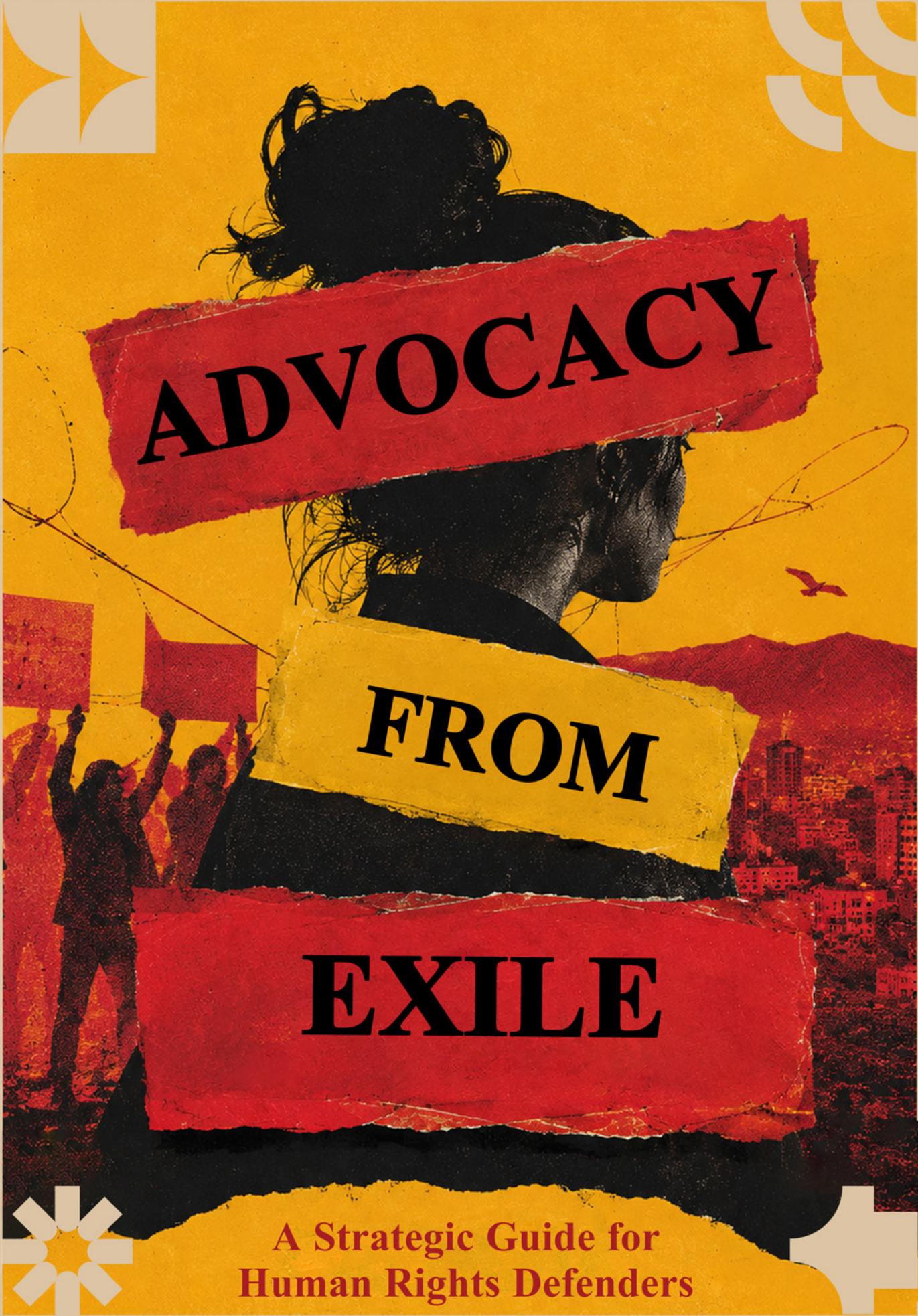




ADVOCACY

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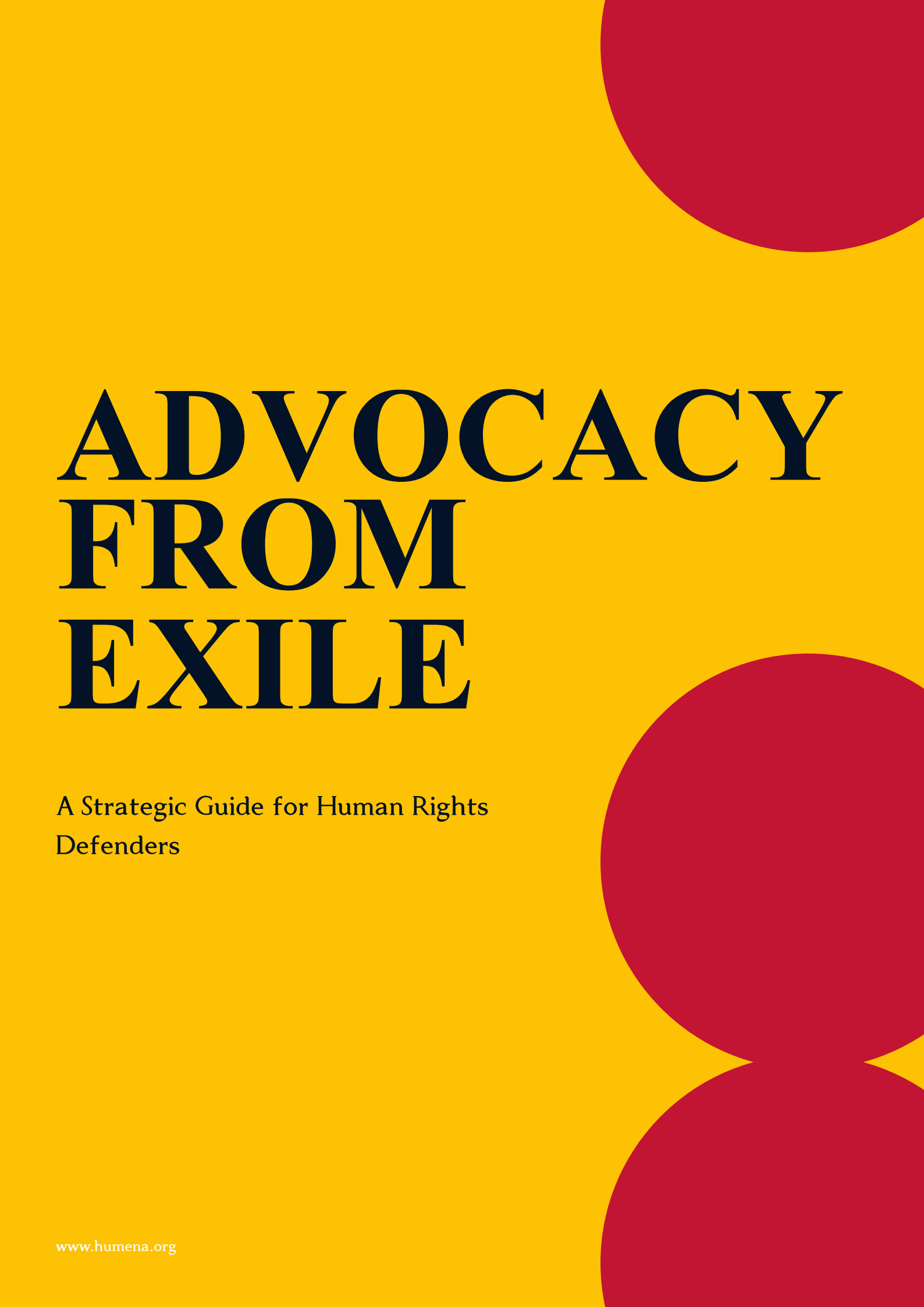
EXILE

**A Strategic Guide for
Human Rights Defenders**

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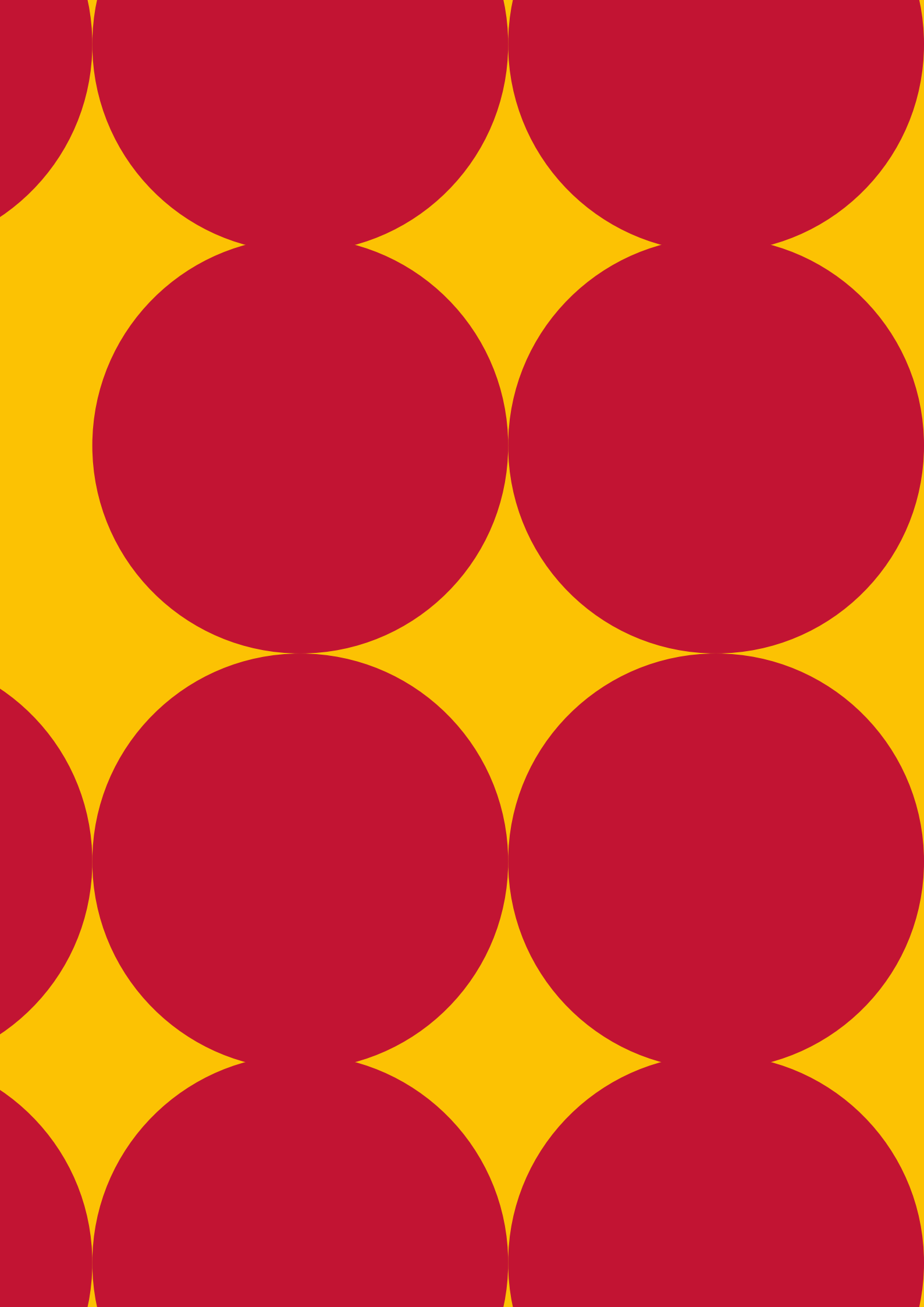


HuMENA For Human Rights and Civic Engagement
HuMENA pour les Droits de l'Homme et l'Engagement Civique
هيومنينا لحقوق الإنسان والمشاركة المدنية



ADVOCACY FROM EXILE

A Strategic Guide for Human Rights
Defenders





About HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement

HuMENA is an independent, non-profit human rights organization focused on protecting and expanding civic space, promoting human rights, supporting human rights defenders, and advocating for social movements in the MENA region, including activists in exile and the diaspora. Headquartered in Brussels, Belgium, and Beirut, Lebanon, with teams operating across the region.

HuMENA focuses on capacity building, protection, and strategic advocacy, grounded in evidence and research, to promote freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, and freedom of association. The organization empowers individuals and communities through training programs, psychosocial support, protection mechanisms, and the development of solidarity networks among human rights defenders.

