, No Way In or Out: Transnational Repression at the Border, 2024.

17. Nathaniel Allen and Matthew La Lime, "How digital espionage tools exacerbate authoritarianism across Africa", Brookings, 19 November 2021.

18. Siena Anstis and Ron Deibert, "**Silenced by Surveillance: The Impacts of Digital Transnational Repression on Journalists, Human Rights Defenders, and Dissidents in Exile**", The Knight First Amendment Institute, Columbia University, 18 February 2025.

3) Security and counter-terrorism frameworks

Governments increasingly invoke counter-terrorism or public-order cooperation to justify cross-border pressure, even when the conduct in question involves protected expression and association, rather than violence.[19] This "securitisation" blurs the line between legitimate cooperation and the suppression of dissent abroad, raising concerns regarding necessity and proportionality, and heightening the risk of refoulement by administrative means.[20]

Since systematic data collection began, global monitors have recorded an increase in the number of incidents, origin states, and host states affected by TNR. Legal mapping and policy research point to the same broad trend: practice is expanding faster than protection systems are adapting.[21]

4. Transnational Repression Through an East African Lens

Existing documentation does not capture the full range of less visible forms of transnational repression affecting HRDs in East Africa. Phone calls, filming at public events, informal approaches or requests to "resolve" an issue may never lead to a formal complaint, yet still influence how HRDs speak, move and organise. Drawing on the experiences of HRDs in Nairobi, Kampala and Kigali, this report identifies recurring patterns and assesses their frequency, providing greater empirical detail on practices often described only through individual cases or anecdotal accounts.

East Africa is a highly connected regional space where political priorities, bilateral relations and large diaspora communities intersect with major hubs for HRDs, such as Nairobi, Kampala and Kigali. Recent analyses point to recurring patterns across the region: activists and political opponents abroad may face surveillance, informal approaches, administrative pressure and, in some cases, physical interference.[22] Legal research has also highlighted the role that cooperation between states can play in monitoring or pressuring exiles, while accountability mechanisms have often struggled to keep pace with these practices.[23] In Kenya, Nairobi's prominence as a regional centre for activists and exiled communities has made these risks particularly significant, reinforcing the need for stronger protection for both foreign HRDs and local activists.[24]

The most common pattern identified involves approaches by embassies or host-country actors, combined with surveillance, reported in 65% of cases. Digital targeting, including harassment, impersonation and attempts to compromise online accounts, was reported in 30% of cases. Legal and migration-related pressure, such as passport obstruction, visa complications or references to in-absentia proceedings, was reported in 10% of cases. Direct physical interference outside the country of origin was also reported in 10% of cases.

Taken together, and considered alongside existing research, these findings suggest a recurring pattern rather than a series of isolated incidents. Increased public visibility – through panel discussions, media

19. Siampakou, S., "The Use of Transnational Repression: Implications and Concerns", International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), 26 August 2025.

20. Schenkkan, N., "The Golden Age of Transnational Repression", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 36(4), October 2025, pp. 36-50.

21. Freedom House, ***Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach: The Global Scale and Scope of Transnational Repression***, 2021.

22. Abdishukri, M. A., "The Condor Playbook: East Africa's Transnational Crackdown on Dissent", *Review of African Political Economy blog*, Centre tricontinental (CETRI), 16 June 2025.

23. Oxford Pro Bono Publico (OPBP) for the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), *Transnational Repression of Human Rights Defenders:* ***Transnational Repression of Human Rights Defenders: References, definitions and protections under International Human Rights Law, 2025.***

24. Amnesty International Kenya, *Amnesty Kenya Gazette – Year in Review,* Special Issue, 2025.

appearances or testimonies – may be followed by surveillance or an apparently informal approach. Digital harassment may then intensify, while administrative or travel-related obstacles may further restrict mobility. Only a smaller number of cases involve direct physical interference. The overall picture is therefore one of layered pressure operating across diplomatic, administrative, digital and social spaces.

The regional political context may help explain why TNR has become more visible in some East African settings. In Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, recent episodes of youth-led mobilisation, including Gen Z, political unrest and heightened scrutiny of civil society have coincided with a broader securitisation of dissent and electoral contexts.[25] In this environment, governments may increasingly perceive politically active CSOs, journalists and HRDs – including those operating from exile – as potential sources of political mobilisation or external influence. For exiled HRDs, periods of domestic unrest may therefore increase their exposure: heightened attention to dissent within the host state may reduce scrutiny of pressure originating abroad, while simultaneously increasing the perceived political sensitivity of diaspora activism.[26]

The regional dimension is also important. Gen Z-led mobilisation has generated new forms of cross-border solidarity, particularly through digital networks, creating connections among activists and civil society actors across East Africa.[27] These networks can strengthen advocacy and solidarity, but they may also increase the visibility of exiled HRDs to authorities concerned about the spread of political mobilisation across borders. The evidence gathered for this study suggests that this changing political environment should be considered as a contextual factor when assessing the recent evolution of TNR in the region.

Rwanda presents a somewhat different trajectory. Its use of TNR predates the more recent wave of youth-led mobilisation and political unrest in the region.[28] As documented in this report, cross-border pressure against perceived opponents and critics has been used over a longer period and has evolved alongside Rwanda's post-genocide political and security environment and changing regional dynamics, including developments in DRC.

These contextual dynamics provide the broader setting in which TNR takes shape, but they do not fully capture how responsibility is distributed across the region. The evidence instead points to a continuum of state involvement: origin states may extend coercive practices beyond their borders; host states may themselves subject HRDs to repression, fail to discharge their protective obligations, or create conditions that enable pressure originating abroad; and regional security, diplomatic and migration networks may provide the connections through which such practices are transmitted and sustained. The following section examines these interlocking dimensions of TNR, from the conduct of origin states and host states to the wider regional structures that shape how repression travels across borders.

4.1. Origin-State Repression in Host Countries

Transnational repression often begins with a relatively simple shift: the defender leaves, but the security logic that targeted them at home travels with them. Across cases concerning HRDs from Burundi and Sudan, interviewees described pressure being reproduced outside the country of origin through surveillance, approaches, digital harassment, reputational attacks, consular and administrative pressure, and threats to mobility.

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25. Sheriff Bojang Jnr., **"Nowhere to run to: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania tighten grip on protest, democracy"**, *The African Report*, 9 July 2025; Devon Knudsen and Otsieno Namwaya, "Have Election Crackdowns Become the Norm? Domestic and Cross-Border Repression in East Africa", *African Arguments,* 11 February 2026.

