

## Purpose Statement

The Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) provides support and protection to human rights defenders (HRDs) in the Middle East, with a focus on the Gulf region and neighbouring countries, to promote human rights. GCHR's work includes research, investigating crimes against HRDs and journalists, publishing reports and appeals, and providing emergency resources and capacity building training. GCHR provides a bridge from the region to the international community by organising consultations between HRDs and UN experts, carrying out campaigns and advocacy, and coordinating joint actions and human rights events with local partners and international allies. This document provides an overview of our work, which is based on the theory of change that the situation in certain countries impacts the entire region.

## Focal Population

We advocate for human rights defenders (HRDs)/women human rights defenders (WHRDs), including but not limited to activists, online activists, lawyers, journalists and NGO staff, from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with an emphasis on the Gulf and neighbouring countries. We also advocate for people who cover issues related to migrants' rights, women's rights, children's rights, and the rights of other minorities or other marginalised people.

## Evidence

- ❖ GCHR has played an important role in shedding light on human rights issues and cases across the region. GCHR has helped to free W/HRDs in prison, improve their prison conditions or save their lives. GCHR has helped expose people involved in human rights abuses and issued calls for justice.
- ❖ Through our work, W/HRDs have had opportunities to continue their work, and/or have had the space to reflect, heal (physically and emotionally) and get support. Since 2011, we have provided over 1600 W/HRDs with workshops and training to build their capacity and make them safer and stronger. The networks we have built have strengthened the human rights community in the region. The events we have organised, such as UN MENA Consultations and a WHRDs Forum, have given activists we work with the space to share their knowledge and lived experience with each other, international NGOs, donors and UN experts.
- ❖ What makes GCHR unique is that GCHR staff and Advisory Board members are mostly activists from and working in the MENA region. We have broad networks and bring lived experience and expertise about the needs for the region. Our projects include an aspect of consulting with people we work with, which ensures their voices are reflected in our work.

## Beliefs & Assumptions

- ❖ While we acknowledge the limitations we face as a human rights organisation, through our work we also have discovered that highlighting cases of targeted W/HRDs internationally - and exposing human rights abuses and those responsible for them - has provided protection and empowerment for activists in many cases, and made it harder for MENA authorities to target them with no consequence.
- ❖ We believe that advocacy with peers and allies and otherwise applying pressure on authorities will encourage authorities to take meaningful steps to stop suppressing freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

## Core Strategies


**Provide protection for human rights defenders**

a) Support W/HRDs at risk through an effective protection programme to preempt threats and mitigate those risks by providing:

- Training on digital security at all workshops and events, plus training on well-being, legal support and investigative journalism
- Limited direct grants for security, medical support or legal support
- An Emergency Resources Hub with over 100 resources on advocacy, security, well-being, legal assistance etc in English and Arabic

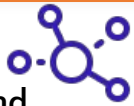
b) Consolidate protection mechanisms and tools that are preventative rather than reactive for human rights defenders, with a focus on WHRDs.


**Raise awareness about human rights defenders at risk of being attacked**

a) Research, document and expose violations internationally about challenges and government actions that impact freedom of expression, accessibility and digital rights.  
 b) Increase visibility and outreach to media about risks facing human rights defenders.


**Enable a safer environment for human rights defenders at risk through advocacy**

a) Increase advocacy in international fora including the United Nations about human rights violations in the region.  
 b) Increase advocacy on the topic of business and human rights to target governments or companies which are supporting, enabling or responsible for human rights violations.  
 c) Fight impunity for crimes against journalists by doing projects in which journalists from the region investigate crimes against journalists and call on UN mechanisms to protect them, including during the International Day to End Impunity


**Facilitate networking and exchanges between human rights defenders, partners and social movements**

a) Learn from and share the experiences of W/HRDs from the Gulf region and neighbouring countries at regional gatherings and UN consultations.  
 b) Develop and broaden GCHR's network  
 c) Address the closure of civic space and promote the role of civil society

## Outcomes

### Short-Term Outcomes (in 1 yr)

### Medium-Term Outcomes (2-4 yrs)

### Long-Term Outcomes (5+ yrs)

- Secure, joint protection platform established for W/HRDs to provide effective protection mechanisms.
- Missions or advocacy trips lead to more exposure and publicity for cases of at-risk W/HRDs.
- Provide emergency support to W/HRDs, including journalists under the Journalism Protection Program through evacuation, relocation, financial /legal support and well-being resources.
- Capacity building and digital security training workshops for W/HRDs, including journalists, increase their protection.

- Next phase of Tangible Protection Mechanisms for WHRDs fully underway, and framework for protection implemented.
- Increased investment in the WHRDs programme financially and strategically.
- Revisit and revise WHRDs' conventions and plans of action to reflect their current realities and needs.

- Increased number of W/HRDs receiving support and protection.
- Increased connection, empowerment, and enablement of the work of WHRDs through solidarity networks and mechanisms in place.

- An effective strategy developed specifically on free expression, accessibility and digital rights.
- Increased recognition of GCHR as a source of information on the situation of HRDs as well as analysis on freedom of expression and digital rights.
- Widened GCHR's network of journalists.
- Increased social media presence.

- Increased visibility for MENA HRDs in the media.
- Decreased prosecutions under national security laws and cybercrime laws for HRDs.

- Revised laws in MENA countries so they no longer restrict freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, and digital rights.

- At least three innovative/creative campaigns about human rights violations in GCHR's countries of focus per year.
- Effective joint advocacy/campaigns at the UN and online makes GCHR a leading, reliable regional partner.
- Expanded tools of pressure and influence for protection of HRDs by targeting businesses/sports events in the Gulf.

- Accountability for human rights violations facilitated through implementation of legal mechanisms.
- Fewer tech companies providing surveillance tools to repressive governments.
- Stronger regulations preventing surveillance tools from being used against W/HRDs.

- Stronger mechanisms enable human rights NGOs to take action to help W/HRDs and journalists subjected to violations.
- Western governments take bolder steps to prioritise action to end human rights violations in the region.

- Increased networking opportunities annually for at-risk W/HRDs, NGOs, journalists, activists and academics to share experiences and learn from one another.
- Active role in 8 networks of which GCHR is a member.

- A new generation of W/HRDs, journalists, activists and academics gain experience working with human rights organisations through internships and GCHR events.

- Civil society is stronger and working better together, leading to opening of civic space.

## Impact

Providing support and protection to human rights defenders in the Middle East and North Africa region helps to promote human rights, including but not limited to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.