HuMENA is committed to fighting for inclusive justice, believing in the power of people and social movements to drive change. It works to support marginalized groups, including women, refugees, LGBTQ+ individuals, and ethnic and religious minorities. The organization adopts a comprehensive approach, integrating issues of climate change, gender equality, and social justice into its programs, aiming to build a more free, just, and democratic future for all in the region.

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Introduction

Mission of human rights defenders, as well as all advocates for change and freedom, has become significantly difficult in the contemporary world. It goes beyond confronting authoritarian political regimes and dealing with rampant violations of human rights that could affect them. Over the past few years, we have all witnessed a rapid decline in faith in human rights values that were established after World War II and the founding of the United Nations system. This decline has not been at the governmental level, but unfortunately, current hostility to the principles of human rights have spread among the common/ordinary people themselves, which in turn has reflected in their political choices, of course in countries where the people vote for their rulers transparently and freely.

In a world full of political and military conflicts, many activists find themselves forced to flee their native countries to exile, in order to escape repression and being targeted, or to seek safety and border margins of freedom of action and movement. While exile might be seen as an obstacle to the continuation of the mission, it can also open up new horizons and provide distinguished opportunities to support processes of change and democratization and advocate for human rights causes in their original homeland.

This Training Toolkit aims at developing a general framework for the idea of 'advocacy from exile'. This includes a definition of the concept of advocacy and its associated features, the various forms of advocacy, a reflection on the differences between advocacy organized from within and from exile with a focus on the opportunities and limitations associated with the latter, and an analysis of the main pathways for advocacy from exile.

This guide also provides activists and human rights defenders with a 'practical and systematic framework' for planning successful advocacy campaigns, based on 'a list of specific steps', starting from: identifying the advocacy issue, setting its suitable goals, assessing and analyzing the surrounding context, determining appropriate activities, developing an action plan, and defining a framework for evaluating the impact of this campaign. Additionally, taking into account considerations to protect the overall safety of activists and defenders against the risks they might face while conducting advocacy operations.

Hopefully, this guide will be a valuable addition to every advocate and campaigner for change and every human rights defender, and will contribute to more organized, effective and safe advocacy efforts from exile, as the fight for rights and justice is not limited by boundaries of geography but rather derives its strength from the dedication and determination to achieve a more just and equitable world.

On this Toolkit

The notion of exile has accompanied the work and struggles of various groups of activists and those concerned and involved with matters of public interest, such as political opponents, human rights defenders, journalists, and others. They do not usually opt for exile to seek safety, or to escape repression and avoid targeting. Some carry on seeking new methods to influence the issues they were concerned with before they left their own home countries. National borders and the complexity of political contexts have been a massive impediment to their willingness to continue working and serving the causes they believe in.

Nowadays, there are international organizations that bring most of the world's countries under their roof to discuss issues that concern any country and clearly declare that human rights anywhere in the world is no longer "solely an 'internal matter'" of a given country. There is also a tremendous and continuous development in the means of communicating and communication and a whole new virtual world that is taking shape on the Internet, which in turn has allowed various internal and external groups to influence what happens locally.

Over the past fifteen years, and through the complex developments that accompanied the protest movements that erupted in a range of countries in the Middle East and North Africa, numerous activists have been compelled to leave their home countries and live in exile, but their passion for activism and the defence of their individual and collective rights has not ceased. Hence the need for specialized epistemological content — such as this guide and others — that seeks to analyze the contexts of human rights defending from exile, and provide good practices and reproduce them for the benefit of other activists.

This training manual attempts to enhance knowledge and skills on advocating for human rights causes from exile in order to help activists sustain their inspiring work in supporting human rights and advocating for change in their original communities by utilizing the new possibilities and opportunities provided by their presence in exile, as well as helping them address the obstacles that may limit their ability to act and impact. It provides them with a practical framework for conducting advocacy campaigns from exile.

The Methodology

This guide was developed through a methodology that combines the study and analysis of available training manuals and methodologies for planning advocacy strategies, in addition to tracking and studying a number of innovative and effective advocacy campaigns in national, regional and international contexts, with focus on Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. In some sections, the guide is based on the accumulated personal experiences of both; the author and the HuMENA team in planning and executing various advocacy operations over the years.

For Whom was this Toolkit Developed?

This guide is designed to provide the key necessary knowledge that activists in exile may need to sustain their previous advocacy work for human rights and positive change. Additionally, it includes a practical skills framework for designing effective advocacy campaigns through a simplified model of the planning process for this type of campaign. This guide is primarily aimed at individuals who are concerned with positive change in its broadest sense based on the fundamental principles of human rights. These people may describe themselves as human rights defenders, and may use other terms such as activists, or professional terms such as journalists, etc.

Using This Toolkit

This toolkit can be used in a variety of ways depending on the purpose intended: as an informative resource on human rights advocacy in general, or as a specialized resource on human rights advocacy in exile to identify the key features of advocacy operations carried out from abroad. It can also be used as a practical framework for designing and implementing successful advocacy campaigns.

INTRO TO ADVOCACY

Intro to Advocacy

Advocacy is defined as "the process by which People with a cause and their supporters organize themselves to influence the cause or issue they are dealing with, by influencing the decision-making process or even altering the attitudes and behaviours of 'opinion leaders' and 'society members' in order to become more favourably disposed towards the issue.

Advocacy is currently considered one of the primary tools for achieving political and social change, in which people collectively decide on their priorities towards issues and concerns they are dealing with, and invite - or force - others to conform to these priorities. Advocacy can also be described as the process of mobilizing different forces within society to defend their rights against those who violate these rights, or benefit from their violation.

Advocacy represents a route to peaceful change in civilized societies by mobilizing popular support for the promotion of human rights, sometimes in the face of human rights violations, and at other times by pressuring decision-makers to adopt specific public policies.

Advocacy processes also help strengthen the voices of marginalized groups that are precluded from representation in decision-making by amplifying these voices and mobilizing further support from those in solidarity with them. This coalition represents a social and political power that can force those in power to take responsibility for their decisions and stances. Thus, advocacy can lead to major changes at the level of public policies or societal awareness and treatment of a particular issue or group. Human rights issues and violations affecting marginalised and vulnerable groups may not receive the attention and support they deserve without advocacy.

Attempt to Define Advocacy

Since advocacy is linked to people's experiences and the different causes they advocate for, there is no one agreed-upon definition of it. Rather, there are hundreds of definitions, each of which expresses the experience and identity of a change somewhere in the world. Advocacy can be defined as:

"Working with others in an organization, group or coalition in a structured manner to achieve a different object, or an effective process that can successfully influence decision-making and decision implementation processes, by (teaching), (educating and informing) and raising the awareness of leaders, decision-makers, those who implement decisions and policies, or those who modify or reform existing policies."^[1]

Advocacy can also be defined as:

"Methods and tools that work to achieve the requested change in policies or practices, or to influence the decision-making process at the local or regional level."^[2]

The Mauritanian Association for Human Rights defines it as:

"A process that aims to produce positive change for the benefit of a group, or to respect, protect, defend, promote a particular right (or more) of others. This change may relate to a policy, legislation, programme or project of the national interest."^[3]

The previous definitions — among others — indicate the multiple perspectives from which advocacy can be defined. It can be defined according to its geographical sphere, including local, regional, and international. It can be defined according to the nature of the target audience, whether they represent those in power or aim to change the perceptions of

the general public. Advocacy can be defined by the issue it aims to change, whether it is a political issue, such as advocating for fair and free elections, or a social issue, such as advocating for a fair family law, or even an economic issue, such as advocating for more socially just tax policies. Practically speaking, these contexts cannot be detached from each other. Social issues are political issues and have an economic aspect, and so do political ones, since they are the result of social interactivity, affect social ties and structures, and also have economic implications.

Advocacy campaigns may target achieving changes in the reality of a specific group that is marginalized or subject to discrimination and violence, such as women, people with disabilities, religious and ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, etc.

Other definitions can be presented for some specialised advocacy processes, such as **digital advocacy**, which refers to the use of technology and social media platforms to mobilise support for a particular cause and influence public opinion and/or decision-makers.

Legal advocacy is a way to address rights violations that are based on the absence or weakness of law or on law that is itself a rights violation. This can include encouraging the government to create a law against a particular rights violation, requesting evidence on the enforcement of a law, or advocating for the repeal of a law that protects perpetrators (such as laws that give adults the "right" to corporal punishment of children).^[4]

Core Qualities and Characteristics of Advocacy Processes

As explained in the previous section, there is no agreed-upon definition of advocacy, hence the need to develop a framework, or qualities that distinguish advocacy processes from others. The following qualities can be used to describe advocacy processes:



Advocacy is based on the participation and empowerment of people (community of interest / rights-holders)

Advocacy is a people-based and participatory tool for change. Advocacy is built on the idea of solidarity of different groups in society to defend rights, and it must be based on the vision, needs and priorities of the protagonists. By the protagonists (rights-holders), we mean the people directly concerned or affected by the violation or issue we are dealing with. Those who are in solidarity with them must realize that they have an additional duty besides solidarity, which is empowerment. Empowerment is the process by which individuals and groups are equipped with the knowledge and skills to act, decide and influence the context and public policies to act for their interest.

Another objective is bringing protagonists (rights-holders) to the forefront of advocacy processes and equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge if needed.



Advocacy tries to create a balance of power

Advocacy is only needed when something is not functioning properly!

Advocacy is not needed whenever the political, economic or social situation is ideal. It is based on the existence of unfulfilled needs that constitute a violation of one or more basic human rights, and the lack or infringement of these rights reflects an imbalance of power whereby the more powerful parties benefit from the violation against the less powerful parties. Advocacy is an attempt to strengthen and maximise the voice of less powerful parties in society to redress an imbalance in the balance of power.

This rebalancing process is usually challenging and requires a lengthy endeavour, and could last for decades. Those who have the power to change often do not respond to logic or moral arguments when it comes to decisions that conflict with their direct or indirect interests, or even the interests of those who support the survival of those people in power. But they will concede to another opinion when it is powerful enough to threaten those material interests. For example, governments usually do not take

decisions to increase the salaries of employees until they object in various ways to their low salaries, even to the point of going on strike. Similarly, the civil and political rights gained by African Americans in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century were obtained after massive protests involving millions of people.



Represents a just cause

The same tactics and tools used by human rights defenders can be used by those who violate human rights to defend their benefits and the continuation of the status quo that allows them to illegitimately capitalize on the violation of victims' rights. Hence the need to consider a tool to measure the justice of the issues with which advocacy engages. Women rights defenders who advocate for equal rights and duties for men and women within the family are confronted by others who believe that this idea of equality will destroy the historically stable family structure and family dynamics, which is based on prioritising men and giving them all the power within the family. How do we determine which interests are worthy of protection here, or which party to the conflict has the rightful cause?

International human rights standards play the role of a measuring instrument. If the advocacy process aims to promote a human right, or to stop the violation of one or more of those rights, it certainly represents advocacy for a righteous cause. However, if the activities carried out are aimed at supporting violations or violators, or advocating for the continuation of this violation, these activities cannot be considered advocacy for a just cause, even if the tools and mechanisms used by those who support human rights violations are similar to those used by rights advocates.



Advocacy attempts to bring about sustainable / long-term changes

Advocacy as a mechanism for social change differs from other mechanisms because it aims to bring about radical changes in the issue or violation. It does not aim to provide temporary solutions or mitigate the harm, but aims to eliminate the roots of the issue or even neutralize one of these roots or persistent factors, as a prelude to eliminating the

violation or issue almost completely. Advocacy in this regard does not conflict with other mechanisms of positive change in society, but rather complements them. For example, to deal with the issue of poverty, relief organisations will provide food aid to those affected, while organisations and individuals who prefer the advocacy approach will organise activities to put pressure on the public authority to fulfil its duty to provide food sufficiency for these people through an in-kind or material support programme that covers the entire country. Advocacy is usually not based on activities with a temporary impact such as providing aid, but may include some of these activities in a broader framework that includes a variety of activities, with the ultimate goal of changing the political, economic and social realities of the victims.



Advocacy is not an end in and of itself but rather a means to achieve other ends

Advocacy is how we will accomplish our objectives in preventing human rights violations, or in promoting human rights. Advocacy is not an inherently end in itself, but a collective, peaceful, and legitimate means to achieve other objectives. Addiction to activism that some human rights defenders fall into, whereby activism becomes the goal rather than a means to achieve other goals, must be carefully monitored.