26. Freedom House, *Collaboration and Resistance: Tracking Transnational Repression*, 2026.

27. Sheriff Bojang Jnr., **"Nowhere to run to: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania tighten grip on protest, democracy"**, *The African Report*, 9 July 2025; Devon Knudsen and Otsieno Namwaya, "Have Election Crackdowns Become the Norm? Domestic and Cross-Border Repression in East Africa", *African Arguments,* 11 February 2026.

28. See, for example, Human Rights Watch, "Transnational Repression by Rwanda", 15 February 2024.

The evidence does not suggest that every incident is directed by the origin state, nor does it establish host-state cooperation in every case. Rather, it shows a recurring capacity of origin-state actors, proxies and associated networks to extend pressure into spaces where HRDs have sought safety.

Among Burundian HRDs, this pattern is particularly pronounced. Eight of the 16 Burundian interviewees (50%) reported being targeted after leaving the country in ways consistent with TNR. Burundian interviewees described a pattern of cross-border pressure that begins at home with legal and administrative measures and continues in exile through calibrated and often deniable forms of pressure. CSOs in Burundi face intrusive inspections, suspensions and dissolutions, refusals to renew registration, banking "verifications" or freezes, and professional sanctions, including against lawyers defending HRDs, alongside pressure from the *Service national de renseignement* (National Intelligence Service – SNR) and the *Imbonerakure* youth wing militia of Burundi's ruling party, the *Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces de défense de la démocratie* (National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defense of Democracy – CNDD-FDD).

After departure, repression reorganises rather than ends. In Kigali and Kampala, some interviewees described visible advocacy being followed by observation and approaches, including filming, monitoring outside their locations and calls framed as attempts to "resolve your situation". Digital pressure included smear campaigns, impersonation and attempts to obtain login credentials, using labels associated with the Burundian authorities, such as "terrorist", "enemy of the nation", "criminal", "foreign-funded" and "propagandist". Legal-status and mobility pressure included passport "reviews", obstacles to renewal, references to in-absentia proceedings or extradition, and airport or border incidents.

"The online harassment has continued. Some messages have referred to my location and warned me not to consider myself safe. There is a strong perception among Burundian defenders in exile that networks linked to Burundi continue to monitor them abroad. In Nairobi, some defenders now avoid Burundian community gatherings because they fear that informants operate within these spaces."

– CSO representative working with Burundian HRDs in exile, Nairobi

The practical effect is strategic immobilisation: limiting public appearances, changing venues, altering travel routes and avoiding predictable diaspora spaces. In this sense, exile does not necessarily remove the underlying security relationship; it changes the instruments through which it is maintained.



Armel Niyongere,[29] a Burundian HRD, reported being threatened several times in various countries at the request of the Burundian authorities. During the Arusha II Dialogue in 2016, the Burundian Government delegation reportedly objected to his presence, labelling him *persona non grata* and claiming that he was subject to an international arrest warrant.[30]

He described being stopped at Belgium's International Airport, Zaventem:

"In 2016 at Zaventem, I was stopped while traveling on a Burundian passport. Questions referred to a case back home. I made it through, but after that I avoided any flight that might connect me via certain hubs."

Armel Niyongere also stated:

"In 2023, in Geneva, the Burundian government tried to prevent me from entering a session of the United Nations Human Rights Committee for which I had been duly accredited. They refused to take part in the session if I attended."

These episodes illustrate that origin-state pressure may operate not only in a defender's main country of exile, but also through transit points, diplomatic encounters and international advocacy spaces.

Kigali functions as a high-visibility hub where HRDs report filming around events, unsolicited requests for "dialogue" and other forms of observation. Several accounts described the perceived

29. Burundian human rights lawyer, President of ACAT Burundi, Secretary-General of SOS-Torture Burundi, and member of the OMCT General Assembly.

30. Abbas Mbazumutima, "Arusha II : tentative d'arrestation d'un membre du Mouvement Halte au 3ème Mandat", *IWACU*, 12 July 2016.

presence of individuals believed to be connected to the *Imbonerakure* or the SNR, as well as attempts to lure HRDs to controlled locations, stigmatisation within diaspora communities and administrative pressure, including passport renewals reportedly placed "under review," bank "verifications" and references to in-absentia proceedings. These accounts suggest that pressure in exile may operate through a combination of informal surveillance, social intimidation and administrative leverage, although the evidence does not in every case establish the institutional affiliation of those involved or the direct involvement of Burundian authorities.

A CSO representative working with Burundian HRDs in exile in Kigali stated:

"We were particularly concerned by the repeated movements of a Burundian judge between Burundi and Rwanda. These movements appeared suspicious in the broader context of relations between the two countries. Since Burundi closed its border with Rwanda in January 2024, the authorities have repeatedly accused Rwanda of harbouring people they describe as terrorists or enemies of the nation and have sought their extradition. The language used is important: the authorities do not refer to these people as human rights defenders, but as security threats. We have also seen a non-public list containing several names. Some of those listed are reportedly subject to international arrest warrants, but for the other names it is unclear why they have been included or what legal basis exists for targeting them."

Kampala is often perceived as a comparatively more administratively accessible space for Burundian exiles, but operational risks persist. Interviewees described photographing around panel discussions and community meetings, approaches through community figures following media appearances, digital targeting involving impersonation and attempted credential theft, and status-related pressure concerning passports and cases originating in Burundi. This illustrates that a more permissive host environment does not necessarily eliminate transnational risk; rather, the form and intensity of pressure may vary depending on the host state's protective environment and the channels available to actors seeking to monitor or intimidate HRDs.

Sudan provides a longer-standing example of this cross-border dynamic. Sudanese authorities developed techniques to extend coercive practices beyond the country's borders well before the current civil war broke out in April 2023. Sudanese HRDs in Kenya and Uganda interviewed described photographing and filming around workshops and community meetings, approaches by individuals invoking consular or security connections, digital impersonation and credential attacks, and smear campaigns recycling labels used at home, including "traitor", "spy" and "criminal". Several interviewees also described pressure relating to passports and other documentation.

One Sudanese HRD in Kakuma described the perceived continuity between repression inside Sudan and surveillance in exile:

"The danger from Sudan followed me into exile. People who work with military intelligence and armed groups still monitor people outside Sudan... I believe the attack on me in Kakuma was not random but linked to information being passed from Sudan. You can run from Sudan, but Sudan does not leave you. The system follows you... I now live low and avoid public meetings because I fear people linked to armed groups are watching inside the camp."[31]

Another Sudanese HRD described perceived monitoring in Nairobi:

"In Nairobi, SAF [the Sudanese Armed Forces] are not coming to face us but they are monitoring and reporting to the government. A lawyer called Montazer attended a workshop organised by Freedom House. When he got back to Port Sudan he got arrested and stayed in detention for several months. "[32]

In Kampala, Sudanese HRDs reported filming or photographing at workshops and community venues, "friendly" approaches following public visibility and increased digital targeting involving impersonation, credential attacks and amplification of smear campaigns.

