



**SAFETY &
SECURITY
DURING
ELECTIONS**

**Guidelines for
human rights defenders**



DEFEND DEFENDERS
East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

SAFETY & SECURITY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS DURING ELECTIONS

Elections are a challenging period in many African countries. In the past ten years, many African nations have experienced pre- and post-election violence which resulted in the loss of lives, properties, and stability.

Human rights defenders (HRDs) involved in electoral processes as observers, civic educators, and monitors have in the past been targeted. They are at high risk for potential physical assaults and attacks, office break-ins, arrests and detentions, and targeted cyber-attacks. To ensure their safety, security, and wellbeing, DefendDefenders continuously engages with HRDs to enhance their capacity in security management. For reference, we developed these guidelines to strengthen HRDs' safety, security, and wellbeing during election periods. The guidelines apply to both HRDs working in organisations and individual HRDs.

Organisations should ideally have security policies and specific security plans and protocols for events such as elections in place, to cover HRDs' safety, HRDs' offices, secure communication, secure data and information, HRDs' movements, supplies, and emergency situations. Organisations' management should brief staff and their families and oversee the implementation and adherence to these guidelines.

General safety guidelines during election periods

- **Stay up to date** with daily news from trusted sources. Regularly update your colleagues and family regarding the situation and get updates from them as well.
- **Save contact information** of your local council chairperson and police station. Register with them for safety reasons and in case of emergencies.
- **Keep your mobile phone with you.** Make sure it is charged and that you have emergency numbers programmed in. Report any occurrence of security interest to your security focal point, police or the local council in your area.
- **Be aware of your surroundings.** Be vigilant in public areas such as hotels, restaurants, bars and crowded places like markets, malls or sports events.

- Always **carry your ID**, e.g., national identity card, copies of passports or relevant documents that indicate immigration status.
- **Avoid routines** and have emergency plans. Vary the time and route of regular journeys, to avoid being an easy target. Figure out alternative routes and have an emergency plan ready, in case of any incidents. If a curfew is in place, avoid moving past curfew hours.
- Be **careful with messages** from strangers. Do not open links or documents you do not recognise, especially if you don't know the sender, to avoid phishing and other cyber-attacks. Avoid phone calls or SMS conversations with contacts you do not recognise.
- **Avoid posting or sharing sensitive information**, such as any personal information or your location, on social media platforms to protect your security.

Emergency contact information

Make sure you have the contacts of your local authorities, hospital, and fire brigade on speed dial.

Get in touch 24/7 with DefendDefenders in case of emergencies:

+256 783027611 (phone, Signal, and WhatsApp)

Office security in election periods

- **Share phone numbers and addresses** of NGOs that provide protection for HRDs and contact information of hospitals, police, fire brigade, and ambulance.
- Put in place **visitor admission procedures** and filters.
- Regularly **change security measures**, e.g., passwords, office keys, and equipment including computers, phones, laptop, etc.
- Regularly **back up your data.** Keep back-ups in a safe place outside your office.
- Do not leave any **sensitive information** on your desk.
- Ensure all **valuable items are insured** and stored securely, in case of lootings and break ins.
- **Limit the amount of cash** stored in the office.
- **Close the office** for two days before and after

the election date. Resumption of work should depend on the security situation. Remain in constant communication with staff.

- **Install CCTV**, if possible, to monitor physical intrusions into your office.
- Know staff's **physical addresses** and ask for their **next of kin contacts**. Encourage staff to share their manager's contact details with their next of kin.

Communication precautions

- Always **have sufficient airtime** on your phone, budget emergency calls in. Your mobile internet modems should also always have sufficient airtime, to serve as a potential substitute means of communication.
- Carry **two sim-cards** from different networks, in case one network experiences interruptions. Share all numbers with your manager and your family.
- Share alarming and credible news from trusted sources with your manager or a security focal point responsible for further dissemination. Kindly consider **information gaps** that certain HRDs may face, e.g., due to language barriers, that limit access to information from local broadcasters.
- Use recommended secure **end-to-end encrypted social media platforms**, when disseminating information online to group community members or work groups/staff.
- **Encrypt your e-mail communication**, when communicating sensitive information, data, and/or documents amongst your organisation's staff, management, individuals, stakeholders, and/or external partners, to avoid third party communication/data leaks.

End-to-end encryption:
Signal, WhatsApp, or Telegram

E-mail encryption tools:
PGP, Mailvelope, Flowcrypt

- If you have guests staying with you during this period, inform the local area chairperson – this will prevent any suspicion by the community, due to heightened alert.