Who Does Advocacy Work?

Advocacy can be conducted by any person or group of people! Advocacy tactics and methodologies are developed on the field by advocates as they work on their various issues. Advocacy is usually carried out by networks of stakeholders that include the people of the issue and those in solidarity with them, and these people may organise themselves in different organisational forms such as institutions, associations, lobbyists, etc.

Advocacy is also carried out by political parties, research centres and think tanks, human rights organisations, trade unions, cultural and innovation centres, and other forms of peaceful organisations that are operating in the public sphere.

Human Rights-Based Advocacy

Before discussing Human Rights-Based Advocacy, it is important to note the definition of human rights itself. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) defines human rights as

"Human rights are rights we have simply because we exist as human beings — they are not granted by any state. These universal rights are inherent to us all, regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status. They range from the most fundamental — the right to life — to those that make life worth living, such as the rights to food, education, work, health, and liberty."^[5]

Human rights-based approach (HRBA) is a term used by the United Nations and its various specialised agencies to refer to an approach that

"This entails consciously and systematically paying attention to human rights in all aspects of programme development. This approach is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. The objective of the HRBA is to empower people (rights-holders) to realize their rights and strengthen the State (duty-bearers) to comply with their human rights obligations and duties. States' obligations to human rights require them to respect, protect and fulfill women's and girls' rights, along with the rights of men and boys. When they fail to do so, the United Nations has a responsibility to work with partners to strengthen capacity to more effectively realize that duty."^[6]

Applying this approach to advocacy, we find that we are talking about an advocacy process that is based on the rules of international human rights law, meaning that it defends one or more basic human rights, while adhering to a set of values and principles derived from the values and principles of international human rights law, with the commitment

that the advocacy process does not involve the violation of any other human right or harm to the fundamental rights of any individual or group of individuals.

While applying this, advocacy highlights the gaps in the fulfilment of all human rights and it lobbies for human rights-based public policies that focus on the people, their needs and priorities.

This is tangled with the **people-centric approach** which is a methodology that emphasises the need to place the needs and expectations of rights holders at the centre of advocacy and managing its projects.

This approach has three major advantages ^[7].

A — "to create an environment where rights holders feel empowered to come forward and take an active role in shaping the human rights narrative of advocacy. This requires that the organisation does not just inform the target group of context and objectives of the initiative, but that it also works with the group to decide on key messages and expected results."

B — "to ensure that advocacy serves the interests of all rights holders, particularly the most excluded and least visible categories. This helps organisations use their advocacy to counter discrimination based on gender and other attributes."

C — "to help CSOs bring justice concerns to the fore in a context where formal justice mechanisms fail to acknowledge and address people's grievances. This gives a platform for rights holders to continue pressing for accountability and pursuing redress."

People-centric advocacy focuses on three questions:^[8]

- **To what extent does your advocacy promote meaningful participation, including by victims of human rights violations?**
- **Did you ensure all voices are equally represented in your advocacy, including women and other groups risking discrimination?**
- **Does your advocacy help address justice concerns in the target communities?**

The Different Forms of Advocacy

Advocacy processes can vary according to different issues, goals, different perspectives, and the nature and expertise of the advocates themselves.

Advocacy is also influenced by different legal, social and economic contexts, which in turn means that: the obstacles that prevent the protection, promotion and realisation of human rights and freedoms also differ. Therefore; we need to design advocacy processes that are appropriate and relevant to the context in which they take place.

The political, legal, social, economic and cultural context significantly influences advocacy processes. This context may either facilitate or hinder our work, efforts and make it more difficult and distant for us to reach our goals.

Advocacy can take the form of advocacy and lobbying activities, whether directed at the authorities/ regimes, opinion leaders, influential people in society or ordinary people/individuals. It can also take the form of protest activities that aim to pressure decision-makers to adopt certain policies. Advocacy also involves mobilising and organising collective efforts. Advocacy as human rights defenders is part of our tools to defend and raise our voices against all human rights violations.

In general, it is beyond the scope of this guide to catalogue all the forms that advocacy processes take, as they are constantly evolving. However, the most popular, or globally utilised, forms of advocacy can be recognised as the following:



Campaigns

A campaign is a set of pre-designed activities that are implemented to accomplish a positive impact on the target issue within a specific time frame. Campaigns can be aimed at lobbying decision makers, or they can be aimed at gaining sympathy and social mobilization for a particular cause.



Use of International Mechanisms for the Protection of Human Rights

Human rights defenders use the available human rights protection mechanisms within the United Nations or regional international organizations such as the European Union, the African Union, the Organization of American States, etc. while advocating to put pressure on governments to adhere to human rights principles within the framework of those countries' legal obligations towards international and regional human rights conventions.



Building Alliances and Partnerships

Human rights defenders use the available human rights protection mechanisms within the United Nations or regional international organizations such as the European Union, the African Union, the Organization of American States, etc. while advocating to put pressure on governments to adhere to human rights principles within the framework of those countries' legal obligations towards international and regional human rights conventions.



Strategic Litigation / Impact Litigation

Selecting a case and litigating before the courts in favour of a person with the purpose of obtaining a ruling that benefits large strata and groups of society beyond the pleader, or for the purpose of creating a lasting and permanent impact on society beyond the

parties to the litigation. This is why it is sometimes called impact litigation.



Monitoring and Documentation

Selecting a case and litigating before the courts in favour of a person with the purpose of obtaining a ruling that benefits large strata and groups of society beyond the plead



Knowledge Production

Knowledge production is the remarkable basis of advocacy processes, especially productions that are designed to provide proposals and alternatives to address human rights violations, such as policy papers, or to promote human rights and address deficiencies in the current context, such as legislative proposals submitted by specialists and stakeholders to parliament. Training and knowledge manuals may serve as a basis for building the capacity of other people and enabling them to engage effectively and efficiently in advocacy processes.

ADVOCACY FROM EXILE

Advocacy from Exile

For many activists and human rights defenders, moving to exile was not the end of their journey to seek political, social and economic change in their home countries. Rather, it was a method for them to carry on with their work and struggle. Exile became a new arena of action after working from within carried with it risks, high costs, and threats that limited their ability, or completely prevented them from continuing to advocate for human rights issues.

"You will definitely no longer be the same person as before being seduced by rebellion taste, and thus not solely because it is beautiful, but because the rebellion is an exceptional freedom moment"

— Arwa Saleh (1951–1997), Egyptian communist and feminist

Exile here does not disconnect activists from their homelands, but rather it is a new platform for advocacy, so we were keen to describe this guide as about advocacy (from exile) rather than (in exile) to emphasise the relevance of advocacy processes to the issues targeted by activists and defenders and their struggles in their home countries.

Advocacy from Exile: New Opportunities and New Challenges Too

Political, economic, social and cultural context in exile differs significantly from the contexts in activists' home countries. This difference fundamentally alters the nature of the advocacy process itself. In some cases, this difference works in favour of the advocacy process, and being abroad can be a catalyst for its success. In other cases, being away from the local context is an impediment to the impact and efficiency intended from the advocacy.



Relative Freedom from Risks Associated with Advocacy Operations:

The departure of activists and human rights defenders from countries where they face risks of imprisonment, assault, and prosecution naturally strengthens their ability to maintain their advocacy work, as well as alleviating the emotional pressures of living under continual threat. As a result, they will be more efficient and able to work, carry out their activities and plan them properly.

However, being in exile does not mean absolute safety for activists and human rights defenders. Governments complicit in human rights violations that are exposed internationally by these same activists often try to harm them in exile in various ways. These include initiating legal proceedings against them in their home countries and issuing long prison sentences against them in absentia. Or harming their family members who still reside inside the country as a form of revenge against the activists. Sometimes, repressive governments try to assassinate activists and, unfortunately, succeed in doing so, as happened with the Saudi journalist and democracy advocate [Jamal Khashoggi](#).



Broader Range of Options for Advocacy Activities

Activists often flee to countries that are more democratic and subordinated to the principles of justice and the rule of law, such as the European Union, Canada, and the United States. These countries impose fewer restrictions on the public sphere and on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Activists benefit from the new available spaces to carry out various advocacy activities that they were not able to do while in their home countries. This includes demonstrations and protest actions in the streets and public spaces.

In addition, the relatively high level of freedom of expression in these countries gives them the ability to speak out on issues that are controversial, sensitive, or go against traditional social norms in their countries of origin, such as gender equality and the defence of the rights of diverse sexual minorities (includes a variety of gender and sexual identities and expressions that differ from cultural norms. Usually, sexual minorities are comprised of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals).

Case Study — Expose Them Campaign

Expose Them: A Campaign from Exile to Prosecute Human Rights Abusers in Egypt



Context

After Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi assumed office in 2014, the country witnessed massive crackdowns on the opposition, activists, and human rights defence groups. The state of repression that prevailed in the country included: arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearances, the expansion of the application of the death penalty, as well as the restriction of the public space with a number of legislations that deprive citizens of their constitutional rights to human dignity, freedom of expression, and freedom of peaceful assembly.

Things came to a head in 2019 when the security services launched a brutal crackdown that included stopping people in the streets, searching their phones for any dissenting content, and arbitrarily arresting thousands of citizens. In this context, a group of activists, human rights defenders, and a number of exiled organisations launched a campaign titled "Expose them."

Main Objectives

Highlighting the climate for human rights and civil activism in Egypt, calling on the Egyptian government to stop its human rights violations, and exposing those who collaborate and support the continuation of human rights violations.

Activities & Impact

The campaign was carried out through various activities including posting on social media platforms, launching a website in Arabic, English and French, organising a series of protest events in some European capitals and cities, and holding direct

meetings with a number of leading EU policymakers. The campaign sought to "unmask the ministers, parliamentarians, military and businessmen, as well as foreign governments and international corporations who stand behind President Sisi and contribute directly or indirectly to the authorities' repression of civil society and human rights defenders."

The campaign also published several documentary reports, including one titled: "Law 70 of 2017: A Death Sentence for Civil Society; a law threatens to annihilate human rights groups." The report reveals the catastrophic impact of this law — which the campaign contributed to its subsequent repeal — on the work of civil society organisations in Egypt.

The campaign's wide-ranging and geographically widespread activities in several countries caused great annoyance to Egypt's authorities, as demonstrated by the targeting of [one of the campaign's exiled activist leaders](#).



Easier Accessibility to International Organisations and their Teams

Being in the aforementioned countries facilitates activists and defenders' physical contact with international organisations active in the defence of both democracy and human rights, whether governmental organisations such as the United Nations and its various bodies or even leading non-governmental organisations such as Amnesty International. While in their home countries, these individuals could have been arrested for meeting with a UN official or communicating with international human rights non-governmental organisations.

The presence of activists in geographical areas near or adjacent to these organisations allows them to participate in their variety of events and benefit from the mechanisms provided by these organisations to advocate for human rights at the global level.



Emancipation from Restrictions on Financial Resources

Most countries in the Arab region impose severe restrictions on civil society organisations regarding

their right to seek both external and internal funding.

Moving into exile allows these organisations much more flexibility and freedom to seek financial resources and fundraising to finance their activities and enhance their ability to sustain and operate.

Challenges of Advocacy from Exile

As for challenges facing advocacy from exile, some of the most prominent are:



Local Decontextualisation

Although digital media has reduced the gaps between the national and the foreign, and weakened the value of geographical boundaries, the activists' remoteness from their national context may blur their ability to understand changes and developments in this context, especially with their longer absence from their societies, that can exceed tens of years.



The Difficulty of Communicating Directly with the Primary Target Audience

Although advocacy processes that rely on international mechanisms and cross-border solidarity have proven their efficiency and effectiveness, this does not negate the fact that the first and foremost target of the change process are local citizens, as they are the holders of the cause, the holders of rights, and the most significant destination of change and pressure.

People are the source of all authority, no matter how long oppressive regimes persist in denying this fact and suppressing the voice of the people. Diaspora communities rely on the internet and modern digital technologies to maintain contact with their communities. However, relying entirely on the internet has its disadvantages and risks. As a result of widespread illiteracy in some societies, barriers associated with poverty and high prices of internet services, and the impact of armed conflicts and wars on the ability of people in the region to have stable access to internet services, significant proportions of the population in the Arab region do not have access to the internet.



Digital Overload

Being exiled imposes physical barriers between activists and their home countries, and the solution to dealing with these barriers is to rely entirely on the internet and social media in communicating with the public, working and organising activities. The full reliance on social media and the internet as a space for advocacy may affect the field monitoring and documentation skills of new generations of advocates and activists.