One interviewee reported:

31. Interview with HRD 9 ,35 October 2025.

32. Interview with HRD 24, online, 29 April 2025.

"We published the report on torture in 2023. RSF put us under pressure, monitoring us... I got more than 10 calls from RSF and the embassy of Sudan, asking why we mentioned some names of RSF... In Kampala's Kasanga neighbourhood, RSF are present and it became dangerous for Sudanese people to go there."[33]

Another stated:

"In Kampala, for Sudanese HRDs it's not safe because the warring parties have intelligence networks (also in Nairobi). Sometimes in Sudanese restaurants, people stayed behind us when we were talking about issues in Sudan. After that, a lady was shouting 'RSF'. A colleague called me two days ago and said the situation in Nairobi is very bad; they stopped attending workshops and cannot move around a lot. There are a lot of RSF members in Nairobi."[34]

A third interviewee reported:

"RSF has an office in Kampala. I had pictures of the people who arrested me there, and I received phone calls with threats. They are documenting the pictures of Sudanese people and reporting what they are doing."[35]

These accounts should not be read as establishing that every person perceived to be associated with the RSF or SAF is in fact acting on behalf of those organisations. They nevertheless reveal a consistent perception among interviewees that diaspora spaces are penetrated by actors associated with the conflict in Sudan, and that this perception itself affects participation.

Accounts from Burundian and Sudanese HRDs point to a common mechanism: origin-state repression can extend across borders through social proximity, digital networks and administrative systems rather than relying exclusively on overt physical coercion. The objective may not be immediate arrest; it may instead be to make HRDs feel that they are being watched, that they remain within reach of those seeking to pressure them, and that continued advocacy may carry uncertain consequences.

4.2. Host-State Involvement and Protection Gaps for HRDs in Exile

4.2.1. Host-State Amplification of Origin-State Repression: The example of Burundian HRDs in Rwanda

Origin-state repression does not fully explain the risks faced by HRDs in exile. Pressure can also be amplified by the host state, particularly where bilateral relations, security concerns or political interests affect how exiled activists are perceived and treated. In such cases, repression does not necessarily operate through direct instructions from the state of origin. Its narratives and demands may also shape the conduct of authorities in the country of exile.

This dynamic was particularly visible following the 2015 crisis in Burundi. As political opponents, journalists and civil society activists fled the country, Burundian authorities increasingly portrayed opposition and civil society actors as being linked to the attempted coup and subsequent efforts to destabilise the country. Bujumbura repeatedly accused Rwanda of hosting individuals involved in these efforts and of facilitating activities aimed at destabilising Burundi.[36] Against this background, Burundian HRDs arriving in Rwanda found themselves in a highly securitised environment.

A Burundian NGO worker in Kigali described being questioned by individuals connected to the Rwandan security apparatus:

33. Interview with HRD 25, online, 5 May 2025.

34. Interview with HRD 24, online, 29 April 2025.

35. Interview with HRD 21 ,15 March 2025

36. Letter dated 3 February 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Burundi to the UN addressed to the President of the Security Council, UN Doc. S/114/2016. The Burundian Government alleged that actors involved in the 2015 attempted coup had fled particularly to Rwanda and accused Rwanda of facilitating efforts to destabilise Burundi.

"In 2017, my laptop was stolen. Before, I was making trips back and forth to Kampala every two months. Then I became suspicious. A former friend, now serving in the Rwandan army, contacted me for a meeting in Kigali. I was taken to a hotel to meet other people, including two other Rwandan army officers. But it was a covert interrogation; they wanted to reassure themselves that I wouldn't talk about Rwanda."[37]

Taken alone, this testimony does not establish that the Rwandan officials were acting at the request of Burundi. The wider context is nevertheless important. Burundian exiles were arriving in Rwanda at a time when Bujumbura portrayed their presence as part of a wider security and destabilisation threat. Origin-state accusations could therefore contribute to heightened scrutiny by the host state, even where the latter was also acting on its own security and political concerns. The case illustrates how the effects of origin-state repression can be amplified when its narratives are taken up, or acted upon, by authorities across the border.

The experience of Burundian exiles in Rwanda also illustrates how the protection and operating space available to HRDs can become dependent on changing relations between the two states. One interviewee stated:

"Rwanda has refused extradition requests from Burundi several times. But Rwanda prioritises economic development, and if there is an economic opportunity with Burundi that would threaten their business, it's possible they will tell the HRD to leave the country. Closing the borders with Burundi for so long has already had a big economic impact. When there was mediation between both countries, they told the Burundian radios in exile to shut down. We had to relocate our staff to a third country to continue operating. We returned a few months later when the negotiations failed."[38]

The experience of Burundian media operating from Rwanda provides clearer evidence of this dynamic. In March 2021, *Radio Publique Africaine*, *Radio-Télévision Renaissance* and *Radio Inzamba*, which had been operating from Kigali after their journalists went into exile, suspended their broadcasts. Human Rights Watch reported that Rwandan authorities informed the outlets that they could no longer operate from Rwanda following a request from the Burundian government.[39] Some resumed broadcasting only after their directors had left Rwanda.

This example goes beyond a general protection gap. It shows how an origin state can obtain restrictions on the activities of its critics through action taken by the host state. No physical transfer or extradition is required: limiting the ability of exiled journalists and HRDs to operate can itself extend the effects of origin-state repression beyond its borders.

More broadly, these accounts show that protection in exile can be affected by relations between states. Host states may provide refuge while at the same time subjecting exiled HRDs to surveillance, restrictions or political pressure. Where such measures respond to, reinforce or give effect to demands and narratives originating from the country of origin, the host state can become an important part of the TNR environment.

4.2.2. Security Cooperation and Uneven Protection

For HRDs in exile, the role of the host state is rarely straightforward. Cooperation between states may be formal, but it can also take place through informal contacts, political pressure, shared security concerns or tacit arrangements that are difficult to document. In some cases, host authorities may act in ways that accommodate the interests of the state of origin without any visible formal request. In others, they may resist such pressure and provide protection. Host-state responses are therefore often uneven. The same state may refuse to deport or hand over an HRD in one case, while failing to prevent intimidation, restricting activities or accommodating pressure in another. Protection can also change over time as political and security relations between governments evolve. For HRDs, this creates uncertainty about the extent to which the protection offered by the host country can be relied

37. Interview with HRD 07, Kigali, 13 March 2025.

38. Interview with HRD 04, Kigali, 13 March 2025.

39. Human Rights Watch, "Burundi: Entrenched Repression of Civil Society, Media", 26 May 2021.

upon in practice.[40]

The experience of a Burundian HRD in Uganda illustrates this complexity. The defender reported being arrested in 2021, together with the executive director of the Ligue Burundaise des Droits de l'Homme Iteka (Ligue Iteka), on allegations of "money laundering". He stated:

"In 2021, I was arrested along with the executive director of the Ligue Iteka in Uganda on allegations of 'money laundering'. But Uganda refused to cooperate in my deportation to Burundi. On the contrary, one of the police officers said they could help obtain the Ligue's accreditation in Kampala. I created a development NGO called Iteka Initiative and obtained financial support from the Ugandan government."[41]

In this instance, Ugandan authorities refused to facilitate the defender's return to Burundi and subsequently allowed him to continue his organisational activities in Kampala. This provided a meaningful degree of protection. It does not, however, mean that political or security cooperation between the two states was absent. Rather, it shows that such relationships do not necessarily produce the same response in every case.

