

Promoting and Supporting the work of Human Rights Defenders: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

This article briefly explores the historical context of human rights defenders and charts the increasing awareness and recognition of the work that they do. It then gives an overview of the global environment in which HRDs work before focussing on the situation facing HRDs in China, a country where the conditions in which they work are amongst the most challenging. Finally, the piece considers what role Taiwan might play in being a voice for the promotion of HRDs worldwide.

Keywords

human rights defenders, China, Xi Jinping, Taiwan

Introduction

Those unfamiliar with the term ‘human rights defender’ should probably count themselves lucky, for it may mean they live in a society where human rights are not under threat and where working to promote them does not endanger one’s life. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many countries across the world and in the past decade there has been an increasingly severe backlash against those working non-violently to defend the rights of others. This is happening in all regions of the world and the response by so-called ‘friendly’ governments has not been strong enough, nor has it been applied

consistently to those countries which are the most egregious abusers of human rights.

Human rights are all too often written off by repressive regimes as ‘Western values’ unsuited to the culture or circumstances of whatever country whose rulers are facing criticism. Human rights defenders (HRDs) are variously depicted as ‘tools of the West’, traitors, spies or money-grabbing opportunists looking to make their fortune from profligate Western human rights organisations. Challenging powerful interests has always resulted in attempts to undermine or silence those asking awkward questions or shining a spotlight on injustices.

The International Context

HRDs - those working non-violently to defend the rights of others - have always existed. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they were active in anti-slavery movements and the struggle for workers’ rights. In various countries pioneers agitated for the emancipation of women and for the freedom of people to practise any religion they wanted. Others raised their voices against colonialism and the exploitation of indigenous resources by occupying powers while others still railed against brutality of police forces. Although the language of such work has changed, what has not changed is the often violent response of the powerful when this work takes place. HRDs then - although they obviously would not have defined themselves as such - faced arrest, flogging, imprisonment and killing for their actions promoting the rights of the marginalised and highlighting injustice in societies. HRDs active around the world today face similar consequences because of their work and though they are far better networked and resourced than their forerunners two hundred years ago, they also face far more powerful adversaries who pay little regard to international covenants and declarations upholding the universal nature of human rights and safeguarding the work of HRDs.

Human rights were mainstreamed as a concept in the aftermath of the devastating second world war and though the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) was (and is) routinely ignored without consequence by every UN member state, the document served as an important reference point for the development of civil society attempting to hold governments to account. For those who argue that ‘human rights’ are a solely Western concept, it is important to note that the drafting process of the UDHR drew

on a number of different traditions from around the world, and those closely involved in producing the document came from China, India, Lebanon, France as well as the US and Canada.¹ The Declaration proved to be the basis for the legally binding International Covenants of Civil & Political Rights and Economic, Social & Cultural Rights. The post-war era saw the founding of a number of important international human rights organisations, including the International Commission of Jurists in 1952, Amnesty International in 1961 and Helsinki Rights Watch, later Human Rights Watch, in 1978. These NGOs codified the language of human rights and although initially largely focusing on civil and political rights in a climate of Cold War, they gradually began to extend their gaze to economic and social rights, bringing Western countries more regularly into their lens.

It was not until 1998 that HRDs were formally internationally recognised as legitimate actors thanks to the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders in 1998 which was adopted by consensus at the General Assembly after 14 years' negotiation.² Although not legally binding, this Declaration "contains a series of principles and rights that are based on human rights standards enshrined in other international instruments that are legally binding - such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."³ Two years later, a Special Representative on the situation of HRDs was established at the UN level to support the implementation of the Declaration. HRDs received a further boost in 2004 when the African Commission on Human and People's Rights established a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders to examine the situation of HRDs and in 2011 the Inter American Commission on Human Rights created an Office of the Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders. The European Union adopted its own guidelines on HRDs in 2004 as did the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe ten years later.

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- 1 The state-run China Society for Human Rights Studies praises the Chinese contribution to the drafting of the UDHR, noting with approval how Peng-Chun Chang included elements of Confucian thought into the Declaration, "making it cover ideas from both the West and the East and enabling it to be an international document of the world significance. From then on, Confucianism began to benefit people around the world and it also gained the world significance" http://www.chinahumanrights.org/CSHRS/books/text/t20130419_1024939_5.htm
 - 2 The full title is "Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms."
 - 3 <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders/Pages/Declaration.aspx>

Despite this belated recognition at international levels and the increased awareness of the concept of ‘human rights defender’, the situation facing HRDs has unfortunately deteriorated rather than improved, as documented below. Countries who have signed up to international human rights treaties and who profess to place importance on international human rights standard must do more to halt this slide in the coming years.

