



ANNUAL REPORT 2021

Supporting the human rights community
with their information needs since 1982

Human rights defenders need evidence, law and research to advocate justice and accountability.

We develop tools and strategies that make this **information** accessible.

HURIDOCS is an NGO that helps human rights groups gather, organise and use information to create positive change in the world.

INSIDE THIS REPORT

Introduction	5
Programmes and Partnerships	7
Tech Development	14
Knowledge Collaboration	17
Awards	18
Recognising Defenders	19
Events	20
Finances and Funders	21
The Road Ahead	22



HURIDOCs in 2021 OUR FOCUS

At HURIDOCs, our aim is to help the human rights community use the power of information to change the world for the better. We work with various human rights and justice actors on a number of intersectional themes while we support organisations in every region of the world.



INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic remained in full swing during 2021, and its devastating effect on the social, economic, political and environmental spheres of society is evident.

It is well-known that the vulnerable are affected the most by the global pandemic but we are comforted that many of our partners and friends support exactly those who need it most: those whose rights are trampled, whose voices are unheard and whose stories are yet to be told. That is why we continue to zoom in on developing and improving methodologies and tools that make it easier for our partners to use evidence, law and research to stand up for the rights of those that are ignored or violated.

Since we are a distributed organisation that is fully remote, apart from our small office in Geneva, we can respond to the needs of human rights defenders as it happens, where it happens. Our agility and resilience allowed us to grow in 2021, and HURIDOCS has the largest number of staff members in its history of 39 years. As the number of human rights violations continue to grow, we will too—so that we can provide the much needed support to document abuses and provide access to credible human rights information.



What allowed us to grow is the unwavering support and inspiration from our partners. We remain thankful to the many human rights defenders, activists, advocates, investigators, researchers and policy makers who walk this road with us and who push us to push the boundaries so that justice and accountability can be achieved.

We gratefully acknowledge our donors who supported us, as well as the work of our partners, and we look forward to fostering the collaborations that continue to support our vision of using credible and accessible information to create positive change in the world.

We appreciate and continue to learn from the work from our allies and peers. May we carry on with our collaboration and mutual reflection, as the fight against the human rights abuses, disinformation, censorship, illegal shutdowns, impunity and tyranny cannot be fought alone.

We are indebted to our Board Members who guided and supported us throughout the year. We learned so much from our outgoing Chair Gisella Reina, who has been part of the HURIDOCS story since 2014 and stepped down as Chair mid-2021. She is succeeded by our new Chair Lisa Reinsberg, who joined the Board in 2018. We at HURIDOCS are very excited about the next part of our journey with Lisa and the rest of the Board.

As we reflect on the past, our focus remains on a better future where we can help those who defend and stand up for what is right. We will continue to offer guidance and support and we will do so in innovative and consistent ways. May 2022, and the years that follow, be kind to humanity and may all human rights be realised.

In solidarity,
The HURIDOCS team



Human rights information DATABASES & COLLECTIONS

The collections mentioned here only tell half the story. Many of our partners operate in shrinking civic space while working within repressive regions, and because of the themes they focus on, their work often requires a high level of security and privacy.

We have supported these partners to develop documentation methods and customise tools to gather qualitative, quantitative and anecdotal information to analyse trends and patterns. We also assisted them to streamline their information models and documentation systems which allows them to work more effectively and efficiently.

By having a more streamlined approach to managing human rights information, violations, cases and memories, human rights organisations are able to do so much more for the communities they serve. Credible and accessible information aids our partners to raise awareness of critical human rights issues, secure redress for victims of violations, strengthen accountability processes, build capacity, and foster collaboration within the broader human rights community.

PROGRAMMES & PARTNERSHIPS

During the course of 2021, our Programmes Team provided strategic and technical support to a number of new partners and we undertook 59 projects with 70 partners and worked actively with them in 40 countries.