Overuse of social media and reliance on it solely can cause activists and advocates to lose key skills such as fieldwork skills, mass communication, organisational skills. The complete reliance on social media in our work makes us part of the "herd" of these sites, so we only see what the users of these sites see, and we will only influence the demographics and groups that are active on these sites. ^[9]



Stigmatising Activists and Defenders as Agents of the Countries they Reside in

Authoritarian regimes often use the exile of opposition activists and human rights defenders who expose their involvement in serious human rights violations as an excuse to discredit the patriotism and sincerity of these individuals, accusing them of being "enemies of the state," and "agents of foreign countries," in an attempt to limit their influence on public opinion by undermining their credibility and questioning the intentions of their advocacy work.



Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

It is not necessarily simple for people who have been displaced from a social and cultural context they spent their previous years of life in, to integrate into new societies with values and identities that are significantly different from those of their original societies. The first barrier that activists face is the language barrier, as many of them are not fully fluent in the language of the countries to which they have travelled. This is especially true for countries with weak education systems. The language barrier not only limits an activist's ability to communicate in exile, it also limits their ability to understand and cope with the new context, and their ability to get decent jobs, or complete their university or post-university studies.

PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINING ADVOCACY FROM EXILE

Pathways to Sustaining Advocacy from Exile

As previously stated, there is no limitation on the forms of advocacy processes; however, through studying the experiences of advocacy for human rights issues from exile, we can categorize the most prominent forms of advocacy as follows:



PATHWAY 1:

DIGITAL ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS

Digital advocacy campaigns harness the power of the internet and social media platforms — such as Facebook, X, YouTube, TikTok, and Snapchat — to drive engagement and amplify campaign activities.

These initiatives are strategically designed to mobilize support for political, social, or economic causes, as well as to reshape public perceptions regarding specific issues and behaviors.

As digitalization becomes increasingly ingrained in everyday life, digital campaigns have garnered widespread traction among activists and advocates worldwide. Notably, those operating in exile have digitized their advocacy efforts, leveraging online platforms to maintain connections with their communities and persist in their pursuit of meaningful change.

Similar to traditional advocacy efforts, digital campaigns necessitate a comprehensive identification and analysis of the advocacy issue before establishing clear objectives. However, they diverge significantly from conventional approaches due to their pronounced emphasis on defining the target audience — the demographic to whom the campaign message is directed.

Identifying the target audience is intrinsically linked to formulating a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) campaign goal. This process involves addressing key questions such as: What are the campaign's objectives? Who is the intended audience?

Additionally, it is imperative to evaluate the audience's stance on the issue — whether they are supporters, adversaries, or simply uninformed. Furthermore, digital campaigns necessitate an in-depth assessment of the demographic attributes of the target audience. Depending on the nature of the campaign, relevant factors may include age, gender, educational background, and socioeconomic status, among others.

Equally crucial is the selection of an appropriate communication strategy to effectively engage the intended audience. For instance, policymakers may exhibit limited engagement with social media posts due to their constrained online presence, whereas younger demographics are more active on platforms like TikTok than on Facebook. Understanding the preferred digital consumption habits — whether via smartphones, tablets, or laptops — further enhances campaign efficacy.

A well-defined and cohesive target audience significantly bolsters the likelihood of influencing public opinion. Precise audience identification enables campaigners to tailor messages more effectively and select the most suitable communication channels.

A cornerstone of digital advocacy lies in the articulation of compelling and impactful messaging. Effective campaign messages should be:

- Accurate and evidence-based
- Clear and unequivocal
- Aligned with the campaign's core objectives
- Concise yet persuasive
- Innovative and engaging
- Multimedia-oriented, incorporating text, images, videos, and other formats



PATHWAY 2: LEVERAGING INTERNATIONAL MECHANISMS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION

Exile affords human rights defenders and activists enhanced access to international human rights protection mechanisms under the auspices of the United Nations. This access allows them to leverage these frameworks to exert pressure on governments, compelling them to uphold their human rights obligations in accordance with international legal commitments. It is noteworthy that all states have ratified at least one of the nine core international human rights treaties, in addition to at least one of the nine optional protocols. Furthermore, 80% of states have ratified four or more treaties, thereby establishing legally binding commitments to uphold, protect, and fulfill human rights under international law

→ The obligation to respect mandates states to refrain from infringing upon individuals' human rights.

→ The obligation to protect requires states to safeguard individuals and groups from human rights violations.

→ The obligation to fulfill compels states to take proactive measures to ensure the comprehensive realization of fundamental human rights. ^[10]

● Categories of International Human Rights Protection Mechanisms

The international human rights protection framework comprises two principal categories of mechanisms ^[11]

A) Treaty-Based Mechanisms (Human Rights Treaty Bodies)

These mechanisms are composed of independent human rights experts who monitor states' adherence to international human rights treaties. Signatory states are obligated to implement measures that

ensure the full enjoyment of the rights enshrined within the respective treaties.

There are currently ten treaty bodies, including

▶ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD): Oversees compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

▶ Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR): Monitors implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

▶ Human Rights Committee (CCPR): Supervises adherence to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its two Optional Protocols.

▶ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW): Ensures compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Optional Protocol.

▶ Committee Against Torture (CAT): Oversees the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

▶ Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC): Monitors implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.

▶ Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW): Supervises adherence to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

▶ Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT): Conducts detention monitoring under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture.

▶ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD): Ensures compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

▶ Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED): Oversees the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Functions of Treaty Bodies

▶ These committees perform various functions, including:

- ▶ Reviewing periodic state reports on treaty implementation.
- ▶ Investigating individual complaints regarding human rights violations.
- ▶ Conducting country-specific inquiries into severe human rights abuses.
- ▶ Issuing general interpretations of treaty provisions.
- ▶ Holding thematic discussions on pressing human rights issues.^[12]

The working mechanisms of these committees, methods of communication and meetings schedules can be found on the official website of the Office of the [United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#).

B) Charter-Based Mechanisms

The charter-based bodies are a set of human rights protection bodies, established under the United Nations Charter, which has been ratified by all 193 UN member states. These bodies include: Human Rights Council, The Special Procedures, Universal Periodic Review (Working Group), and independent investigations mandated by the Human Rights Council. Here is a quick introduction to these types of bodies:

The Human Rights Council (HRC)

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is an intergovernmental body within the United Nations system, made up of 47 States, elected in rotation from among the Member States of the UN General Assembly, in accordance with the rules of equitable geographical representation. The Council was established by the UN General Assembly in 2006 to replace the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights and to be responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe.

Special Procedures

The Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council are a group of independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic (on a specific topic such as freedom of expression, or violence against women) or country-specific (on the human rights situation in a particular

country) perspective.

They are unpaid members and are elected for a three-year term, which can be renewed for only another additional three years. As of November 2023, there are 46 thematic mandates and 14 country-specific mandates. Special procedures conduct on-site visits upon invitation to various countries to urge them to respect human rights and to monitor their compliance with the human rights standards on the ground. They also take certain measures to address human rights violations, including issuing urgent appeals to countries that include recommendations for specific actions. They also receive individual complaints about human rights violations within the scope of their mandates. They provide technical support to UN bodies and governments, assist in the advancement of international human rights standards, and engage in various international advocacy activities to defend human rights.

Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique mechanism of the Human Rights Council that calls for each UN Member State to undergo a peer review of its human rights records every 4.5 years. The UPR provides each State the opportunity to report on the actions it has taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to overcome challenges to the enjoyment of human rights; and to receive recommendations from UN Member States for continuous improvement. This mechanism is designed to prompt, support, and expand the promotion and protection of human rights in every country.

Independent Investigations

The UN mandates the Human Rights Council to establish commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions to address situations of serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, whether long-standing or resulting from sudden events, and to promote accountability for such violations and combat impunity. Examples of such commissions and missions include: The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, and the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya.

You can learn more about the nature "modus operandi" of these mechanisms and communicate with them, as well as the dates of their meetings through the [official website](#) of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Human Rights Mechanisms

● Regional Human Rights Mechanisms

In addition to UN mechanisms, regional frameworks have been established under organizations such as the European Union, African Union, and the Organization of American States.

For activists and human rights defenders in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, engagement occurs at the crossroads of the [African and Arab human rights systems](#). The African system — overseen by the [African Union](#) — is recognized for its evolving effectiveness, while the Arab system, administered by the [League of Arab States](#), remains structurally fragile and ineffective.

Exile provides activists with critical opportunities to engage with international mechanisms, present testimonies, and document human rights violations. Through such efforts, they contribute to global advocacy, influence policy, and hold governments accountable for their human rights obligations.

📄 Case Study — Egyptian Human Rights

Egyptian Human Rights Organizations Pursue Legal Action Against the Government Before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for Involvement in Sexual Assault and Harassment of Female Protesters

📌 Context

In 2005, Egypt underwent constitutional amendments that altered the regulations for selecting the President. At the time, the Egyptian opposition viewed these changes as a prelude to Gamal Mubarak, son of the late President Hosni Mubarak, ascending to power while effectively blocking any competitive presidential candidacy.

On May 25, 2005, a group of protesters, including women, gathered in front of the Egyptian Journalists' Syndicate to oppose these constitutional amendments. During this demonstration, several female journalists were subjected to sexual harassment and assault by individuals affiliated with the ruling party. These attacks occurred under the watch of security forces, who were present in large numbers and had cordoned off the protest. Despite attempts by the survivors to seek justice, legal efforts to hold the perpetrators accountable or to prosecute law enforcement officials for their failure to protect them were unsuccessful.

🎯 Main Objectives

To hold the perpetrators and those orchestrating the sexual harassment and assault of opposition female journalists in 2005 accountable.

To ensure that state authorities fulfill their obligation to protect individuals from gender-based violence and to provide justice for survivors.

📈 Activities & Impact

After exhausting all domestic legal remedies and facing the dismissal of investigations into the sexual harassment and assault of female journalists, three of the survivors sought assistance from the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) — a prominent Egyptian human rights organization. With support from Interights, the survivors filed a complaint before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) on May 18, 2006. The complaint led to a legal battle that lasted seven years, during which representatives of the Egyptian government made multiple attempts to deny responsibility for the violations. On March 14, 2013, the ACHPR issued a ruling condemning the Egyptian government, calling for a reopening of investigations into the "Black Wednesday" incidents, prosecution of the perpetrators, and compensation for the four complainants for the physical and psychological harm they suffered. However, the Egyptian government refused to comply with the Commission's ruling and issued an official response rejecting the decision, triggering widespread international criticism.





PATHWAY 3:

TRANSNATIONAL ALLIANCE AND NETWORK BUILDING

Building alliances among human rights defenders and their organizations is a vital strategy for amplifying advocacy efforts and maximizing their impact. Below are several recommendations for establishing strong networks from exile:

↳ **Effective network planning** is the cornerstone of success. A participatory approach should be adopted to define a shared vision, objectives, and membership criteria for both individuals and institutional entities.

↳ **Establishing clear values** and internal governance mechanisms help prevent internal conflicts that could undermine the alliance.

↳ **Structural Clarity:** While decentralized networks are often preferred, having a well-defined structure, decision-making processes, and a fair distribution of responsibilities is crucial for success.

↳ **Respect for diversity and differences:** Valuing diversity within the network ensures a wide range of expertise and perspectives, strengthening representation for different communities from the home country.

↳ **Mutual Support:** Members should exchange technical, institutional, logistical, financial, and moral support. This fosters trust, strengthens relationships, and enhances solidarity in the face of challenges encountered in exile.

↳ **Independence of Members:** Networks should unify efforts without overshadowing the individual or institutional identities of their members. Each entity should maintain its independence while contributing to the collective cause.

↳ **Understanding the Host Country Context:** Activists in exile must study and understand the legal, political, social, and cultural environment of their host country. This knowledge helps identify opportunities, such as the presence of international

human rights organizations that share their advocacy goals.

↳ **Engagement with Local Organizations:**

Collaborating with local civil society groups in exile can open new opportunities and expand support beyond their usual audience in their home country.

↳ **Sustaining Connections with Domestic Activists:**

Maintaining strong ties with human rights defenders who remain in the home country is crucial to ensuring advocacy efforts inside and outside the country are complementary.

↳ **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Impact**

Assessment: Regularly assessing the network's performance allows for measuring achievements, documenting progress, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and making informed strategic decisions.