That protection also proved unstable. In January 2024, renewed warnings of possible arrest prompted the defender to leave Uganda, first for Nairobi and subsequently for Kigali:

"It was clear that even in exile, our work could be turned against us. After the warning in January 2024 that arrests were imminent again, we were advised to leave urgently for Nairobi and from there we went to Kigali because we felt unsafe."

The sequence is important. An HRD may be protected from deportation at one moment but remain vulnerable to renewed pressure later. Safety in exile therefore depends not only on whether a particular request from the state of origin is rejected, but also on the willingness and capacity of the host state to prevent further intimidation and allow the defender to continue working safely. Interviewees in Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda described similar uncertainty when reporting threats or intimidation. Police reports could be filed and formal receipts issued, but follow-up was often limited and defenders were sometimes simply advised to "be careful". Such responses do not in themselves establish complicity. They nevertheless leave HRDs exposed when threats are recurrent and the actors behind them are not effectively investigated.

The protection gap identified here should therefore not be understood as the absence of cooperation between states. It arises from the uneven position occupied by host states in TNR: they may protect an HRD against one form of pressure, tolerate or accommodate another, or fail to respond effectively when intimidation occurs on their territory. For exiled HRDs, this makes protection contingent and sometimes difficult to predict.

4.2.3. Abduction, Torture and Unlawful Removal

At the most serious end of the spectrum of TNR are acts that directly threaten an HRD's liberty, physical integrity and life. These include abduction, arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, enforced disappearance, unlawful removal or rendition and, in extreme cases, targeted killing. While these violations are legally distinct, in practice they may form part of the same operation: individuals may be abducted, assaulted or tortured in order to obtain information, silence them, or facilitate their forcible return. Repression across borders is not limited to surveillance, threats or administrative restrictions. HRDs may be subjected to severe physical and psychological violence in the country where they sought protection, or forcibly returned to a country where they face detention, torture or disappearance. Forcibly returning an HRD to a country where they face such risks amounts to refoulement, which is prohibited under international law.

The evidence gathered in Kenya includes some of the most serious forms of physical interference

40. See Freedom House, *Collaboration and Resistance: Tracking Transnational Repression in 2025*, 2026, documenting cooperation among East African governments in the tracking, detention and return of activists.

41. Interview with HRD 13 ,08 March 2025.

documented in this study. Nairobi is an important refuge and advocacy hub for HRDs from across the region, but several defenders described surveillance, physical intimidation, attempted abduction and fears of forcible return.



The case of Tanzanian HRD **Mshabaha Hamza Mshabaha** is particularly serious. Mshabaha had lived in exile in Nairobi for five years and continued to support Tanzanian activists through Change Africa. On 22 February 2026, he was lured into a vehicle by individuals introduced through contacts he trusted. Once outside Nairobi, he realised that the meeting was a trap. Two men restrained him with a seatbelt around his neck, attempted twice to inject him with a syringe and tried to force him to drink alcohol. During the attack, he recalled being told that he was going to "meet Samia", to "meet Mama", and that these were his "last days here".[42]

Mshabaha resisted, repeatedly tried to open the vehicle and eventually attracted the attention of people along the road, allowing him to escape. Kenyan police intercepted the vehicle shortly afterwards and arrested three suspects, two Kenyans and one Tanzanian. Amnesty International Kenya and the Law Society of Kenya described the incident as an apparent "violent, premeditated abduction and forceful rendition to Tanzania".[43] They reported that Mshabaha had been found drugged and injured and commended the police intervention, which prevented his transfer.

The case brings the torture dimension of TNR into particularly sharp focus. Attempted strangulation, efforts to inject an unidentified substance, forced ingestion, restraint and threats of imminent harm went far beyond an attempt to restrict Mshabaha's movement. They exposed him to severe physical and psychological abuse, while apparently seeking to bring him within reach of the country from which he had fled. Investigation and judicial proceedings are required to establish who planned or directed the operation. Mshabaha's account also raises concerns about the use of trusted personal and activist networks to locate and gain access to HRDs abroad.

Other testimonies collected in Nairobi describe similar escalation from surveillance to physical interference. One Ethiopian HRD reported:

"After a period of visible advocacy in Nairobi, unfamiliar men began appearing at events where I spoke, photographing me and following me out. One evening near my residence two men tried to force me into a vehicle, saying we should 'talk'. I pulled away and ran; bystanders intervened. I reported it that night and immediately changed accommodation and routines. In the weeks that followed, I reduced appearances and avoided predictable travel. It was the same sequence every time: visibility, surveillance at events, a 'dialogue' approach, and then an attempted grab that produced long-term security changes."[44]

The attempted abduction changed the defender's behaviour long after the immediate incident. He changed accommodation and routines, reduced public appearances and avoided predictable travel. The pressure therefore affected both his physical security and his ability to continue his human rights work.

The HRD added that:

"The attempted abduction occurred within a few weeks of the January 2025 high-level security and intelligence cooperation between Ethiopia and Kenya, including reported coordination between Ethiopia's National Intelligence and Security Service [NISS] and Kenya's National Intelligence Service [NIS]".

The temporal proximity raises questions about whether increased bilateral security cooperation created additional opportunities for cross-border targeting of Ethiopian HRDs. The testimony does not, however, establish a causal or operational link between that cooperation and the attempted abduction.

A Tanzanian HRD in Nairobi similarly described the perceived targeting of Tanzanian activists:

42. Interview with Mshabaha Hamza Mshabaha, August 2026.

43. Amnesty International Kenya and Law Society of Kenya, "Statement on the Rescue of Mshabaha Mshabaha Hamza and Arrest of His Kidnappers", 23 February 2026.