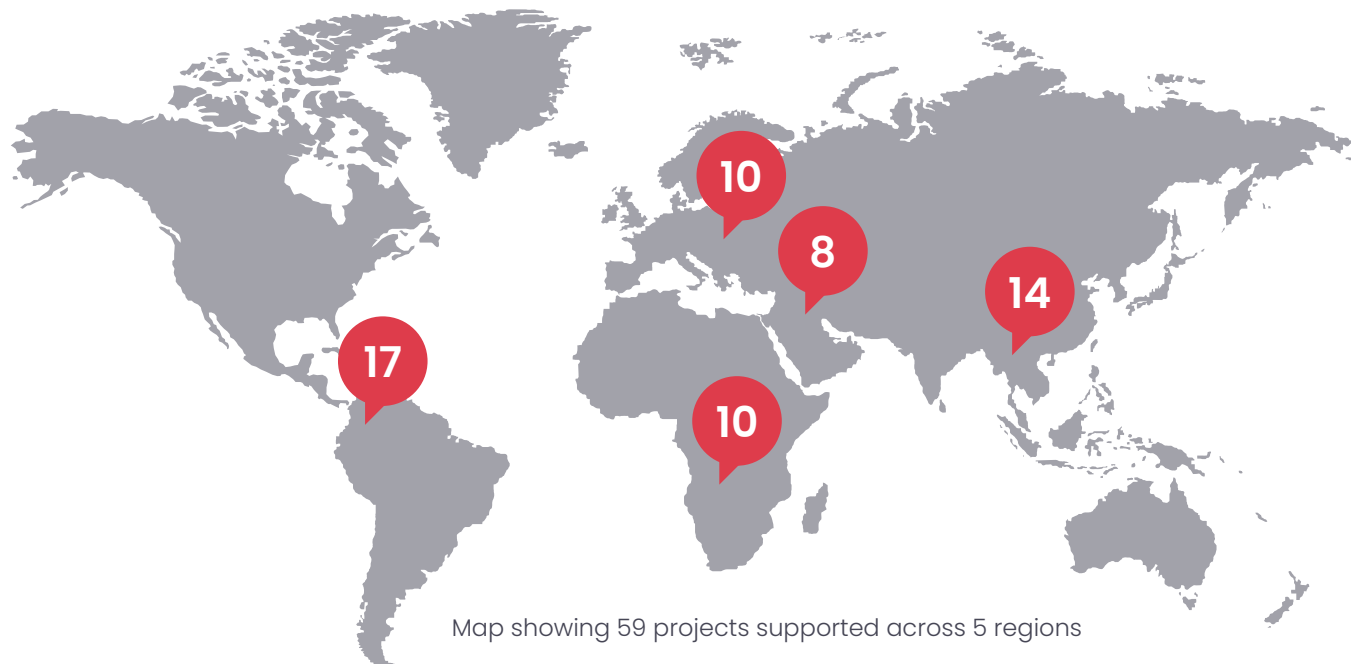
HURIDOCs remained committed to the needs of our existing partners by supporting and maintaining numerous active projects and databases.

Most of our partners now use Uwazi, a web-based open-source tool designed for human rights defenders and built by HURIDOCs to manage, organise, visualise, share and protect data.

The scope of our work and support often varies, and includes the creation of private and public databases that monitor and track human rights violations, assist with case management, compile collective memories and evidence for transitional justice and present libraries of human rights information.

Programmes & Partnerships

OUR REGIONAL FOCUS



We supported 59 projects and 70 partners during 2021

Latin America



Sub-Saharan Africa



Middle East and North Africa



Europe, Eurasia and International



Asia-Pacific



Our work streams

- Monitor and track violations
- Case / complaints management
- Collective memories and evidence
- Human rights information libraries

Overview of countries, projects and partners



Project highlights

During 2021, we have supported 59 projects in collaboration with 70 partner organisations. Here we highlight some of the inspiring projects which are safe to talk about. Working on human rights can be sensitive, and to reduce security and other risks, we cannot mention every project and partnership.



LATIN AMERICA Mexico

In Mexico, the rights of labourers are continuously under threat. They are subjected to abuse, unfair dismissals, exploitation and even death. In many of these cases, women labourers bear the brunt of labour rights violations.

In 2019, Mexico reformed its labour laws to improve working conditions. Our colleagues at the **Solidarity Center** monitor the rights of workers, especially the rights of women, and work towards implementing labour reforms in the country.

To monitor whether these reformed labour laws are executed and respected, we helped Solidarity Center to build *Labour Rights Reform Monitoring and Evaluation (GIRL)*, an information management system to track and analyse hundreds of collective labour agreements between worker unions and companies.

The platform offers support to manage information and obtain conclusions on the current state of labour relations and collective negotiation, trends in the results of worker consultation processes, analysis of negotiation processes, and finally, the impact of the implementation of the labour reform in terms of improvements for labourers rights.

[!\[\]\(faf942dc3e59ce8eb64b4ac481eca7e0_img.jpg\) **READ MORE ABOUT THE SOLIDARITY CENTER'S WORK**](#)



SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Sahel region

In recent years, the Sahelian region of Africa has seen a rise in the number of armed conflicts leading to humanitarian crises. Thousands of civilians found themselves in the middle of clashes between armed groups. This situation has led to increased food insecurity, a large number of displaced communities, and an explosion of human rights violations.

It is within this context that HURIDOCS worked with a human rights organisation to document cases of violations. HURIDOCS' support focused on the development of an effective data model for their documentation strategies, as well as an information

management system for standardising data collection, organising and accessing information on these crimes. The constituted database provides multiple layers of analysis based on parameters such as region, type of violations, status and persons involved.