↳ **Patience and Adaptability:** Building alliances is not an easy task. It requires resilience and a willingness to adapt to inevitable member losses while continuously working to fill gaps left by departures.



PATHWAY 4:

CRIMINAL ACCOUNTABILITY / PROSECUTION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATORS

In recent years, human rights activists and defenders have increasingly turned to judicial mechanisms in host countries to prosecute perpetrators of human rights violations. By leveraging the presence of victims and, in some cases, perpetrators within the same jurisdiction, survivors have successfully initiated legal proceedings against those responsible for grave violations.

This approach has led to significant legal victories, with courts in [Berlin](#), [Paris](#), and [Washington](#), among others, issuing convictions against war criminals and individuals implicated in serious human rights violations in their home countries. Notably, legal action has been pursued against individuals from the

Middle East and North Africa, where widespread and severe violations continue.

One of the most striking examples of this development was the issuance of [two arrest warrants](#) by French courts against former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, marking a landmark moment in the pursuit of accountability for state-led atrocities.

Case Study — Hind Rajab Foundation

Hind Rajab Foundation Pursues Israeli Soldiers Involved in War Crimes in Gaza



Context

Following the attacks launched by Palestinian armed groups on October 7, 2023, the [Israeli army waged a devastating war against the Gaza Strip](#), committing crimes against humanity. These violations included targeting civilians, forced displacement, starvation, and acts of genocide.

One of the victims of this war was five-year-old Hind Rajab, who was killed by an Israeli tank after being trapped in a vehicle surrounded by the bodies of her family members — murdered before her eyes by Israeli forces. Later, the bodies of the paramedics who attempted to rescue her were also found.

In response to this tragedy, the Hind Rajab Foundation was established in 2024 in Brussels, Belgium. Its mission is to combat impunity for war crimes committed in Gaza and to honor the memory of Hind Rajab and all those who perished in the genocide in Gaza.

Main Objectives

The Hind Rajab Foundation primarily aims to hold Israeli soldiers and military leaders accountable for

their war crimes and human rights violations in Palestine, especially those committed during the war on Gaza.

Activities & Impact

Using criminal justice laws across different countries and international humanitarian law, the foundation actively pursues Israeli military personnel at three levels:

► **Dual-Nationality Soldiers:** The foundation targets Israeli soldiers who hold dual citizenship in countries other than Israel. Many legal systems allow prosecution for crimes committed outside national borders when the perpetrator is a citizen.

► **Tracking Soldiers Abroad:** The foundation monitors Israeli soldiers traveling abroad for tourism, seeking to hold them accountable in foreign jurisdictions.

► **International Legal Mechanisms:** The foundation utilizes available international legal avenues, including international courts and tribunals.

In November 2024, the foundation submitted a request to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to issue arrest warrants for approximately 1,000 Israeli soldiers. This request was supported by digital evidence, including content shared by Israeli soldiers on social media platforms.

Additionally, the foundation has filed legal complaints in several countries, including Sweden and Italy. While these efforts have not yet resulted in arrests, they have significantly restricted the international movement of Israeli military personnel.

In January 2025, Brazilian judicial authorities issued an urgent order for police to detain an Israeli soldier vacationing in Brazil for questioning regarding his involvement in war crimes in Gaza. This action followed a complaint filed by the Hind Rajab Foundation. However, the soldier fled Brazil immediately with assistance from the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

Through its persistent legal actions, the Hind Rajab Foundation has made it increasingly difficult for Israeli military personnel to travel freely, thereby escalating pressure for accountability and justice.



PATHWAY 5: STRENGTHENING PEACE, RECONCILIATION AND PEACEBUILDING PROCESSES IN THE HOME COUNTRIES

Many Arab countries are experiencing violent armed conflicts, whether of an international or domestic/civil nature. From the occupied Palestinian territories to the civil war in Sudan, and the armed conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Iraq, these conflicts have made activists and human rights defenders crucial players in promoting peace within their home countries and working to end armed conflicts.

Some peace activists engaged in peacebuilding in a specific country organize various activities to promote a culture of peace and acceptance of others within that society. This is done through digital campaigns, knowledge production, and artistic activities. Others carry out initiatives within refugee and diaspora communities to achieve the same goals by attempting to rebuild common ground among the people of their homeland and resist hate speech, which is often one of the causes of civil armed conflicts.

Other peace activists attempt to play roles in bridging the gap between conflicting parties, persuading them to sit at the negotiation table and address their disputes in an effort to end the armed conflict at home. The presence of activists abroad provides an opportunity to hold such meetings without the fear that one of the warring parties might plan to harm the other.

There are also other groups of activists and human rights defenders who work on documenting violations and tracking perpetrators, as justice is a fundamental pillar of comprehensive peacebuilding and reconciliation in societies that have suffered from widespread human rights violations during armed conflicts.

Human rights defenders contribute to creating records of violations and collecting evidence as a prelude to tracking perpetrators and reducing impunity to achieve justice and redress for victims and their families. This also serves as a deterrent against future violations by preventing officials from committing the same crimes in the future.

The pursuit of justice and the enforcement of the rule of law — whether through domestic courts, foreign courts in exile countries, or even international courts — is a cornerstone in breaking away from the past and starting new chapters in the future of post-conflict societies and states.

Exiled activists propose action plans and legislative and policy recommendations that help promote civil peace, end conflicts, and establish the rule of law. These individuals benefit from their accumulated expertise and knowledge gained from their work in their home countries or from specialized learning experiences in their host countries. They also benefit from exchanging experiences with others who have successful peacebuilding backgrounds in similar contexts, as well as from the expertise of specialists and research centers in exile countries.

In addition to the above-mentioned approaches, exiled activists sometimes organize themselves alongside migrant and refugee communities in exile into political coalitions aimed at playing a key role in advocating specific political, economic, and social agendas during the post-conflict rebuilding phase. These individuals also work on mobilizing political and public support at the global level and soliciting donations and financial resources necessary to fund the implementation of their strategies on the ground after the war ends.

Overall, human rights defenders play a fundamental role in peacebuilding efforts by adhering to the principles of international human rights law and international humanitarian law as the foundation and framework for peacebuilding, ending conflicts, holding perpetrators accountable, establishing legal institutions and official structures to replace those that were destroyed in post-civil war states, and ensuring that their work serves as a fundamental safeguard against the resurgence of armed conflicts.

Case Study — Syria/Sweden Diaspora

Sweden's Syrian Diaspora Organizes to Help Build a New Syria

i Context

After a brutal war that spanned nearly 14 years, the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria officially fell with the armed Syrian opposition taking control of the capital Damascus and Assad fleeing to Russia. More than half a million people were killed and the country was divided into zones of influence controlled by different warring parties, as well as widespread destruction of infrastructure and production sectors with an estimated financial damage of approximately 600 billion dollars, while poverty affected 69 per cent of the Syrian population in 2022.

The day after the announcement of Al-Assad regime fall, a group of young Syrians living in Sweden launched the "Syrier i Sverige initiativ" which aims to use their expertise, knowledge and experiences gained in the diaspora to benefit Syria by developing various projects in the fields of: health, education, technology, energy and infrastructure, with the goal of transferring best practices and modern technologies that have been adopted in Sweden to the Syrian homeland.

@ Main Objectives

The initiative aims to bring together distinguished Syrian competencies that have accomplished successes in various fields in Sweden, and capitalise on these successes in various sectors within Syria, whether in the medical, informatics, engineering or economic fields, by providing practical solutions that contribute to building Syria in a sustainable manner that relies on knowledge and modern technology.

Activities & Impact

In its manifesto, which was published online in early March 2025, the initiative stated that more than 300 volunteers and experts in a variety of fields including medicine, psychiatry, engineering, education, economics, journalism, and politics have joined the

initiative to draft and submit solutions and action plans that contribute to the building and reconstruction of Syria. The initiative also declared its openness to partnership with Syrian and international entities, inside and outside Syria, to cooperate in building "The New Syria." Due to its recent formation, the initiative has not yet published any action plans or organised any official events.



Q PATHWAY 6 :

MONITORING, DOCUMENTATION AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

As mentioned earlier, monitoring, documentation, knowledge production, and art in their various forms are key parts of the advocacy process. For activists and defenders in exile, being away from the hands of repressive authorities in their home countries allows them more space to carry out monitoring and documentation by relying on communicating with victims online, or analysing available data and digital evidence on the internet, media, and social media. In addition to analysing policies and legislation and presenting legislative and policy alternatives that are more consistent with international human rights standards. This also includes artistic products such as drawings, visual designs, videos, songs, and other artistic products that activists produce in exile to advocate for their causes and raise public awareness of these issues, whether in their home countries or in countries of exile.

As for documenting violations specifically, having someone outside the country and conducting this documentation through a secure and encrypted

digital medium may encourage victims of violations to talk about them. This may encourage victims of violations to talk about their stories, unlike if they are asked to talk to someone — who may be monitored — inside the country where they were violated.



PATHWAY 7:

ORGANIZING PROTEST ACTIVITIES IN EXILE

The relative freedom available in most of the countries of exile to which activists and human rights defenders have resorted enables them to practise forms of activities that are often difficult for them to practise in their native countries, especially mass protest activities in the streets and public spaces. Most countries in the Arab region have arbitrary restrictions on the right to protest and peaceful assembly. In some countries, peaceful protesters can even be detained for many years. Protest activities organised in exile often follow one of two paths: the first of which is the practice of protest activities in front of the headquarters of governments in exile to pressure these governments to take certain political positions towards the authorities involved in human rights violations in their home countries — such as easing political and trade relations, or refraining from exporting arms and repressive equipment.

The second path of protest activities in exile is to demonstrate or protest in front of the diplomatic headquarters and embassies of their respective countries or in front of the residence of presidents and royals during their visits to the country where the activists are based. Protest activities are used to highlight human rights violations within countries, put pressure on those in power to take action to stop these violations, or stigmatize presidents and monarchs externally as a form of moral punishment for their involvement in gross human rights violations.

Activists sometimes organise advocacy activities on the sidelines of major international events such as UN General Assembly meetings, the UN Climate Conference, etc. in order to draw attention to the causes they are advocating for.

Case Study — Patrick George Zaki

Protest Activities in Exile Open a Door of Freedom for Egyptian Human Rights Defender

i Context

After a brutal war that spanned nearly 14 years, the Patrick George Zaki is an Egyptian researcher and human rights defender. He was arrested from Cairo Airport on 7 February 2020 upon his arrival from Italy where he was studying for his Master's degree at the University of Bologna. He was then transferred blindfolded to a security facility where he was interrogated about the nature of his work/studies and his activities in defending human rights. He was tortured with beatings and electric shocks. Patrick was subsequently tried before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), an exceptional court whose rulings cannot be appealed and whose decisions are directly intervened in by the Egyptian president, as the court's rulings are not valid until they are ratified by the president. The prosecution charged Patrick with "spreading false news", "inciting unauthorized protests", "inciting violence and terrorism", and "calling for the overthrow of the state". The arrest comes in the context of violent crackdowns in Egypt after current President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi took office in 2014.

🎯 Main Objectives

Immediate release of Patrick George Zaki and ending the prosecution against him.

📈 Activities & Impact

Patrick spent 22 months in preventive detention before being released pending trial. During this period, Patrick's colleagues at the University of Bologna and dozens of human rights defenders in Egypt and abroad were actively organizing various forms of protest activities, mostly based in Italy. Patrick's colleagues and friends launched a Facebook page to spread the news of these events and updates about Patrick himself. Patrick was finally released on 7 December 2021 with the continuation of his trial proceedings, which ended on 18 July 2023 with a 3-year prison sentence. However, the next day a presidential pardon was issued for Patrick and he was released again to finally embrace freedom.

**PATHWAY 8:****APPEALING AND
ORGANISING
MEETINGS WITH
FOREIGN
GOVERNMENTS IN
EXILE**

In parallel to the protest form of advocacy carried out by activists in exile, there is also a more diplomatic form of advocacy: making public appeals online or through the media to governments in exile and leaders of international organisations in order to respond to specific demands, or meeting with these people face-to-face in order to ask them to adopt certain political positions towards the cause they are advocating for.