44. Interview with HRD 01, Nairobi, 10 March 2025.

"In Nairobi, I saw and later heard directly from colleagues about Tanzanian activists seized by unidentified men and driven towards the border for handover. The pick-ups were short and coordinated, usually right after someone became visible publicly and after days of low-grade observation. The impact on us was immediate – we pulled back from public events, rotated meeting venues, and changed communications because we feared similar grabs."[45]

This account describes a more severe combination of surveillance, targeted physical seizure, attempted or actual cross-border transfer, and interference with freedom of movement. It also demonstrates the deterrent effect of such incidents on the wider HRD community: public participation was reduced, meeting locations were rotated and communication practices were altered in response to perceived risk.



The January 2025 abduction of Tanzanian media activist **Maria Sarungi Tsehai** provides another independently documented example. She was abducted in Nairobi by unidentified individuals, blindfolded and handcuffed, while her abductors repeatedly sought access to her phones. She was released several hours later. The identity of those responsible has not been conclusively established, so the case cannot, in itself, demonstrate Kenyan state involvement or an intended cross-border transfer.

Taken together, these cases show that TNR can extend far beyond surveillance and intimidation. Abduction, physical assault, enforced disappearance and attempted rendition can expose HRDs directly to torture and other ill-treatment, while forcible return may expose them to the same violations in their country of origin. The effects also extend beyond the immediate victim: the possibility of being seized, harmed or disappeared can lead entire exile communities to reduce their visibility, restrict their movements and withdraw from advocacy.

4.3. Regionalisation of Transnational Repression in East Africa

Transnational repression in East Africa cannot be understood simply as a series of separate relationships between an origin state and a country of exile. HRDs themselves move across the region, often between Nairobi, Kampala and Kigali, while diaspora networks, advocacy spaces, security institutions and political relationships connect the same countries. As a result, pressure experienced in one country can follow an HRD into another.

Regionalisation therefore describes the way repression travels across this interconnected space. Information gathered about an HRD in one country may circulate elsewhere; accusations made by an origin state may influence how that person is perceived by another government; and an activist who leaves one host country because of threats may encounter the same networks or security concerns in the next. Risk attaches not only to a particular country of exile, but increasingly to the regional space in which HRDs live, work and travel.

The experience of Burundian HRDs since the 2015 crisis illustrates this particularly well. Many initially relocated to Rwanda and Uganda, while others subsequently established themselves in, or regularly travelled through, Kenya. The DefendDefenders 2018 study *Between Despair and Resilience* documented the insecurity experienced by Burundian HRDs during their prolonged exile in Rwanda and Uganda.[46] The testimonies collected for this study show that movement between countries does not necessarily end the pressure. Several defenders described adjusting travel routes, meeting places, public appearances and organisational arrangements as political relations between Burundi and neighbouring states changed.

The same regional dimension appears in the experience of Sudanese HRDs. Interviewees in Kampala and Nairobi described concerns about monitoring within diaspora and community spaces and uncertainty about how information concerning their activities might circulate. Some consequently changed where they met, whom they trusted and how publicly they participated. Whether or not every

45. Interview with HRD 32, Nairobi, 11 March 2025.

46. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project) and Coalition Burundaise des Défenseurs des Droits de l'Homme (CBDDH), *Between Despair and Resilience: Burundian Human Rights Defenders in Protracted Exile in Rwanda and Uganda*, 2018.

perceived act of monitoring can be attributed to a particular state actor, the possibility that information can travel across diaspora and security networks affects behaviour across more than one country.

For some defenders, mobility itself becomes part of the risk. HRDs may leave one country because of threats, travel through another for advocacy or protection, and later relocate again when circumstances change. Armel Niyongere's experience of being stopped while travelling on a Burundian passport, for example, illustrates how an incident in one jurisdiction can affect subsequent travel decisions well beyond that country. In this context, exile is not necessarily a movement from an unsafe country to a single safe destination; it can become a repeated movement through a regional space in which protection and security conditions remain fluid.

Nairobi occupies a particularly important place in this regional system. Its concentration of UN agencies, diplomatic missions, international and national NGOs, donors and media makes it one of the main advocacy and protection hubs for HRDs from East Africa and the Horn of Africa. This creates important opportunities for defenders, but also increases their visibility. Public events, meetings and diaspora spaces can bring HRDs from several countries into the same environment and provide opportunities for surveillance, approaches or information gathering.

Regionalisation is also visible in the way states respond to dissent across borders. Cooperation does not always take the form of a formal extradition request or documented agreement. It may involve contacts between security institutions, political accommodation, tacit cooperation or a convergence of interests among governments facing similar forms of opposition. In such circumstances, crossing a border may offer less protection when the host state shares the concerns or political interests of the state from which an activist has fled.

This dynamic became unusually explicit during President William Ruto's visit to Tanzania in May 2026. Speaking at the Tanzania-Kenya Business Summit, President Samia Suluhu Hassan said that she and President Ruto had discussed how to deal with young people who presented themselves as an East African movement and travelled across the region in the name of democracy. Referring to Kenyan and Tanzanian activists, she stated: "*Tusichague Watanzania au Wakenya; wakija kwangu nachapa mikwaju, wakija kwako unawachapa mikwaju, ili wakae sawa*" – in substance, that neither government should distinguish between Tanzanian and Kenyan activists and that each should "discipline" them when they entered its territory.[47] The East Africa Law Society subsequently expressed concern that the remarks appeared to endorse coordinated action against civic activists regardless of nationality.[48]

The importance of the statement goes beyond its language. It presents dissent that crosses borders as a shared regional concern and suggests that neighbouring governments can respond to activists on each other's territory. It does not establish a formal agreement between Kenya and Tanzania to repress HRDs. It does, however, give unusually direct expression to the political logic that can sustain regionalised repression: an activist regarded as troublesome in one country may be treated similarly when crossing into another.

Recent cases show that this concern is not merely rhetorical. In November 2024, Ugandan opposition figure Kizza Besigye disappeared while visiting Nairobi and reappeared in military custody in Kampala. Kenyan authorities initially denied involvement, but Kenya's Foreign Affairs Minister later acknowledged that Kenyan authorities had assisted Uganda and the operation was defended in terms of Kenya's national interest and its relationship with Uganda.[49] In May 2025, Tanzanian authorities detained Ugandan HRD **Agather Atuhaire** and Kenyan HRD **Boniface Mwangi** after they travelled to Dar es Salaam to observe the trial of opposition leader Tundu Lissu. Both were held incommunicado, allegedly tortured and subsequently forcibly expelled from Tanzania.[50] Freedom House has identified these and other incidents as part of increasing cooperation among Kenyan, Ugandan and Tanzanian

47. See *Uhuru Publications*, "Demokrasia Isizichafue Nchi Zetu – Rais Dk. Samia", 5 May 2026; *The Chanzo*, "President Samia, Ruto Talk on Dealing With 'Unruly Youth' in the Region", 5 May 2026.