HRDs around the world - A Global Analysis

Front Line Defenders is in direct contact with hundreds of HRDs at-risk in dozens of countries around their world.⁴ From listening to their stories, researching the risks they face and monitoring the methods used by states and other actors to silence them, it is evident that HRDs are being targeted in similar ways around the globe regardless of location. It is also evident that governments are learning new repressive methods from each other.

Extreme violence is being used more frequently while judicial harassment has become normalised in many parts of the world.

The most concerning trend that Front Line Defenders has observed in recent years is the increasing number of activists being killed as a result of the work that they do. In 2015 alone, the organisation received reports that over 196 HRDs were killed or died in detention in 25 countries. This marked an increase over the previous year, both in the number of killings and in the number of countries in which they occurred. Killings were reported in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Egypt, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Libya, Mexico, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Pakistan, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey and Yemen, with over half of the killings occurring in Latin America.

Overall, 45% of the killings were linked to the defence of environmental, land and indigenous peoples’ rights. In Asia and Latin America, killings of members of this particular group of HRDs accounted respectively for 67% and 41% of the total number. Other groups targeted included HRDs working on corruption and impunity as well as journalists and other HRDs using the media - including online and social media - to denounce abuses.

Across the world, the families of HRDs are seen as fair game and are targeted

4 This section is largely based on the introduction to the Front Line Defenders 2016 Annual Report.

as a means to put pressure on activists. It is a tactic prevalent in Azerbaijan, Burundi, China and several countries in Latin America. It ranges from actual or threatened physical harm to deprivation of liberty and prosecution, to loss of employment, which is sometimes not reported due to fear of further retaliation. In March 2016 two brothers and a sister of German-based Chinese journalist Chang Ping were abducted by police following an article he wrote for German media. The previous week the elderly parents of a Chinese New York-based blogger and freedom of expression activist were detained by police after he wrote an article discussing calls on Chinese social media for President Xi Jinping to step down.

The surge in the adoption of restrictive legislation continues worldwide, going beyond restrictions on funding to include new efforts to use the law to break contacts between HRDs and their international partners and supporters. The Russian Federation is leading the way in this regard. In May 2015, three years after its infamous ‘Foreign Agent Law’, the Russian Federation passed a law on ‘undesirable organisations’.⁵ This law grants the General Prosecutor authority to declare foreign organisations undesirable if they are deemed to present a threat to Russia’s constitutional order, its defence or its security. Groups listed as undesirable are prohibited from carrying out activities and disseminating publications and other information within the country, including through the media. The law makes any cooperation by Russian citizens with ‘undesirable organisations’ an offence punishable by up to six years’ imprisonment. The law was used against legitimate philanthropic groups providing much needed support to Russian HRDs, including the Open Society Foundation. Other donor organisations have closed their programmes in the country as a result of the law, thus depriving civil society groups of important support.

Travel bans to prevent HRDs from attending international events are being used in a growing number of countries, particularly in Asia and the Middle East and North Africa. The use of travel bans was also notable in Azerbaijan,

5 The ‘Foreign Agent Law’, adopted in July 2012, obliges all non-commercial organisations (NGOs), which are in receipt of foreign funding and are engaged in political activities, to register as ‘foreign agents’. The organisations are then subjected to extensive audits. Supervisory government agencies are allowed to intervene in the internal affairs of the organisations and suspend their work for a period of up to six months if they are found to be in breach of this law. The introduction of the law has resulted in the closure of a significant number of human rights organisations in Russia, either because of their unwillingness to be referred to as a ‘foreign agent’ or because of the new measures which this law imposes.

while Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan maintained restrictive exit visa regimes. In all cases, the purpose remained the same as the laws described above: to cut support, exposure and visibility for HRDs, as well as to limit discussion about the country in international fora.

The use of state security and counter-terrorism laws against HRDs continues to be a common tactic of repression across all regions. The fight against terrorism since the attacks on the twin towers in New York has been recognised as one of the key drivers for closing civil society space worldwide. With the increase in security concerns in the wake of terror attacks in Ankara, Beirut, Brussels, Nice, Paris and elsewhere, there is a real risk that HRDs may be affected further, both in relation to the situation in their own countries and vis a vis support from abroad.

