



International Human Rights Programme

Programme Strategy

Protecting and promoting the human rights of all people

Overview

Since 1948 the international community has developed an extensive body of laws and principles to protect human rights. The laws provide all of us with the tools to live full lives with access to justice. But, there remains a gulf between human rights rhetoric and the lived experience of so many people. We seek to close that gap.

We provide core, project, and seed funding in multi-year grants to organisations that work on five key priorities. We support efforts that ensure:

- (1) justice for victims of international crimes;
- (2) detention as a last resort and zero-tolerance for torture;
- (3) full dignity for LGBTQI people;
- (4) a healthy information sphere; and
- (5) strong human rights movements.

Priorities

Priority area 1

Justice for victims of international crimes

Victims of gross human rights violations have the right to truth, justice, and reparations. Efforts to secure accountability and redress are hindered by significant gaps in evidence collection, legal capacity, and political commitment.

Our grant-making aims to:

- place accountability for international crimes on the public and political agenda;
- research, document, and collect evidence for the prosecution of international crimes; and
- hold perpetrators to account either by prosecution, civil suits or sanctions, and ensuring reparations for victims.

Priority area 2

Detention as a last resort and zero-tolerance for torture

International law states that detention should only be used as a last resort: it should be a necessary and proportionate response to concerns of public order and/or flight risk.

But in recent decades, prolonged pre-trial detention for those awaiting criminal trial and indefinite administrative detention for “irregular migrants” have become the new normal.

A growing detention estate (i.e., prisons and other punitive facilities) has been established where detainees sometimes suffer overcrowding and poor conditions in which torture and inhuman treatment can also thrive.

Our grant-making aims to:

- ensure independent and adequate oversight of detention regimes;
- promote attitudinal change on the necessity of detention;
- promote, develop, and implement alternatives to detention;
- uphold the due process rights of detainees including their right to challenge their (indefinite) detention;
- challenge the deployment of technology that renders individuals especially vulnerable to detention; and
- uphold the absolute prohibition on torture and ensure victims can access justice.

Priority area 3

Full dignity for LGBTQI people

Everyone should live free from discriminatory prosecution, persecution, and violence. Yet many people around the world face repression and discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. We support efforts to challenge the legal, political, and social marginalisation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTQI) people.

Our grant-making aims to:

- strengthen the legal framework that guarantees freedom from criminalisation, hate, and violence;
- end stigmatisation and build public consensus in support of ending the persecution of LGBTQI communities;
- provide legal, psychosocial, and protective services for LGBTQI victims of hate and violence; and
- build the documentation, advocacy, and management skills of LGBTQI advocates.

Priority area 4

A healthy information sphere

Everyone has a right to reliable, trustworthy, and accurate information. But developments in information technology including the algorithmic curation of news are amplifying conspiracy theories and hate speech, and enabling malign interference in electoral processes. These produce real harms and undermine trust in democratic institutions.

Our grant-making aims to:

- build an evidence base demonstrating the means and harms of disinformation;
- reduce the commercial incentives which drive disinformation;

- support independent public interest journalism and media pluralism, especially in restrictive environments where citizens have little access to objective factual reporting; and
- secure an open, transparent, and accountable digital information sphere.

Priority area 5

Strong human rights movements

Human rights defenders stand up for rights and hold power to account. A defender can be anyone – from a community leader, journalist, lawyer, student, trade union official, cartoonist or peaceful demonstrator. All deserve protection. Around the world many are at risk from physical attack, imprisonment, legal harassment, and public stigmatisation. In addition, many defenders cannot operate freely; organisations are denied registration, blocked from receiving funds and subject to excessive, unjustified regulatory controls. Our support and solidarity are imperative.

Our grant-making aims to:

- provide emergency support to human rights defenders at risk;
- support an enabling environment for human rights activism including by equipping defenders with the necessary skills and technology to effectively pursue their work; and
- build a resilient human rights movement, supported by a broad public and supported through diverse revenue streams.

Where we fund

We work internationally at the global, regional, and national levels. We remain committed to the EU, USA, UK, and Brazil, and various geographies in the global East. There is limited capacity to expand our geographic coverage. Exceptionally, we work with intermediary organisations in those geographies where there is potential to advance specific lines of work.

Our funding principles

Our grant-making is underpinned by the following:

Upholding the international legal framework

We support work that is based upon and upholds, strengthens, and implements international human rights law.

Promoting systemic change

We prioritise initiatives that deliver concrete systemic change beyond individual redress.

Supporting activism

We support initiatives that create change through activism (e.g., advocacy, campaigning, strategic litigation, citizen participation).

Strengthening our partners

Our grant-making is a partnership. We empower and build the capacity of our partners.

Strengthening the global human rights movement

We support and mobilise diverse constituencies in support of human rights worldwide.

Striving for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion

We acknowledge the inherent power dynamic within grant-making and seek to reduce it by providing longer-term core support with flexibility. We seek to reflect a variety of voices and experiences in our programme and encourage partners to do the same. This is an ongoing process.

How we work with our grantee partners

Application process

Our grants are usually multi-year and long term (three years or more). We discuss with applicants the size of the grant and whether it will be project support or core support (i.e., flexible and unrestricted funding). We develop the application in partnership.

[Download this document to learn about the grant-making timeline and process.](#)

Communications

The best relationships are built on trust.

We seek to share learning and impact.

We value honest, open, and frank exchange and invite feedback on how we can be better grant-makers. We ask for formal reports on an annual basis. We strive to visit our partners in person when possible.

Events and partner convenings

Where practical, we attend events organised by partners to listen and learn from their experience. We also convene and consult partners to better inform our grant-making and foster joint learning and connections.

Our budget and requests for support

Our annual budget is currently USD 30 million. As a small team, we can only make up to 50 grants per year. This means that we must turn down many requests that come our way, despite alignment with our strategy.

Organisations that fit our current strategy can submit an enquiry through our website:

<https://oakfnd.org/submit-enquiry/>

We value and consider all submissions.

Additional information

Our team

Our team is passionate, experienced, knowledgeable, and diverse. We have dedicated programme officers for each priority area.

Contact us

If you would like to speak to us, please email us on info@oakfnd.ch.

Connect with us on social media

Through our social media channels, we amplify the voices of our grantee partners and support the work of our programmes. We want to inspire hope and possibility.

Our grantee partners

For information on our current grantee partners, visit our grant database on our website or read our annual reports.

Visit our website page to learn more about our partners' work.

We publish stories on a regular basis that explain our grant-making approaches.