48. East Africa Law Society, statement reported in *The Eastleigh Voice*, "Ruto and Samia remarks in Dar es Salaam spark fears of crackdown on youth activists in East Africa", 7 May 2026.

49. Freedom House, Collaboration and Resistance: Tracking Transnational Repression in 2025, 2026.

50. Amnesty International, *"Tanzania: Torture and forcible deportation of Kenyan and Ugandan activists must be urgently investigated"*, 23 May 2025.

authorities in tracking, detaining and returning activists across borders.[51]

These developments show that regionalisation operates at several levels simultaneously. HRDs move between countries; information and political labels circulate with them; diaspora and advocacy networks cross borders; and states may themselves cooperate, formally or informally, in responding to dissent. The result is that relocation within the region does not necessarily break the chain of repression. It may change its form, the actors involved or the jurisdiction in which it occurs.

Regionalisation should therefore be understood as an amplifier of TNR rather than a separate method of repression. Surveillance, digital targeting, administrative pressure, abduction, torture and forced return may originate in one country but acquire a wider reach through regional mobility, information flows and cooperation between states. For HRDs, the practical consequence is significant: crossing another border may provide temporary protection, but it does not necessarily place them beyond the reach of the political and security pressures from which they fled.



Ugandan HRD Agather Atuhaire and Kenyan HRD Boniface Mwangi @ Team Courage

51. Freedom House, *Collaboration and Resistance: Tracking Transnational Repression in 2025*, 2026.

5. Legal Implications, Protection and Accountability

The findings of this study raise legal questions that do not fit neatly within asylum or refugee law alone. Refugee protection remains essential, particularly in relation to legal status and non-refoulement, but transnational repression may continue after an HRD has obtained protection abroad. Threats against relatives, surveillance, politically motivated proceedings, passport restrictions, digital attacks, abduction and pressure exercised through third states engage a broader range of human rights obligations.

There is no single international legal regime governing TNR. Rather, the acts documented in this study engage existing obligations under international and regional human rights law, refugee law and, where relevant, the law of state responsibility.[52] The cross-border nature of TNR nevertheless requires these obligations to be considered together. The relevant questions are not only whether an HRD is protected from return, but also which state is responsible for the pressure exercised abroad, what obligations arise for the state in whose territory it occurs, and what remedies are available when several states or actors are involved.

5.1. Origin-State Responsibility Beyond the Border

Leaving the country does not necessarily end the relationship between an HRD and the repressive powers of the state of origin. Authorities may continue politically motivated prosecutions, restrict passports, threaten relatives, publicly stigmatise defenders or use state institutions and proxies to interfere with their activities abroad. These measures may affect rights including liberty and security, privacy and family life, freedom of movement, expression, association and peaceful assembly, as protected by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Charter).

Different legal questions arise depending on how the pressure is exercised. Where agents of an origin state abduct, detain or otherwise exercise authority or effective control over an individual abroad, international human rights obligations may apply extraterritorially.[53] The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) has similarly recognised that obligations under the African Charter may arise where a state exercises effective control over territory abroad or authority and control over an individual.[54]

Other forms of TNR operate without physical control over the defender. Passport cancellation, proceedings conducted *in absentia*, pressure on relatives or administrative measures taken within the origin state may nevertheless have direct consequences for an HRD living abroad. Attribution must also be examined where private individuals, diaspora actors or other intermediaries participate in repression. Their conduct cannot automatically be treated as state conduct; responsibility depends on the relationship between those actors and state authorities, including whether they act under state instructions, direction or control.

This report therefore draws on the emerging idea of a transnational human rights approach to exile.[55] The purpose is not to suggest that every situation of exile constitutes a continuing human rights

52. See Oxford Pro Bono Publico for the International Service for Human Rights, *Transnational Repression of Human Rights Defenders: References, Definitions and Protections under International Human Rights Law,* 2025; OHCHR, **"Transnational Repression"**, Civic Space Brief, June 2025.

53. UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 31, UN Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.2004 ,13, para. 10.

54. ACHPR, *Mohammed Abdullah Saleh Al-Asad v Djibouti*, Communication No. 09/383; see also ACHPR, General Comment No. 3 on the African Charter: The Right to Life.

55. Frédéric Mégret, "Exile as a Human Rights Violation", *Fordham International Law Journa*l, Vol. 2024 ,(4)47, p. 547 ff.

violation. Rather, it recognises that where a state has forced a defender into exile through repression and continues to interfere with that person's rights after departure or prevents safe return, the legal consequences cannot be understood solely through the law of the host country.

5.2. Host-State Obligations and Responsibility

Host states have a different but equally important role. HRDs within their territory are entitled to the protection of the human rights guarantees applicable to everyone under their jurisdiction. These include obligations to protect life and physical integrity, prevent and investigate serious threats and attacks, provide effective remedies, and protect freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly.[56] The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders further affirms the responsibility of states to protect individuals from violence, threats, retaliation and other arbitrary action arising from their legitimate human rights activities.[57]

These obligations are particularly important where a host state knows, or should know, that an HRD faces a serious threat from foreign state actors or their proxies. Protection cannot be reduced to granting refugee or immigration status. Where credible threats, surveillance, attempted abductions or physical attacks occur, the host state must respond through appropriate prevention, investigation and accountability measures.

The obligation of non-refoulement provides a further safeguard. Under Article 3 of the UN Convention against Torture, a state must not expel, return or extradite a person to another state where there are substantial grounds for believing that the person would be in danger of being subjected to torture.[58] This is particularly relevant to the cases examined in this report involving attempted removal, rendition and pressure for the return of exiled activists.

Host-state responsibility may also arise more directly where authorities participate in or facilitate repression. Extradition, migration procedures, police cooperation and other forms of international cooperation are legitimate and necessary tools. They become problematic when used to circumvent legal safeguards, give effect to politically motivated requests or expose an HRD to persecution or torture. The cases examined in this study also show that cooperation does not always occur through transparent legal procedures. Informal security contacts, political accommodation and tacit cooperation may be equally important in understanding how an origin state is able to reach an HRD abroad.

5.3. What the Findings Mean for Protection and Accountability

Across the Burundian, Sudanese, Ethiopian and Tanzanian cases, no single method defines TNR. The findings instead show combinations of surveillance, informal approaches, digital targeting, legal and administrative pressure, threats against mobility and, in a smaller number of cases, abduction and physical violence.

Individual incidents may be difficult to interpret in isolation. A photograph taken outside a meeting, an unsolicited invitation to "resolve" a problem, an unexplained passport difficulty or an online attack does not necessarily establish TNR. Context and the accumulation of incidents matter. Where different forms of pressure recur around an HRD's advocacy and are connected to state or state-enabled efforts to deter that activity, their combined effect may substantially restrict the defender's ability to work, travel and participate in public life.