HRDs in China

Following the slaughter of the Tiananmen era, a human rights movement and civil society inside mainland China gradually began to re-emerge in the mid-90s, helped along by Beijing's hosting of the UN World Conference for Women in 1995 as the Chinese government desperately sought to re-engage with the world after a period of post-1989 enforced isolation. Restrictions on the activities of HRDs largely ebbed and flowed according to the political environment, with periods of liberalisation followed by periods of repression. That is not to say that during periods of liberalisation those involved in human rights activism were not punished - scores were fired, evicted, jailed and beaten - but the parameters for acceptable activism were wider than in the periods of repression.

The genesis of the current rights defence movement can be traced back to 2003 when a number of young legal scholars demanded a Constitutional Review of the 'Custody and Repatriation system' following the death of a young migrant worker in police custody.⁶

Although the Constitutional Review never took place, the media attention and public support their proposal garnered resulted in the abolition of the system. In the months and years that followed, growing numbers of citizens

6 The Custody and Repatriation system was one where police could detain anyone without a residence permit (*hukou*) or temporary living permit for the place in which they were living and return to their home towns. It was used widely to target migrant workers who flocked from the countryside to the cities in search of employment.

participated in actions to highlight and establish civil rights and push for a system based on rule of law. As one of the key proponents of this movement, Xu Zhiyong, notes in a 2013 essay, “Many people referred to 2003 as the start of what would be known as the citizens’ rights movement.” (Xu, 2013)

In the decade that followed, a growing consciousness of rights began to take hold amongst certain segments of the population in a movement often spearheaded by lawyers willing to challenge the State, at great personal risk. This was helped in latter years by the widespread availability of cheap smartphones and the popularity of social media which enabled HRDs to communicate across geographical and class lines. For a number of years, the relatively free environment of the social-networking platform Weibo allowed activists to widely share information, discuss strategies and highlight abuses, drawing in people with little previous experience of rights defence. This phenomenon was observed by the government and through censorship, new laws and a number of high-profile detentions of users with millions of followers, the State ushered people onto the more closed-facing and easier to control Weixin (We Chat).

Many of those who became HRDs started working on behalf of others after personally experiencing injustice, brutality, abuse of power or the arbitrary use of the law by State officials. One typical example is Wang Yu, a female human rights lawyer who was held incommunicado from 9 July 2015 to 1 August 2016 on charges of ‘subversion of state power’. Formerly a commercial lawyer with little knowledge or awareness of the nascent rights defence movement, she worked in a law firm on patent disputes until she was assaulted by railway officials at a train station in Tianjin in 2008. (Fifield, 2015) She was charged with “intentional assault” and ended up spending 2.5 years in jail. Due to this miscarriage of justice and due to her experiences in jail, she emerged from prison determined to use her legal skills and knowledge of the law to defend the rights of others. She took on a host of so-called ‘sensitive’ cases and endured the harassment, the intimidation and the physical violence that comes with being a HRD in China.⁷

⁷ ‘Sensitive’ cases in China are those deemed by the CCP to have the potential to stir up ‘social unrest’. Those who Wang Yu defended included: Uyhur academic, Ilham Tohti, who was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2014 for ‘separatism’; Li Tingting, one of the so-called Feminist Five, who in March 2015 was arrested for planning a campaign against sexual harassment; and Falun Gong practitioners.

By the time Xi Jinping took power in 2013, more people were engaged in rights defence than had been for decades. In the previous years a number of grassroots campaigns had been launched which alerted people to various societal injustices and urged greater citizen participation as a means to hold the government to account. One illustrative example of how these campaigns affected people can be seen in the case of Chen Guangcheng. In 2012 the blind, self-taught lawyer made a dramatic, Hollywood-style escape from 18 months of brutal house arrest, during which time he and his family were beaten on regular occasions and were not permitted any visitors. As news of his captivity - and of the horrific treatment meted out to Chen and his family - spread, a campaign developed whereby citizens attempted to visit him.

Although none were successful and most who tried were beaten, this campaign succeeded in uniting a large group of people behind a common cause. Many of those who got involved had little previous experience in rights defence but on hearing the details of Chen's ongoing confinement could not simply turn a blind eye. The treatment that they received from the hired thugs guarding Chen's village when they approached it exposed many to the injustice and lawlessness at the heart of the stability maintenance system for the first time. This had the effect of strengthening their resolve to become further involved in human rights work, highlighting the contradiction inherent to stability maintenance - the very tools that are used to enforce it can often make people even more determined to challenge the abuse of power by the state.