A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN PLANNING

A Practical Framework for Advocacy Campaign Planning

As mentioned earlier, advocacy activities and formats are diverse and cannot be strictly categorized. However, advocacy campaigns remain the most well-known and widespread approach to advocacy efforts globally. These campaigns typically consist of a series of pre-planned activities designed to create a positive impact on the targeted issue. In the realm of human rights advocacy, campaigns can be understood as coordinated and strategic efforts carried out within a specific timeframe to promote the enjoyment of one or more fundamental human rights or to mitigate violations affecting these rights.

The nature of activities included in advocacy campaigns is equally diverse and ever-evolving. Human rights defenders continuously develop new forms of activities and interventions to achieve the desired impact. The selection of activities for any campaign is a collective decision made by the campaign team and relevant stakeholders. This decision is based on factors such as the nature of the right being defended, the extent and prevalence of the violation, the capacities and resources of the campaign team, and the surrounding political, legal, economic, and social context.

Advocacy campaigns share similarities with other types of campaigns, particularly in their reliance on mobilization as a core component. However, what distinguishes advocacy campaigns is the way this mobilization is directed. For example, electoral campaigns involve structured efforts to mobilize citizens in a given country to vote for or against a candidate. Advertising campaigns aim to persuade the public to purchase a specific product or service. In contrast, the primary goal of mobilization in advocacy campaigns is to engage target groups in defending one or more fundamental human rights — whether these groups are directly affected by the

absence or violation of those rights or are external to the affected population but are expected to express solidarity and provide support.

There are numerous methodologies — potentially dozens or even hundreds — for planning advocacy campaigns. Despite variations in these methodologies, their core principles remain largely the same. The following three questions form the foundation of any advocacy planning process:

- ▶ What is your issue?
- ▶ What impact do you want to achieve?
- ▶ How will you achieve it?

We propose a detailed practical model for planning and implementing advocacy campaigns. This model consists of five key steps:



STEP ONE: IDENTIFYING AND ANALYZING THE ISSUE

The perspective through which advocacy processes view social issues and human rights violations in a given community differs relatively from the developmental approach to the same issues. Both recognize an unmet need for change; however, advocacy considers that this change should primarily be driven by the affected individuals themselves, with the support of allies. In contrast, the developmental approach does not necessarily prioritize the direct involvement of affected individuals as active agents to the same extent. Instead, it may suffice with opening a dialogue with them about the issue/violation and proposed solutions without fully engaging them in the subsequent steps.

Thus, identifying an advocacy issue begins by determining whether the issue directly and personally impacts part or all of the advocacy team. Many groups may not be able to advocate for their own issues due to various constraints. For example, prisoners suffering from inhumane detention conditions or individuals who cannot publicly reveal their identities due to potential risks. In such cases, allies working on these issues have a duty and responsibility to involve the affected individuals in all steps of the advocacy process. Their ultimate goal should be to empower rights-holders to take ownership of their struggle and lead their own advocacy efforts.

In general, advocacy becomes necessary when there is a systemic injustice or a violation of a fundamental human right. Advocacy campaigns do not address ideal conditions but rather seek to create meaningful change in a social, political, or economic context, particularly for marginalized and oppressed groups such as women, children, and religious or ethnic minorities.

Understanding and analyzing the issue is the first step in planning any advocacy activities aimed at achieving positive change. The following questions can help you assess and define your issue effectively:

➤ What is the issue?

Provide a comprehensive description of the issue, its scope, and contributing factors. It is preferable to support this description with relevant statistics, reports, or case studies if available. Where does this issue occur geographically?

➤ What are the consequences of the issue?

Why is it urgent? Why does it require immediate attention and intervention?

➤ Who is affected by the issue?

Identify the individuals or groups impacted directly or indirectly.

➤ What are the underlying causes and factors sustaining the issue?

It is important to examine multiple layers of contributing factors. For example, if one cause of the issue is the absence of legal protections, we should ask: Why has the legislative authority failed to implement protective laws?

➤ Is the issue linked to legislation, public policies, or social norms?

Is the absence of legal frameworks a key factor? Does existing legislation contribute to the issue (e.g., discriminatory laws)? Is the issue a result of an actively enforced public policy, or is it due to governmental negligence and inaction?

➤ What is the general public's perception of the issue?

Do they recognize it as a problem or human rights violation? Why or why not?

After answering these questions, a well-structured issue statement should be formulated. The more precise and detailed this statement is, the more effectively it will guide the subsequent steps of planning and executing an advocacy campaign.

STEP TWO: DEVELOP CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVES

An objective or a set of objectives represents the positive change we seek to achieve in addressing the targeted issue. Given the complexity and deeply rooted nature of human rights violations, advocacy campaigns do not necessarily aim for the complete elimination of a violation or problem or for an immediate shift to an ideal reality. Instead, the objective should be to take concrete steps toward a more just and equitable reality, gradually reducing the prevalence and impact of the issue.

Building on the analysis conducted in the previous step, we can identify the root causes of the issue or violation. Our advocacy efforts should then focus on addressing one or more of these causes to reduce the severity or scope of violations. While multiple contributing factors may be targeted, it is essential that our chosen goal aligns with our team's capacity and available resources. Advocacy is a cumulative process — our efforts represent one step on a larger path of change, preceded by prior initiatives and followed by future actions led by other human rights defenders.

At this stage, we need to define two types of objectives:

General Objectives

A general objective articulates the broad, long-term positive change we aim to achieve within the context of the issue. It represents a strategic vision shared by advocacy groups working on the same issue. Typically, an advocacy campaign focuses on a single general objective, such as:

- ➔ **Reducing the incidence of torture in Country X.**
- ➔ **Supporting efforts to hold perpetrators of torture accountable in Country X.**
- ➔ **Building public opposition to torture crimes in Country X.**
- ➔ **Enhancing citizens' right to bodily integrity in Country X.**

Specific (Operational) Objectives

Specific objectives break down the general objective into smaller, measurable, and achievable objectives that directly contribute to the desired change. These goals must be realistic, aligned with the team's capacity, and adaptable to evolving circumstances.

A widely used framework for formulating effective objectives is the **SMART goals** ^[13] **model**, ensuring that each goal is:

S

SPECIFIC

The goal focuses on a well-defined aspect of the issue.

Example: Raising awareness among 5,000 young people in the Arab region about fair and free election standards by the end of 2026.

M

MEASURABLE

The goal must include clear indicators for assessing progress, whether through quantitative (numerical) or qualitative measures.

Example: Number of people reached, percentage change in awareness scores.

R

REALISTIC &
APPROPRIATE

The goal is not unattainable or utopian. It must also be feasible/appropriate to the campaign team's capabilities and to the current context. For example, you cannot aim to achieve the integrity and transparency of the electoral process under a political system that does not conduct periodic elections in the first place.

A

ALIGNED

Each specific goal should directly support the overarching advocacy objective and align with the organization's expertise and capacity

T

TIME-BOUND

There should be a specific timeframe for achieving this goal; otherwise the work of the campaign will be ongoing indefinitely. You can specify the time within the objectives in different ways: a specific period (within the year 2025), a specific date (between 1 January and 31 March 2026), and other ways too.

The setting of minimal operational goals is particularly critical when working in hostile or restrictive contexts, as optimism in setting high goals that are difficult to achieve is an ideal way to spread discouragement and a sense of defeat and consequently resignation to the cause and its advocates.

Therefore, advocacy teams should remain flexible, allowing for adjustments to specific goals based on emerging challenges or new opportunities. A well-defined, yet general, goal ensures that even if specific objectives need to shift, the campaign would remain focused on creating tangible, positive change.

A well-written general objective ensures that we are capable of adjusting and changing the specific objectives according to developments while remaining oriented towards achieving a positive impact for the cause being advocated for. Goals may be modified as new opportunities for change arise.

STEP THREE: CONTEXT ANALYSIS

After defining the desired positive change and formulating it into a general objective, along with its corresponding sub-goals or operational objectives, the next step is to analyze the context in which the advocacy campaign will take place. Before strategizing how to achieve these goals, we must first gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of the surrounding landscape.

This involves mapping the opportunities and challenges, identifying potential allies, and recognizing possible opponents. There are multiple tools available for context analysis, each helping to assess different factors that may impact the campaign's effectiveness. Below, we introduce two widely used tools, though they can be adapted, replaced, or combined with others that better suit the campaign's specific needs.

Tool 1: SWOT Analysis ^[14]

The SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) is a strategic tool commonly used across various fields, including advocacy planning, to assess both internal and external factors affecting a campaign.



The upper section of the model represents internal factors, while the lower section represents external factors. The left half signifies supportive factors, whereas the right half signifies complex factors.

It is crucial to highlight that in any step of the quadrant analysis, our campaign implementation strategy must be reflected. For instance, if a team member possesses strong advocacy skills, these should be leveraged to enhance campaign activities. Similarly, if there is a deficiency in financial resources, our campaign should prioritize seeking funding from financial partners.

Tool 2: The Spectrum of Allies

The [New Tactics in Human Rights Program](#) developed this tool to assist human rights defenders/advocates in planning their own advocacy campaigns. The concept of this tool is to study and map the persons and entities influencing the issue and the campaign.

When applying this tool, avoid generalisation by mentioning terms such as (mass) media, community, religious institutions, etc. Even specific institutions such as the "Legislative Council" — try to unbundle them, because not all members of the council or parliament have the same position on your cause or campaign.

This tool creates a map consisting of 5 categories and identifies the persons and entities within each category:

Active Allies

These are individuals who strongly believe in your cause and actively collaborate with you to achieve shared objectives.

Maintaining engagement with this group is essential to ensuring sustained campaign momentum. Expertise within the team, such as legal knowledge, media skills, or advocacy experience. Financial resources available to sustain campaign activities. Established networks and partnerships that can amplify outreach efforts.

Passive Allies

These individuals support your cause but do not actively contribute due to various reasons, such as a lack of knowledge about how to help.

You can engage them by raising awareness and encouraging participation, eventually transforming them into active allies.

Neutral

These individuals have not yet taken a stance on the issue. The key to engaging them is providing clear and factual information about your cause. Their neutrality may be due to a lack of awareness rather than opposition.

Passive Opponents

These are individuals who hold opposing views but do not actively work against your cause. Engaging with them through dialogue and strategic persuasion may help shift their stance or neutralize their opposition.

Active Opponents

These are individuals/ persons who are openly opposing our objectives and they will endeavour in every way to thwart our efforts. As direct opponents or beneficiaries of the status quo, our activities can be aimed at putting them in a predicament where any action they take against us will cost them a lot, so they may prefer to move into the category of 'inactive opponents' rather than openly oppose the goals of our campaign...

STEP FOUR: SELECTING ACTIVITIES AND DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN

After conducting an in-depth study of our cause, identifying the desired positive impact, and analyzing the context, we are now prepared to consider the practical steps that will turn the goal into a reality. We will be thinking about what interventions we will implement on the ground, and how we can implement them.

Interventions or activities are the detailed steps we have to take to achieve the goal. An activity is a specific action or set of actions taken to achieve a specific effect that brings us closer to our campaign goal.

For example, if the goal of your campaign is for the parliament to ratify **the International Convention for the Protection of Persons from Enforced Disappearance** (ICPPED), here are some example activities:

- ▶ Launching a mass petition to collect half a million signatures from citizens to pressure parliament members to ratify the convention.
- ▶ Issuing a joint press release from human rights organisations, lawyers' and journalists' associations calling on the authorities to ratify the Convention.
- ▶ Organise a protest in front of Parliament building to introduce them to the cause and invite them to show solidarity with the campaign's calls.
- ▶ Organising 100 personal visits to the offices of MPs known for their support of human rights issues to convince them to adopt a position in favour of ratifying the Convention within the parliament and to mobilise other MPs in solidarity with this demand.
- ▶ Hosting an open art exhibition in the nearest square to the parliament to illustrate the gravity of the crimes of enforced disappearance on the safety and freedom of citizens.

Evaluating and Selecting the Most Effective Activities

When choosing which activities to prioritize, strategic impact and feasibility must be assessed. The following criteria help determine the most effective actions:

- ① **Safety Considerations** — Activities must protect the safety of campaign members and human rights defenders.
- ② **Relevance to the Campaign** — Activities should directly contribute to achieving campaign objectives and involve key stakeholders.
- ③ **Cost-Effectiveness** — The most impactful activities should be selected based on their effectiveness relative to the required resources.
- ④ All campaign team members agree on the choice of this activity.
- ⑤ The activity is innovative and new. New activities open up new opportunities, while old and repetitive activities often won't achieve anything different for you than what you have achieved for others.
- ⑥ The activity does not involve any violation of a human right either for those inside or outside the campaign team.
- ⑦ This activity takes into account the involvement of the cause's owners and other stakeholders in the advocacy process.
- ⑧ The activity respects dominant societal values and norms. In some cases, our activities aim to change these values. In this case, our campaign must propose and promote an alternative value system.