Protection mechanisms should reflect this reality. Responses that begin only after an attempted abduction or forced return come too late. Earlier indications – repeated surveillance, threatening

56. ICCPR, arts 2(1), 2(3), 6, 7, 9, 17, 19, 21 and 22; African Charter, arts 1, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10 and 11.

57. UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, General Assembly Resolution 53/144 (1998), particularly arts 1, 2 and 12.

58. UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), art. 3; Committee against Torture, General Comment No. 4, UN Doc. CAT/C/GC/4, 2017.

approaches, coordinated digital attacks or unusual administrative obstacles – should be documented and assessed as possible parts of a wider pattern. At the same time, protection responses must avoid assuming state responsibility without evidence: identifying a pattern of TNR and establishing who is legally responsible for each act are separate questions.

Accountability also requires looking across borders. Host-state investigations should consider whether apparently separate incidents are connected and whether foreign actors or intermediaries are involved. Extradition, immigration and police cooperation mechanisms require safeguards against politically motivated misuse. States of origin must end proceedings, administrative restrictions and other measures used to punish defenders for legitimate human rights activity abroad. Where several states have contributed to a violation, responsibility should be assessed according to the conduct attributable to each of them, rather than treating TNR as the responsibility of the origin-state alone.

The findings ultimately point to a protection model that follows the HRD rather than stopping at the border. Refugee status may provide protection against return, but it does not by itself protect against surveillance, intimidation, digital attacks, restrictions on movement or physical targeting abroad. Effective protection must enable HRDs not only to remain outside the country from which they fled, but also to continue their human rights work safely.

Conclusion

For the HRDs interviewed for this report, exile has often changed the geography of repression rather than bringing it to an end. Pressure can travel across borders through people, information, digital platforms, diplomatic and administrative channels, and regional political and security relationships. It can remain relatively discreet or escalate to abduction, torture, forced return and other serious violations.

The central finding of this study is therefore straightforward: crossing a border does not necessarily end repression; it can reorganise it.

The response must extend across the same borders. Origin states must be held accountable where they project repression abroad. Host states must prevent, investigate and respond to threats occurring within their jurisdiction and must not participate in unlawful removals or other forms of repression. International organisations and civil society also need protection mechanisms capable of accompanying HRDs as risks change across countries and over time.

Protection should ultimately be measured not only by whether an HRD remains alive or avoids return, but by whether that person can continue to speak, organise, travel and carry out human rights work safely.

Recommendations

To East African Governments

Recognise transnational repression as a distinct human rights concern. Governments should formally recognise intimidation, surveillance, harassment, threats, abduction, unlawful removal and other forms of TNR against HRDs as human rights and civic-space concerns, and establish a designated institutional focal point responsible for receiving and coordinating complaints involving threats linked to foreign actors.

Establish accessible and independent complaint and investigation mechanisms. Complaints should be receivable through a designated national human rights institution, ombudsperson, police or prosecutorial mechanism with clear responsibility for threats linked to foreign actors. The receiving institution should be able to register complaints confidentially, preserve evidence, identify relevant security or intelligence inputs, interview witnesses, request information from relevant authorities and refer cases for prosecution where appropriate. Complaints should receive written acknowledgment and be addressed through a defined follow-up process.

Provide interim protection following credible complaints. Where an HRD reports a credible threat involving surveillance, intimidation, attempted abduction or other serious interference, the relevant protection mechanism should conduct a prompt security assessment and, where warranted, provide interim measures such as safe transport, emergency relocation, protection of residences or venues, digital-security support and appropriate protection for immediate family members. Protection should not depend on the occurrence of physical violence.

Strengthen safeguards against abduction, rendition and refoulement. States should ensure that no HRD is unlawfully abducted, transferred, rendered or returned to a country where they face a real risk of persecution, torture or other serious human rights violations. Immigration, asylum and security authorities should conduct documented risk assessments before removal or transfer where credible allegations of political persecution exist.

Prevent misuse of extradition, mutual legal assistance (MLA) and police cooperation. Extradition, MLA and police-cooperation requests involving HRDs should be subject to human-rights scrutiny where there are credible indications of political motivation. Relevant authorities should assess whether the underlying conduct concerns protected expression, association or other legitimate human rights activity before acting on requests from foreign authorities.

Protect civic spaces from intimidation linked to foreign actors. Governments should ensure that HRDs can participate safely in conferences, workshops, public meetings and civil society activities. Where there is credible evidence of intimidation linked to foreign actors, authorities should investigate the conduct, identify those responsible where possible and provide appropriate protection to affected HRDs.

To Origin States

End transnational surveillance and intimidation of HRDs abroad. States should cease surveillance, harassment, threats, intimidation and other coercive measures targeting HRDs outside their territory, including through diplomatic, intelligence, security or proxy actors.

Refrain from using passports or consular services as instruments of retaliation. Passport cancellation, review or denial of consular services should not be used to punish, silence or restrict HRDs exercising their rights abroad.

End politically motivated criminal proceedings and in-absentia proceedings. States should withdraw charges and terminate proceedings based on the legitimate exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including politically motivated proceedings conducted in the absence of the accused.

Protect relatives and associates from retaliation. States should refrain from threatening, surveilling, harassing or otherwise retaliating against family members and associates of HRDs because of their relatives' human rights activities or criticism of government.

To International and Regional Actors

Integrate transnational repression into HRD protection assessments. Protection programmes should assess surveillance, unsolicited approaches, digital attacks, administrative pressure, threats to relatives and mobility risks as interconnected elements of cross-border risk.

Establish regional rapid-response and longer-term protection pathways. HRDs facing credible cross-border threats should have rapid access to relocation, legal, psychosocial and digital-security assistance, followed where necessary by sustained support enabling them to continue their work safely in exile.

Strengthen the African Commission's response to TNR. The African Commission should build on its existing recognition of transnational repression by addressing it systematically through resolutions, thematic studies and guidelines, State reporting, concluding observations and recommendations. Its Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and other relevant mechanisms should use urgent appeals and joint interventions in individual cases.

Develop regional jurisprudence through individual communications. The African Commission should use communications involving abduction, torture, enforced disappearance, refoulement, surveillance and other cross-border violations to clarify the respective responsibilities of origin and host States.

Mainstream TNR within UN treaty bodies. The Committee against Torture, Human Rights Committee and other relevant treaty bodies should address TNR in lists of issues, State reviews, concluding observations and follow-up procedures, and use individual communications to develop jurisprudence on cross-border repression, non-refoulement and State responsibility.

Use UN Special Procedures more systematically. Relevant Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups should address individual cases and broader patterns through urgent appeals, allegation letters, joint communications, country visits and thematic reports, including where security cooperation or administrative measures are used against HRDs abroad.