The Xi Era

The landscape of the burgeoning rights defence movement has changed utterly in the four years of Xi Jinping rule. Despite some initial optimism due to the fact that his father, a first generation Chinese Communist leader, was known as a reformer, within months HRDs up and down the country began to feel the full force of the new leadership. After consolidating power in 2013 and 2014, Xi launched a widescale assault on liberal voices and actors in Chinese society. Since mid-2015, the most calculated and severe crackdown on HRDs in recent memory has taken place. The administration has targetted HRDs in a variety of ways in an effort to extinguish the human rights movement in the country. Individual and influential defenders have been detained and jailed, networks have been broken up and civil society organisations have been shut

down. Despite the government's repeated emphasis on the importance of rule of law, rule of law has not extended to the treatment of HRDs. Furthermore, with civil society in already such a beleaguered state, new laws coming into force in January 2017 restricting foreign funding of NGOs and the work of INGOs in China look set to further stunt the growth of civil society.⁸

One of the clearest strands running through this crackdown is the concerted effort by the state to undermine and delegitimise the crucial work of HRDs by continuously linking them to 'hostile foreign forces'. In doing so, the state hopes to divert attention away from the very real injustices that these HRDs are highlighting and instead focus on the HRDs as tools of foreign powers whose interests lie in destabilising China. The Xi era has seen the re-emergence of the televised confession where HRDs are paraded on state television and humiliated, confessing to their 'crimes' and sometimes implicating colleagues. In addition to targetting their support base, these confessions are also aimed at dividing the human rights community in China by offering lesser and sometimes suspended sentences to those who testify against their fellow human rights defenders.

A video released on an official social media account of the Supreme People's Procuratorate of the PRC in August 2016 went so far as to claim that human rights lawyers are part of a vast American conspiracy aimed at fomenting a

8 The 'Overseas NGOs' Domestic Activities Management Law' will see foreign NGOs placed under the management of the Ministry of Public Security to whom NGOs will have to apply for registration if they want to operate in China. Chinese NGOs are regulated by the Ministry of Civil Affairs. In order to register and to open a representative office in China, foreign NGOs will have to find a 'professional supervisory unit', essentially a government agency or organisation, willing to sponsor the NGO and take responsibility for its work. It is virtually guaranteed that any foreign NGOs working on human rights issues will not be permitted to register. Foreign NGOs which are deemed to be engaged in work promoting 'subversion of state power' or 'separatism' will be placed on a blacklist and barred from entering the country. Individuals acting on behalf of foreign NGOs who are found to be engaged in these activities may be prosecuted, although these terms have not been defined. The law authorises police to closely monitor the work and financial records of foreign NGOs and specifically legalises the police to "invite for talks" the head representative of foreign NGOs at any time. Police will also have the power to revoke the registration or cancel activities which 'endanger national security' of foreign NGOs at any time. It has not been specified what type of activities may be defined as 'endangering national security'. Furthermore, the new law will make the support (financial or otherwise) of unregistered NGOs to individuals or organisations within mainland China illegal. This is likely to have a severe impact on domestic NGOs who work on so-called 'sensitive' issues, such as HIV/AIDS advocacy, human rights, workers' rights or gender issues. As many of these groups are unable to receive funding in China for their work, they are reliant on grants from overseas' organisations in order to carry out their activities.

‘colour revolution’ in China.⁹ It warns that if such US interference is permitted to continue, China may end up like “Egypt, Syria or Libya”, countries which have fallen into “war and chaos, unrest and hopelessness”. A second video released by the Communist Party Youth League mocked Western diplomats and family members of detained HRDs who attempted to observe a series of trials of human rights lawyers in Tianjin on 2–5 August 2016.

Trends

The following are some of the main trends Front Line Defenders has documented targeting HRDs since Xi Jinping took power, and especially since 2015.