The resultant information management system enables actors to provide complete assistance to victims including legal advice, legal representation, psychological assistance or reference to appropriate mechanisms.





EUROPE AND EURASIA Germany

The **Anti-Trans Hate Crime database** provides information on human rights violations such as bias-motivated murders, violence, and discrimination against trans people in 12 European and Central Asian countries. The purpose of data collection is to provide evidence that will demonstrate how violence disproportionately impacts trans communities and how urgent is the need for legal, political, and social redress.

Our partners at **TGEU** is located in Berlin, Germany and is a member-based organisation that provides a voice for the trans community in Europe and Central Asia. HURIDOCS supported TGEU to migrate their data from OpenEvsys (now sunsetted by HURIDOCS) to Uwazi.

A subset of their collected data is available in a public database that provides information on more than 1,000 cases of anti-trans hate crimes which range from arson and cyber hate to physical violence, psychological violence, assault, abusive behaviour, hate speech and sexual assault.

[🔗 READ MORE ABOUT TGEU'S WORK](#)



MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA State of Palestine

The **Arab Center for Social Media Advancement** (7amleh) launched an online tool that collects information on digital rights violations experienced by Palestinians.



The Palestinian Observatory of Digital Rights Violations (7or) is the first open source online platform to monitor, document and follow up on the digital rights violations of Palestinians.

The **7or platform** allows users to report instances of digital censorship, online abuse and over-moderation. It also provides users with a search functionality to filter through the database containing violations, offering an evidence-based approach to tackling online censorship.

Data can be collected on each case, which allows for a more systematic analysis of content moderation and censorship.

[🔗 READ MORE ABOUT 7AMLEH'S WORK](#)



The 7or platform allows us to collect examples of the diverse discrimination that Palestinians experience from social platforms, as well as providing analysis of the variety and frequency of these digital rights violations.

— Nadim Nashif,

Co-Founder and Executive Director of 7amleh



ASIA-PACIFIC South Korea

We supported the **Transitional Justice Working Group**, a Seoul-based NGO that works with several local family associations and human rights groups to build a public database of those taken by North Korea.

The resulting database called **'Footprints'** documents and publishes information concerning reported cases of arbitrary detention, abduction and enforced disappearances committed in and by North Korea, stretching back to just before the outbreak of the Korean War.

The **archive** currently holds more than 19,000 files on wartime abductees, which represent a quarter of the estimated number of civilians who were taken by North Korean forces during the 1950-1953 period.

The hope is that it serves as a resource for family members, journalists, advocacy campaigners and lawyers in South Korea and beyond who are working towards a resolution for these human rights violations.

[READ MORE ABOUT THE TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE WORKING GROUP'S WORK](#)



It's very important that these issues are not just forgotten. We have a responsibility to the extent possible to make sure that the victims find remedies. It's not just statistics. It's people with stories.
— **Ethan Hee-Seok Shin**,
Case researcher,
Transitional Justice Working Group



ASIA-PACIFIC Malaysia

Suara Rakyat Malaysia (Voice of the Malaysian People) was established in 1989 to fight against human rights activists' detention without trial under the International Security Act in 1987.

SUARAM has expanded its human rights work beyond Right to Trial, and now has four other streams of work: Right to Justice, Documentation & Monitoring, People before Profit, and Freedom of Expression.

In 2021, HURIDOCS collaborated with SUARAM and helped resolve its challenges around the need for a unified data management system for its human rights advocacy and litigation work.

Using Uwazi, we designed and developed the complaints management and documentation system so that SUARAM can efficiently collect, track, and analyse its data.

[READ MORE ABOUT SUARAM'S WORK](#)

A young green plant with purple stems growing from a rock. The background is a blurred blue and white, possibly water or a sky.

Strengthening partnerships & fostering growth **OUR PROGRAMMES TEAM**

During the course of 2021, the Programmes Team strengthened many of its existing partnerships, while concurrently building new relationships with a number of local organisations.

Nancy Yu, HURIDOCS' Product & Research Lead was appointed as the new Director of Programmes. Kristin Antin, the outgoing Director of Programmes transitioned into the new role of Knowledge Collaboration Lead.

During the second half of the year, the Programmes Team was reorganised according to regional scope and focus. Each regional team was assigned a Programme Manager and a total of seven programme staff members joined the team during the year.

Two new appointments related to user experiences were made, and a UX designer and a UX researcher joined the team. These new appointments overlap between the Technical Team and the Programmes Team.

The reorganisation of the team and the new appointments are to ensure that both our old and new partnerships are sustained, while fostering growth and responsiveness to the increasing demand for our support.