The New Tactics in Human Rights programme provides a unique resource, compiling a number of innovative tactics (activities) implemented by human rights defenders/advocates around the world. The database of these tactics (Tactics Database) can be accessed at: <https://www.newtactics.org/find-tactics/>

There is no standard rule that determines the number of activities required to reach a particular goal; reaching one of our campaign goals may require the implementation of a single activity, or it may require the implementation of dozens of activities.

Generally, once we have decided on the activities required to implement each of the campaign objectives, we need to develop a detailed plan for all these activities and link this plan to a specific timeframe. The plan outlines the responsibilities of each member of the campaign team and the steps

they will take in implementing the activities.

There are dozens of formats for drafting plans. The template below is suitable for staff who are just beginning their first steps in advocacy campaign planning. When preparing detailed action plans, we must ensure that all members of the campaign team are involved in the planning process, in partnership with the owners of the cause. Tasks should be distributed in a balanced manner, taking into account the skills, expertise and abilities of each member.

Evaluating and Selecting the Most

Although action plans are a detailed document that draws a full comprehensible map of campaign activities, they should be flexible and able to absorb updates/changes and developments, deal with emergency situations and absorb shocks, as rigid plans are the easiest route to failure.

Activity	Steps	Responsible Person	Execution Date	Notes / Remarks
An example: To execute a panel discussion with members of Constitutional and Legislation Affairs Committee in The Egyptian House of Representatives on 'the ratification of International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance'	1 — Booking a conference room/hall	Shaima'	10th of November 2025	
	2 — Inviting targeted Members of Parliament to attend	Suliman	13 November 2025	
	3 — Conducting the discussion panel: Logistical supervision and the dialogue tool	Hajar	20 December 2025	
	4 — Documenting the outputs of the panel discussion	Bahi	20 December 2025	

STEP FIVE:

CAMPAIGN EVALUATION

The campaign evaluation plan is part of the 'detailed campaign planning process', where we select the method to measure the impact of this campaign and explore how successful we have been in achieving the pre-identified objectives. Evaluation plans are the final step in the advocacy campaign planning methodology, and the actual evaluation of the campaign takes place after all activities have been implemented. In some long running campaigns, evaluation can be conducted on an interim basis — for example, annually — in addition to the final evaluation.

Evaluation in the context of advocacy campaigns is a term that refers to the systematic process of measuring the impact of the advocacy process itself. It also includes monitoring the results achieved and the reasons why these results were achieved. It can also be described as the process of measuring the success of a project, programme or campaign in reaching the goals that were planned.

To carry out the evaluation/measurement process, we need a variety of information about the process of implementing campaign activities. This information and data is provided by another process called **"follow-up"**, which is closely related to the evaluation process. Although the nature and objectives of follow-up are different from evaluation, evaluation cannot be conducted without a follow-up process.

For The follow-up process plays very important roles in explaining and motivating the decisions made by the campaign management. The follow-up process also provides the necessary documentation of the implementation stages of the advocacy campaign, and is a way of learning and gaining experience over the course of the campaign's life. The follow-up process also helps the campaign management to make sound and appropriate decisions, and helps the team to continuously make the necessary adjustments to the detailed work plans.

Follow-up can be conducted in several ways, including the following:

- ▶ Reviewing the technical reports prepared by the campaign team periodically after the implementation of the campaign activities.
- ▶ Watching the visual clips and video and audio recordings of the campaign activities.
- ▶ Field visits to the implementation sites of the campaign activities to watch and observe the performance of the team members.
- ▶ Conducting individual and group meetings (focus groups) with the campaign team, partners, and targets of the activities.

Talking about evaluation, there are different methodologies for evaluating advocacy campaigns, the most popular of which is the results-based evaluation methodology. Here, we rely on the objectives themselves to formulate the evaluation indicators. The indicators are the benchmark that we will use to measure the success of our campaign. There are two main types of indicators:

① Quantitative Indicators

A type of indicator whose sole function is to quantitatively or numerically measure the success in achieving the objectives.

Example: Campaign objective: Gain the support of 100 Members of Parliament (MPs) to ratify the 'Convention Against Torture.'

Quantitative indicator: Successfully collect approval signatures from 100 MPs.

At the end of the campaign activities, we could state that we have achieved our goal by 100 per cent or less. We could also state that we have achieved an exceptional success and mobilised the signatures of 120 MPs. Therefore, we will have achieved this goal by 120%.

Quantitative indicators can take multiple forms such as: distributing a certain number of leaflets to citizens, getting a certain number of views on campaign films, and so on.

② Qualitative Indicators

A type of indicator whose function is solely to measure our success in reaching the essence of the goal itself, such as citizens' conviction of the message embedded in the leaflets that were handed out to them, the quality and innovation of these leaflets, and the changing positions of the target groups on the issue of the campaign. There are multiple ways to measure these types of indicators, but they may require some expertise or specialised training in the field of monitoring and evaluation.

③ Target Audience Assessment

Other aspects of advocacy campaigns can also be evaluated using different tools, such as the evaluation/assessment of the target audience^[16] and the effects of the advocacy process on them. **These questions will help you conduct this type of assessment:**

- ▶ Were the people initially identified as key targets the right choices of influence in order to achieve the desired change?
- ▶ Have any of them changed over time, and if so, how?
- ▶ Have you come across new stakeholders that need to be involved in the advocacy process?
- ▶ Have you learnt anything new about your key target personas/target audience?

Campaigns can also be assessed by their success in changing the positions of people and entities in the "Allies Spectrum" analysis model previously referred to in Step 3, by moving them from opposition to the cause, or neutrality, to the area of active or inactive allies.

SAFETY FIRST: ANALYZING RISKS OF ADVOCACY MISSIONS

Safety First: Analyzing Risks of Advocacy Missions and How to Deal with It

As previously stated, advocacy from exile is different, in terms of the margin of freedom and safety that defenders enjoy now since they are 'relatively' far from the clutches of authoritarian regimes, but this does not mean that they are 'completely' safe. It is important to note that running advocacy operations from abroad is not a picnic or a risk-free process. Abusers still have the ability to harm defenders and activists, though in different ways. We will try to recognise the 'types' of these risks and how they can be 'dealt with' to achieve the concept of 'comprehensive safety' for human rights defenders and activists.

Recognizing and Understanding Risks

Doing advocacy is a recipe for trouble! Advocacy attempts to rebalance an unbalanced state of power, so the party or parties who benefit from this imbalance will work hard to disrupt the advocacy process, and at a later stage may even hurt or abuse the people doing the advocacy themselves, especially in situations where the opponents represent or hold some sort of political power.

It is our responsibility to recognise the risks that surround our work and accept them as part of the potential cost we are willing to pay to achieve the intended change. Both understanding and

acceptance are the first steps to dealing with these risks later in the process.

Understanding and assimilating risks is about digging deeper into the nature of these risks, understanding the context in which they may exist, and understanding how our own particular attributes affect our risk exposure compared to our peers working on similar issues or in similar contexts.

Intersectionality is a primary perspective that helps us understand and assimilate the risks associated with advocacy processes. Intersectionality is the manner in which we understand how the intersection of various human identities and attributes (e.g. religion, race, gender, sexual identity, colour, age, etc.) affects the fragility/resilience of the advocacy team and their increased/decreased potential for vulnerability. In this context, female human rights activists or human rights defenders are often exposed to other types of risks than those faced by male defenders and activists. These risks include the threat of sexual assault, actual sexual assault, or societal stigma and questioning of their sexual behaviour.

LGBTQI+ activists and human rights defenders are also more likely to be targeted by authorities, and ordinary people or the general public. Some exile countries may be less welcoming to them than to other activists and human rights defenders. They have a higher risk of being subjected to aggression (physical attacks).

"The ways in which human rights defenders are perceived affect their space for work and their security. Stigmatisation is a common method of deterring them, and occurs in different ways — from name-calling, shaming, insinuations, accusations, the spreading of false rumours and lies, to smear campaigns, judicial harassment and criminalization. The negative impacts of stigmatisation can be invisible, subtle, and long-lasting; they can result in more threats and attacks against defenders and the fragmentation of communities and movements. Countering the stigmatisation of human rights defenders is critical to their security and protection, as is the promotion of the legitimacy of their human rights practice."

— The Activists Project, Human Rights Defender Hub, Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York

Monitoring and Analyzing Risks

"In spite of threats to our space for work and personal expression, we don't often give up: we decide to keep challenging the injustices which we see in the world. For this reason, we can think of security for human rights defenders as well-being in action: being physically and emotionally healthy and sustaining ourselves while continuing to do the work that we believe is important, and carrying out the necessary analysis and planning to stay secure on our own terms."

— Tactical Technology Collective

There is a never-ending list of risks that can accompany our work in human rights advocacy, and as mentioned earlier, there are various factors that control the possibility of occurrence of these risks and the quality and severity of them. However, the unique nature of each advocacy team's work remains a motivation to start monitoring and thinking about risks within the team first, before considering the involvement of other partners.

The term **risk** refers to any potential harm to one or more team members, or to their organisation. This harm can be physical, psychological, material, moral, digital, or otherwise. The list of risks within the scope of human rights advocacy begins with stigmatising and defaming people active in the advocacy process, up to the assassination of one or some of these individuals!

The Following Questions are Intended to Help Us Think About Risk Strategically

- ➔ What is the topic/issue of our advocacy?
- ➔ Who are the persons/entities supporting us in our endeavour?
- ➔ Who are the persons/entities whose interests will be directly or indirectly affected by our success?
- ➔ What is the scale of this impact? Will we cause them moral or physical damage/harm, or will our activities lead them to pay a penalty for their human rights violations?

- ➔ What capacities and capabilities do our allies have?
- ➔ What are the capacities, capabilities and authorities of our opponents?
- ➔ How was our opponents'/authorities'/society's response when other activists before us attempted to raise this issue?
- ➔ How have our fellow activists and defenders dealt with these kinds of risks before?
- ➔ What risks are we likely to face while advocating for this issue?

For each risk, it is important to ask ourselves the following questions:

- ➔ What is the likelihood of its occurrence? High — Medium — Low
- ➔ What is the severity of the resulting damage/harm: Major — Moderate — Minor
- ➔ How do we minimize the likelihood of this risk occurring?
- ➔ If the risk does occur, how do we minimize its expected impacts/harm/damage?

It's important to adopt a holistic approach when it comes to managing risk and ensuring team safety. Often, taking action without analysing our context, or adopting security measures in an ad-hoc manner or based on 'tradition' or hear-say, without carrying out an analysis of our context and the threats we face, often leads to us taking decisions which give us a false sense of security. Therefore, it is vital that we regularly map out the socio-political context in which we are acting, identifying as accurately as possible the threats that we face and updating the strategies, tools and tactics we can use to defend our space and continue working in an empowered manner.^[15]

Suggested Risk Mitigation Measures

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."

— Audre Lorde (1934–1992), American writer, professor, philosopher, intersectional feminist, poet and civil rights activist

The following table outlines a range of the most

prevalent risks in the work of human rights defenders and activists who conduct advocacy from exile and some suggested measures to address these risks by mitigating and minimising their likelihood of occurrence.

Unfortunately, advocating for positive change in authoritarian states is still a risky endeavour. However, being aware of these risks, and planning to address them is a guaranteed way to minimise the likelihood of such risks occurring and, if they do occur, to minimise the loss and damage they cause.

Type of Risk	Examples	Suggested Risk Mitigation Actions
Legal Risks	- Violating the laws of the host country and being prosecuted as a result. - Prosecution in the country of the defender or activist's nationality.	1. Careful study of the applicable laws of the host country, especially those related to freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, and laws regulating the work of associations and NGOs. Be keen not to break these laws. 2. Adhere to the laws in general. Do not put yourself in the position of a legal infraction or breach in the host country. Any legal dispute the activist is implicated in may be exploited to prosecute, stigmatise and defame them. 3. To examine the legal and political context governing the relations between the defender or activist's home country and the host country, including ensuring that it is difficult for the host country to be involved in forcibly returning them to their home country. 4. Follow up on any cases or accusations pursuing the person in their home country and entrust lawyers to make all possible efforts to finalise the prosecution. * To learn how to apply these and other tips in practice, please refer to the suggested resources in the Advocacy Kit section below.
Risks Related to Personal Safety	- Physical Assaults - Surveillance and tracking. - Stigmatisation - Denial of renewal or issuance of official documents from the embassy of the home country.	1. Utilise the legal and security protection mechanisms in the host country in the case of any perceived danger or aggression. 2. Allocate part of the advocacy team's efforts to counter false accusations that their opponents may throw to stigmatise them. For example, accusing them of working for a foreign country, or spreading 'moral deviation'/corruption in Arab societies, etc. 3. Researching the possibility of obtaining refugee status and its protective and legal documents. * To learn how to apply these and other tips in practice, please refer to the suggested resources in the Advocacy Kit section below.