1. Detentions:

In the 12 months following July 2015, at least 300 human rights defenders or their family members were detained, questioned or prevented from travelling in a nationwide crackdown. As of August 2016, four had been sentenced, with a human rights lawyer and a underground Christian activist being punished with a 7 and a 7.5 year prison sentence for ‘subverting state power’. At least 13 remained in detention awaiting trial. Many of those detained were lawyers who had been at the forefront of China’s human rights movement in the previous years, and their arrests point to a deliberate strategy by the government to rob the movement of some of its key voices and leaders. The vast majority of those in custody were not permitted access to their own lawyers and family members were not informed where they were being held. HRDs who are released after periods in detention often report to Front Line Defenders similar treatment: sleep deprivation, food deprivation and constant interrogation about their human rights activities. As noted above, some of these lengthy, incommunicado detentions were accompanied by televised confessions.

2. Disappearances:

The Chinese authorities continue to routinely ‘disappear’ HRDs. These periods of disappearance can last from a number of hours to weeks, months or even longer. They often occur around times of perceived political sensitivity,

⁹ <https://chinachange.org/2016/08/03/china-claims-rights-lawyers-and-dissidents-are-part-of-vast-american-conspiracy-in-4-minute-video/>

where, for example, HRDs are removed from certain locations during the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown or for the duration of political meetings in Beijing. HRDs are also subjected to disappearances however during the course of their day to day human rights work. This happened to HRDs Tang Zhishun and Xing Qingxian in October 2015 when they were abducted by police on the Myanmar side of the Chinese-Myanmar border as they tried to escort the 16 year old son of detained HRD Wang Yu to safety in Thailand. While the child was sent back to his grandparents in Inner Mongolia, the families of the two HRDs did not receive any notice of their whereabouts until they were served with their arrest notices in May 2016, eight months after their disappearance.

3. Physical assault:

Under President Xi's rule, there has been an increase in the physical assaults of human rights defenders by state-hired thugs. This has been especially noticeable against lawyers who take on human rights cases. These methods form part of a wider strategy to terrorize HRDs out of doing their work. In such instances, local police often look on as lawyers are pushed, punched and kicked as they enter or exit courthouses. (China Human Rights Briefing, 2015) In April 2015, lawyer Cui Hui was attacked by a judge when she pressed for resolution to a protracted case. A precedent was set in 2014 when four lawyers were savagely beaten after trying to investigate reports of Falun Gong practitioners being held in an illegal detention centre. (Front Line Defenders, 2014)

4. Targetting of Civil Society Organisations:

Domestic NGOs have been targetted, especially those working on LGBT, HIV/AIDs, women's rights and labour rights issues because they link and empower people across provinces and establish relationships with foreign NGOs and funders, who provide funding they cannot get in China. Measures taken against NGOs range from eviction notices from their landlords who have been pressured by police, to the disruption and cancellation of events, to raids on their offices, to the interrogation and detention of staff members. In June 2015, a women's rights organisation was forced to shut down after repeated police pressure and interference with their work. The Yirenping network of NGOs in particular seems to have been singled out and a once

thriving civil society organisation working on behalf of the vulnerable is now struggling for survival.

5. Harassment and surveillance:

The harassment and surveillance of HRDs in China is a daily reality and the variety of methods used ensures that life as a human rights defender is made as difficult as possible. In addition to the usual electronic and physical surveillance, interrogations and threats, 2015 and 2016 saw a spike in the number of HRDs being forbidden from leaving the country. Front Line Defenders is aware of at least two dozen cases where people have been blocked from leaving China after being told that they represent a risk to state security.

6. Family members

This harassment extends frequently to family members of HRDs, who are also punished with travel bans or are subjected to pressure from their employers. On 15 October 2015 human rights lawyer Liu Xiaoyuan reported that his son had been stopped from leaving China to continue his studies overseas. Earlier that month the son of Wang Yu and Bao Longjun, two HRDs in detention, was detained by police in Myanmar as he attempted to flee China to study in the US. Dozens of HRDs have told Front Line Defenders about attempts to intimidate their spouses, parents or children in an effort to get the HRDs to stop their work. In August 2016, the wife of detained lawyer, Li Heping, returned home to her apartment to find police blocking her entrance and informing her that she had been evicted. This type of harassment has happened numerous times to HRDs and their family members in the past number of years.