Advance recognition of TNR at the Human Rights Council. The Council should address TNR more explicitly in relevant resolutions and mandate OHCHR or Special Procedures to further document its impact on HRDs in exile and develop guidance for origin and host States.

Support systematic documentation and investigation. International and regional actors should support secure evidence collection and independent investigations capable of feeding protection measures, urgent interventions, individual communications and accountability proceedings.

To Civil Society and Protection Actors

Develop standardised documentation protocols. Organisations should establish secure procedures for documenting surveillance, unsolicited approaches, threats, digital attacks and other incidents while ensuring that documentation does not expose HRDs to additional risks.

Strengthen protection immediately after high-visibility activity. Civil society and protection actors should provide timely risk assessments and digital-security support following high-risk advocacy, media appearances, public events and other activities that increase an HRD's visibility, particularly where previous incidents suggest a recurring sequence.

Strengthen regional solidarity and early-warning mechanisms. Organisations should build cross-border protection networks that allow timely information-sharing, emergency support and relocation while treating low-level intimidation, photographing, unsolicited approaches and mobility pressure as potential early-warning indicators of escalation.

Track the cumulative sequence, not only individual incidents. Protection actors should document whether visibility is followed by surveillance, approaches, digital targeting, administrative pressure or physical interference. This can help identify patterns that may otherwise remain below the threshold for a formal complaint or investigation.

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Created in 1985, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) works for, with and through an international coalition of over 200 non-governmental organisations - the SOS -Torture Network - fighting torture, summary executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, and all other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment in the world and fighting for the protection of human rights defenders.

Assisting and supporting victims

OMCT supports victims of torture to obtain justice and reparation, including rehabilitation. This support takes the form of legal, medical and social emergency assistance, submitting complaints to regional and international human rights mechanisms and urgent interventions. OMCT pays particular attention to certain categories of victims, such as women and children.

Preventing torture and fighting against impunity

Together with its local partners, OMCT advocates for the effective implementation, on the ground, of international standards against torture. OMCT is also working for the optimal use of international human rights mechanisms, in particular the United Nations Committee Against Torture, so that it can become more effective.

Protecting human rights defenders

Often those who defend human rights and fight against torture are threatened. That is why OMCT places their protection at the heart of its mission, through alerts, activities of prevention, advocacy and awareness raising as well as direct support.

Accompanying and strengthening organisations in the field

OMCT provides its members with the tools and services that enable them to carry out their work and strengthen their capacity and effectiveness in the fight against torture. OMCT presence in Tunisia is part of its commitment to supporting civil society in the process of transition to the rule of law and respect for the absolute prohibition of torture.

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Establishing the facts

Investigative and trial observation missions - Through activities ranging from sending trial observers to organising international investigative missions, FIDH has developed rigorous and impartial procedures to establish facts and responsibility.

Experts sent to the field give their time to FIDH on a voluntary basis.

FIDH has conducted more than 1,500 missions in over 100 countries in the past 25 years. These activities reinforce FIDH's alert and advocacy campaigns.

Supporting civil society

Training and exchanges – FIDH organises numerous activities in partnership with its member organisations, in the countries in which they are based. The core aim is to strengthen the influence and capacity of human rights activists to boost changes at the local level.

Mobilising the international community

Permanent lobbying before intergovernmental bodies – FIDH supports its member organisations and local partners in their efforts before intergovernmental organisations. FIDH alerts international bodies to violations of human rights and refers individual cases to them.

FIDH also takes part in the development of international legal instruments.

Informing and reporting

Mobilising public opinion – FIDH informs and mobilises public opinion. Press releases, press conferences, open letters to authorities, mission reports, urgent appeals, petitions, campaigns, website... FIDH makes full use of all means of communication to raise awareness of human rights violations.

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THE OBSERVATORY

Activities of the Observatory

The Observatory is an action programme based on the belief that strengthened cooperation and solidarity among human rights defenders and their organisations will contribute to break the isolation they are faced with. It is also based on the absolute necessity to establish a systematic response from NGOs and the international community to the repression of which defenders are victims.

With this aim, the Observatory seeks to establish:

- A mechanism of systematic alert of the international community on cases of harassment and repression of defenders of human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly when they require urgent intervention;
- The observation of judicial proceedings, and whenever necessary, direct legal assistance;
- International missions of investigation and solidarity;
- A personalised assistance as concrete as possible, including material support, with the aim of ensuring the security of the defenders victims of serious violations;
- The preparation, publication and world-wide dissemination of reports on violations of the rights and freedoms of individuals or organisations working for human rights around the world;
- Sustained action with the United Nations and more particularly the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, and when necessary with geographic and thematic Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups;
- Sustained lobbying with various regional and international intergovernmental institutions, especially the Organisation of American States (OAS), the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, the International Organisation of the Francophonie (OIF), the Commonwealth, the League of Arab States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The Observatory's activities are based on consultation and co-operation with national, regional, and international non-governmental organisations.

With efficiency as its primary objective, the Observatory has adopted flexible criteria to examine the admissibility of cases that are communicated to it, based on the "operational definition" of human rights defenders adopted by FIDH and OMCT: "Each person victim or at risk of being the victim of reprisals, harassment or violations, due to his or her commitment, exercised individually or in association with others, in conformity with international instruments of protection of human rights, to the promotion and realisation of the rights recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and guaranteed by the different international instruments".

To ensure its activities of alert and mobilisation, the Observatory has established a system of communication devoted to defenders in danger.

This system, called Emergency Line, can be reached through:

E-MAIL: alert@observatoryfordefenders.org

FIDH TEL: + 33 1 43 55 25 18

OMCT TEL: + 41 22 809 49 39

SOS-Torture Burundi is a group of Human Rights Defenders who are determined to end the massive human rights violations in Burundi. SOS-Torture Burundi works with the support of citizen participation such as testimonies of victims or eyewitnesses. This information is collected, verified, and shared so that these human rights violations are put to a stop. SOS-Torture/Burundi was initiated with the aim of informing national and international opinion about serious human rights violations taking place in Burundi through monitoring reports, particularly on torture, arbitrary arrests, forced disappearances, sexual violence, and summary executions. This initiative to inform on the realities of the country followed the carnage of a hundred people killed during the day of 11 and 12 December 2015 by the police and military under the pretext of pursuing rebels who had just attacked military camps located on the outskirts of the capital.

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Established in 1993, IMLU is a leading health, governance, and human rights Non-Governmental Organization registered in Kenya with a mandate to prevent and respond to torture and related violations. IMLU advocates for justice, healing, and accountability for victims of torture, driven by a commitment to upholding human rights and promoting a society free from torture.

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We are watching