Type of Risk	Examples	Suggested Risk Mitigation Actions
Digital Risks	- Surveillance of accounts and personal correspondence. - Grabbing sensitive data or hacking into personal accounts. - Physical seizure of electronic devices such as a computer or mobile phone.	1. Careful study of the applicable laws of the host country, especially those related to freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, and laws regulating the work of associations and NGOs. Be keen not to break these laws. 2. Adhere to the laws in general. Do not put yourself in the position of a legal infraction or breach in the host country. Any legal dispute the activist is implicated in may be exploited to prosecute, stigmatise and defame them. 3. To examine the legal and political context governing the relations between the defender or activist's home country and the host country, including ensuring that it is difficult for the host country to be involved in forcibly returning them to their home country. 4. Follow up on any cases or accusations pursuing the person in their home country and entrust lawyers to make all possible efforts to finalise the prosecution. * To learn how to apply these and other tips in practice, please refer to the suggested resources in the Advocacy Kit section below.
Psychological Risks	- Psychological disorders can occur as a result of forced exodus, or as a result of traumatic experiences the person had prior to exile. These disorders include depression, post-traumatic stress, pathological anxiety, etc. - Psychological exhaustion and job burnout. - Social isolation and alienation.	1. Obtain specialised training in digital safety protection. Or take advantage of the free related content available online. 2. Follow up on updates related to internet safety and security. Install security updates provided by the companies that provide us with operating systems and applications on an ongoing basis. 3. Keep physical devices and equipment (laptop — mobile phones —...) under our watchful eyes at all times while we are outside the house. 4. Encrypt work or advocacy data on our electronic devices, preferably fully encrypted. 5. Continuously back up the data on our electronic devices. 6. Limit the personal or work-related information we share on social media platforms. * To learn how to apply these and other tips in practice, please refer to the Advocacy Kit section below.
Other Risks	- Targeting the spouse, children and/or other family members who still reside in the defender's home country.	1. Limiting the information we share about our family members inside the home country, whether on social media or among our circles of friends and acquaintances. 2. Alert the closest family members to the possibility that they may be at risk as a result of an advocacy operation involving a family member, and involve them in developing emergency plans. 3. In some advocacy operations that are expected to antagonise the authoritarian regime within the country, it is possible to conceal the identity of the members of the team carrying out this operation. 4. Using the help of human rights organisations operating within the country to provide legal support in case any family member is targeted.

"Safety First is not a selfish slogan that implies putting the safety of activists and defenders before the issues they advocate for, but it is a message to these advocates and activists to remind them that the most important part of the activities they carry out to achieve change is that they remain safe and secure to carry on their advocacy and carry out new activities. The causes we work on need years to achieve the radical change we seek. This change will necessitate that we remain present and able to continue our efforts.

For human rights defenders and activists, taking into consideration safety in all its aspects is an act of resistance and a step on the road to social change. For those who raise their voices in the face of human rights violations to continue to do their part is certainly part of their fight."

ADVOCACY KIT

Advocacy Kit

In this section, we provide human rights defenders and activists with an introduction to a range of web-based knowledge resources that provide them with critical information and skills in the context of advocacy from exile.

Advocacy Tactics

[5 Steps to Strategic Effectiveness Method](#) As a [PDF file](#)

[Advocating for human rights causes using social media](#) [Only Available in Arabic]

[Advocacy in Restricted Spaces: A Toolkit for Civil Society](#) As a [PDF file](#)

[Digital Advocacy and Campaigns](#) [Only Available in Arabic]

[New Tactics in Human Rights: A Resource for Practitioners](#) (Book) As a [PDF file](#)

[United Nations Human Rights Council - A Practical Guide for NGO Participants](#) As a [PDF file](#)

Advocacy using international human rights protection mechanisms

[United Nations Human Rights Council - A Practical Guide for NGO Participants](#) As a [PDF file](#)

[The United Nations and Human Rights Protection: Guidance Manual](#) [Only Available in Arabic]

[Working with the UN Human Rights Programme: A Handbook for Civil Society](#) As a [PDF file](#)

[A Guide to Human Rights Council Special Procedures in the Syrian Context](#) [Only Available in Arabic]

Evaluating the Advocacy Process

[Evaluation Advancing Advocacy \(E2A\)](#)

Monitoring and documentation

[Training manual on human rights monitoring](#)
As a [PDF file](#)

[Documenting Human Rights Violations: A Training Manual for Syrian Human Rights Defenders](#), issued by the Syrian Network For Human Rights
As a [PDF file](#)

[Guide to Documenting Human Rights Violations](#)
[Only Available in Arabic]

[Regional Guide for Monitoring and Documenting Gender-Based Violence, with a Focus on Sexual Violence against Women in the Middle East and North Africa](#) [Only Available in Arabic]

Digital Security

[Digital Security Directory for Activists \(and Human Rights Defenders\) in the Middle East and North Africa \(MENA\)](#) [Available only in Arabic. [For more similar sources and documents](#)]

[Security in-a-box](#)
A digital security 'tools and tactics' [site](#)

[A digital safety platform](#) [Only Available in Arabic]

Comprehensive and holistic safety

[Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders \(2009\)](#) As a [PDF file](#)

[Workbook on Security: Practical Steps for Human Rights Defenders at Risk](#) As a [PDF file](#)

Psychological/ emotional safety and well-being

[Multiple sources and material on wellness and self care presented by FEMENA focusing on supporting women human rights defenders \(WHRDs\), their organizations, and feminist movements in the MENA and Asia regions.](#)

ANNEX

Annex 1

Advocacy Campaign Planning Worksheet

This worksheet provides a sample advocacy campaign plan. This section can be printed out and filled in with the previous content of the Advocacy Campaign Planning Framework to create a complete advocacy campaign plan.

Step I: Issue / Problem Identification & Analysis

The following questions will help you to analyse your case effectively:

① What is the Problem?

Here we present a comprehensive description of the issue and its boundaries, preferably accompanied by the available statistics and studies on the issue, if any. Where (geographically) does the problem occur?

② What are the potential consequences and results?

(Why is it urgent? Why does it deserve our attention?)

③ Determine the key audiences?

(Either directly or indirectly)

④ What are the factors that lead to the onset/continuation of this issue/problem?

It is crucial here to think in successive layers of factors/causes. For example, if one of the causes of the issue is the lack of criminalisation of an act in formal laws, let's question ourselves: "Why has the legislative authority failed to criminalise such an act until now?"

⑤ Is this issue/violation related to an enforced legislation / public policies / people's culture?

Is one of the causes of the issue the absence of legislation? Or is one of the causes the presence of legislation (e.g. legislation that discriminates between women and men in favour of men)? Is the issue related to a systematic policy that is already implemented, or is it linked to the authority failure or neglect of addressing the issue?

⑥ What is the position of the majority of the population on this issue?

Do they agree with your view of it as an issue/violation, and why?

After answering these questions, we can then draft a statement that explains the dimensions of the issue that we want to bring about positive change. The more detailed and concise this statement is, the more it will be helpful in the rest of the planning and execution of the advocacy campaign.

Issue Statement:

Step II: Campaign Objectives

General objective of the campaign:

Executive objectives of the campaign

1

2

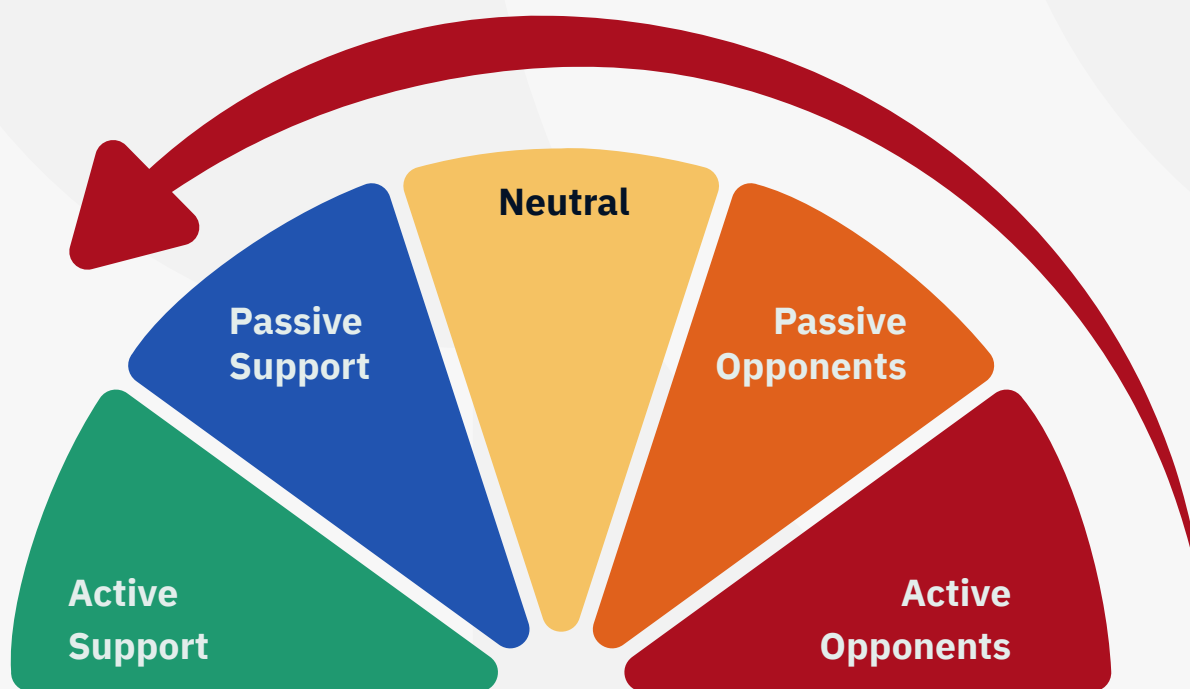
3

Step III: Context analysis

1- Context analysis using the quadrant analysis tool:

Strengths S	Weaknesses W
Opportunities O	Threats T

2- Context analysis using the Allies Spectrum tool:



1) Active Allies

2) Inactive Allies

3) Neutral

4) Inactive Adversaries

5) Active Adversaries

Step IV: Selecting Activities and Developing a Work Plan

Activities:

(Two activities at least for each objective)

Objective 1 activities:

1.1 _____

1.2 _____

Objective 2 activities:

2.1 _____

2.2 _____

Objective 3 activities:

3.1 _____

3.2 _____

3.2 _____

Executive / Operational Plan

#	Activity	Steps	Responsible Person	Execution Date	Notes / Remarks
1					
2					

Step V: Monitoring and Evaluation Plan^[17]

I: Monitoring

The implementation of the campaign activities will be monitored through the following tools:

- 1 _____

- 2 _____

- 3 _____

- 4 _____

II: Evaluation

The results of the campaign will be evaluated at the end of the time period set for its implementation using the following indicators:

1 – Quantitative indicators: _____

2 – Qualitative indicators: _____

References

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- 4- [Digital Advocacy and Campaigns Guide.](#) 7amleh – [The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media.](#) (Arabic edition).
- 5- [New Tactics in Human Rights: A Resource for Practitioners](#) (English)
- 6- [Advocacy in Exile: A Guide for Arab Diaspora Activists and Civil Society Organizations](#)
- 7- [Applying a people-centric approach to advocacy and project management](#)
- 8- [Toolkit for Youth on Adaptation & Leadership](#)
- 9- Holistic Security: A Strategic Guide for Human Rights Defenders. Tactical Tech Collective. (Not available online).
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17. The following section is an example of one of the evaluation methods, though it can be replaced by a different evaluation method, or even used in combination with other evaluation methods, whether from among the methods addressed in this guide or from other evaluation methods based on a valid practical and logical basis.

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