How to Respond

In light of such a sustained and strategic crackdown, a robust response by countries who say they value human rights and the work of HRDs is more needed than ever. While HRDs in mainland China struggle to regroup and re-strategise, 'friendly' countries must go beyond issuing statements highlighting 'concerns' or 'reminding China of its international obligations'. Cases of individual HRDs must be raised consistently by countries in a variety of fora, and not simply relegated to a separate bilateral human rights

dialogue, which the Chinese authorities favour. Those HRDs who are ill in prison and denied medical care, those who are held incommunicado and tortured in ‘black jails’ without access to lawyers and those who are sentenced to lengthy prison terms for their peaceful work in defence of universally recognised rights - their names should be on the lips of officials and diplomats engaged in negotiation with the Chinese authorities. It should not be forgotten that the Chinese government has signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and ratified the Covenant of Social, Economic and Cultural rights and that President Xi has repeatedly emphasised building a nation based on rule of law.

Friendly countries must also do more to practically assist HRDs. A new EU-funded mechanism to support HRDs at-risk globally, ProtectDefenders.eu, was officially launched in December 2015. The initiative, which is managed by a consortium of 12 international and regional NGOs including Front Line Defenders, makes available much needed funds to support the protection of HRDs, including for temporary relocation. This is a welcome response to the current backlash against them. This funding must also be matched by political will, both in standing up for HRDs with their governments and supporting them practically when they need some time away from their high-intensity and risky work. In the case of Chinese HRDs, it is known that the authorities may stop them from travelling to attend human rights-related conferences, trainings or programmes in third countries if they find out. In such cases, the governments of these third countries must be prepared to be more flexible in accommodating visas for the HRDs and being open to communicating with them in secure ways. The UN must also be more vocal when HRDs are prevented from travelling to attend the meetings of UN human rights bodies. More generally, civil society organisations and academic institutions must be more willing to host HRDs at risk for short periods of time, especially since increasing amounts of funding, such as the EU initiative above, are available for this.

Taiwan’s Role as a voice for HRDs

Taiwan is well poised to become a voice on the international stage for HRDs, especially those from China. With a democratically elected government, a free media and a thriving civil society, Taiwan is an example of how adherence to human rights and rule of law can transform a country. Indeed,

given its own authoritarian past, it could be argued that Taiwan has more of a responsibility than others to promote the work of HRDs internationally, knowing the ruinous effect of an environment in which those who speak out for justice are silenced. Furthermore, by affirming the importance of HRDs and the universal nature of human rights, Taiwan would be actively undermining those authoritarian governments who argue that HRDs are an invention of ‘the West’ looking to impose ‘western values’ on countries where ‘conditions are not appropriate for such rights’.

Taiwan is also well-placed to host HRDs on temporary fellowships or for short periods on rest & respite, given the proliferation of domestic rights-based NGOs and academic institutions. Government assistance in this regard to facilitate visas would be vital. For example, when HRDs are based in a third country and cannot return to their home country for fear of arrest, Taiwanese Representative Offices must be willing to allow them to apply for visas from that third country, rather than asking them to apply for it in their home country, as has happened in the past. In the experience of Front Line Defenders, which hosts a handful of HRDs from all over the world every year, these exchanges are mutually beneficial and work to increase understanding and solidarity across geographical and cultural lines, as well as building long-term friendships.

Conclusion

Relatively recent international recognition of the vital work done by HRDs has not led to an appreciable improvement in the situations facing them around the world. They continue to be targetted, often in very violent ways, and in the vast majority of these cases, the perpetrators of these attacks are never brought to justice. Although lip service is increasingly paid to the importance of human rights and HRDs, geopolitical and economic concerns dictate whether a country’s government will be pressured to improve its treatment of HRDs and to what extent. This has been evident in the case of China. The crackdown which has taken place since 2015 has been met with plenty of statements of concern, but little practical action has been taken when China has brushed aside those concerns, as it has done in the vast majority of cases. Nearly all of those HRDs who have been ‘released on bail’ in the past year remain out of contact and almost certainly not free. The international community must be more willing to provide practical support to HRDs when

governments are not responsive to criticism. In this regard, Taiwan has the potential to play an even greater role and become a global force in promoting the protection of HRDs-at risk.

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支持人權捍衛者：挑戰與機會

Ed Ó Donnabháin

前線捍衛者組織專案經理

摘要

本文一開始，先簡單探討人權捍衛者的歷史脈絡，說明世人已經比以往更加瞭解、也更為認同他們的努力。接著便針對人權捍衛者在全球的處境，進行整體的檢視。其後，作者以中國為分析的焦點，指出該國人權捍衛者所面對的，可謂最艱難的挑戰。最後，作者鼓勵台灣採取行動，為全球的人權捍衛者發聲。

關鍵字

人權捍衛者、中國、習近平、台灣