Movements

- **Minimise movements** and **avoid travel** for the two days before and after the election date. If you must travel, try to arrange it before or after this period. Do not plan family outings or other social events in this period and do not stay out late.
- On **election day**, go home directly after casting your vote. Minimise movements and keep friends and family informed of your whereabouts. Do not loiter, to avoid getting caught in unrest.
- **Avoid demonstrations** and immediately leave areas that show signs of demonstrations or unrest.
- **Avoid areas prone to riots**, e.g., local markets or where there are many people.
- **Avoid places of social activity**. If you cannot avoid them, try to find one with security. Limit activities that impair judgment, e.g., consuming alcohol.
- **Lock your car**, while driving.
- **Do not carry large amounts of cash**.
- Know the location of the **closest police station** and memorise the police emergency number (e.g., 999 or 122).
- Do not visibly demonstrate political affiliations, **exhibit a maximum level of impartiality**.

To avoid unnecessary movements **stock up on supplies & prepare your home**.

Have enough food, a first aid kit (including bandages, pain killers, wound disinfectant), and a supply of candles, gas/charcoal/paraffin, and torches with full batteries, in case of power outages. Keep your car fuelled for emergencies and keep your entrances and windows locked.

Arrest/Detention

- Secure the **services of a lawyer**, if you are at risk of arrest, and remember their phone number. You may not have access to your mobile phone but should be able to place a call.
- **Do not resist arrest** – you could be assaulted and charged with more offences.
- **Know your rights** (e.g., telephone call, family to be informed, etc.) and request them firmly.

- **Know the law** (e.g., a witness is required to answer questions, a suspect is not required to reveal anything which may incriminate them).
- Ask for the precise **reason of your detention** and your current location (if unknown).
- **Do not answer questions** without the presence of a lawyer.
- If you are in company when arrested, ask that they **accompany** you, if possible.
- Choose a **security contact** that will check in with you at certain times, and who will take measures to find you.

Carry any necessary medication with you at all times.

Emergency situations

- If caught up at a **demonstration or unrest**, remain calm and steadily move away from the hotspot. Inform your contacts (manager, security focal point, colleagues, friends and family) of the situation and location.
- If **arrested**, inform your contacts and communicate your whereabouts, condition, and assistance needed. Remain calm and refrain from any behavior that could provoke negative reactions.
- If **injured**, inform your contacts and your health service provider for emergency assistance. Alternatively, go to the closest health clinic.

Always have your emergency contacts accessible, including DefendDefenders number or that of your National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders.

Are you an human rights defender from/ in the East and Horn of Africa in need of **emergency protection**?

Get in touch: **+256-783-027611** (phone, signal, and WhatsApp - 24/7)

For more information about DefendDefenders and the protection & promotion of human rights defenders, please visit **www.defenddefenders.org**.

Follow DefendDefenders on **social media**:

- Facebook: @defenddefenders
- Twitter: @DefendDefenders
- Instagram: @defenddefenders
- YouTube: DefendDefenders
- LinkedIn: /defenddefenders

COVID-19

To learn how to increase your safety and security during COVID-19, check out our guidelines for HRDs: <https://defenddefenders.org/covid-19-guidelines-for-human-rights-defenders/>.

Guidelines from health authorities

- » Stay home and self-isolate from others in the household if you feel unwell.
- » Wear a mask outside, to avoid spreading potential infections.
- » Cover your nose and mouth with a disposable tissue or flexed elbow when you cough or sneeze.
- » Wash your hands regularly, either with soap and water for 20 seconds or alcohol-based hand rub.
- » Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth if your hands are not clean.
- » Avoid close contact (1 meter or 3 feet) with people, especially those who are unwell.

Self-care and wellbeing

- » Create a routine & keep yourself busy
- » Stay connected with family and friends
- » Exercise and eat healthy
- » Reach out for professional help, if your mental health is suffering.

Security incidents

If you experience security incidents:

- Immediately write down the facts and circumstances of the security incident
- Discuss the security incident with your colleagues
- Analyse the security incident and decide what action to take

INCIDENT REPORTING

Security incident are events which could indicate or lead to threats (e.g. unwanted contacts with or questioning by police, intelligence services or any other authorities). All incidents involving your organisation's team members must be reported as soon as possible to the manager or the security focal point of the organisation. Ultimately, a full written incident report shall be handed over by the organisation management with an analysis of the sequence of events, and conclusions and recommendations (see the following template full incident report).

FULL INCIDENT REPORT

Date:

Author:

Role of Author (involved or not):

Full chronological account of the incident
Who was involved?
Reasons for any decisions taken
Identification of any failure of procedures or plans, and recommendations for any actions

Signature Author:

To be filled by each HRD/ staff and submit to organisation manager and security focal point

Name	
Passport No./ID no./ Refugee no.	
Telephone Number 1	
Telephone Number 2	
Place of residence (enclose sketch indicating the nearest landmark)	
Colleague aware of residence	
Contact person	
Type of relation	
Phone number of contact person	
Health service provider + emergency number	
Embassy emergency number	

Copy of passport

Sketch of place of residence

Health care documents