TECH DEVELOPMENT

Uwazi is our open-source web-based tool to help human rights defenders manage their information collections and documentation systems.

Since its **launch in 2017**, we have created or supported nearly 400 Uwazi databases and the number of information collections we support is growing at a consistent rate.

Therefore, a significant part of our work consists of making sure that **Uwazi** is stable and constantly improving so that our partners can make better use of its functionalities.

Our flagship tool UWAZI

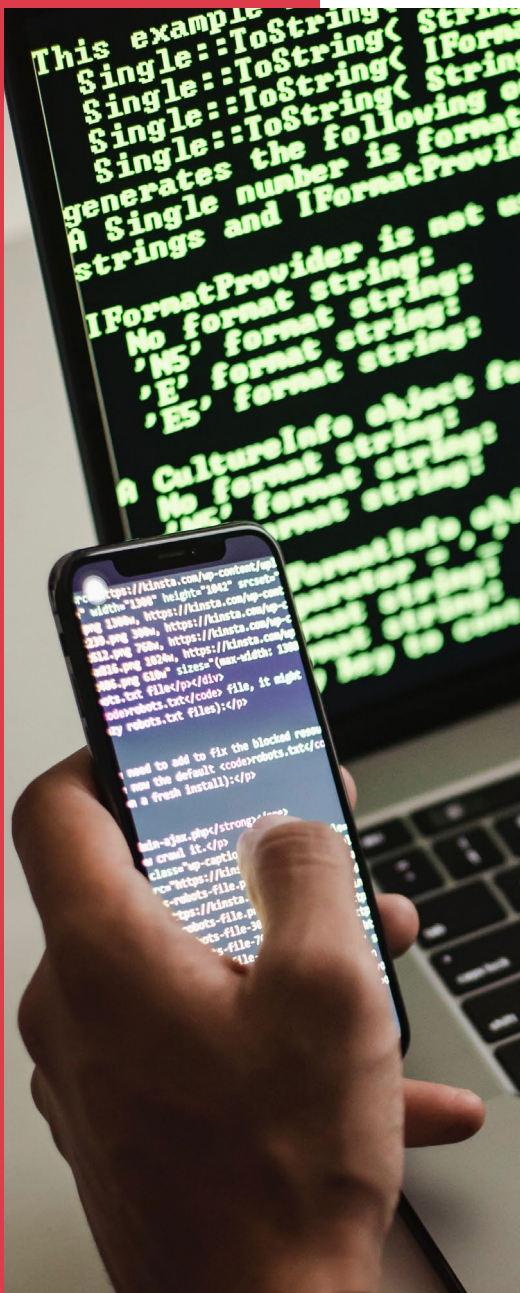
Improving Uwazi

During 2020 our Tech Team focused on stabilising Uwazi which means that they fixed a lot of bugs, while simultaneously improving the overall scalability and performance of Uwazi. This trend continued throughout 2021 and the overall improvement of Uwazi will allow its users to have a more reliable and faster system with a much better user experience.

New features

Apart from improving the performance of Uwazi, we also added new functionality to the tool! Some of the most notable new features of Uwazi include:

- **User access and permissions:** The complete overhaul of user access and permissions allows for better organisational information management, while access to sensitive information can be better controlled.
- **Custom entity pages:** Entity views have more advanced display functionalities and the customisation of entity pages makes it possible to tell a story better with the data contained in a collection.
- **Generate automated unique IDs:** Admins can now have unique ID values automated for each record, which is helpful for scenarios including easier and consistent retrieval or creating codes for sensitive information, such as names of victims or witnesses.



Data integrity and innovation

SECURITY & MACHINE LEARNING

Security audit

To ensure the safety and security of the data of our partners and users, we requested a security evaluation of Uwazi. The security audit was performed by Security Labs and found that the application has a high-level of security. The assessment, which included manual and automated testing, identified four minor vulnerabilities, which have since been addressed and patched.

Innovation and integration

As far as innovation is concerned, joining forces with other tech allies and designing interoperable systems, where possible, helps to improve security, functionality and overall reliability of human rights information.

We have partnered with [Horizontal](#) to integrate Uwazi with their mobile app [Tella](#).

Tella enables human rights defenders to safely record information on injustices while in low connectivity zones or risky environments. By integrating Uwazi into Tella, the Uwazi community can enter information directly into the Tella app on their phone and send it to their Uwazi database when it is safe and possible to do so. For the first time ever, Uwazi users can work offline and submit their information to the server once they have an internet connection.

Legacy tools

Since we have discontinued our legacy tools [OpenEvSys](#) and [Casebox](#), we have been busy migrating our partners' data from these older systems to Uwazi. Our responsibility as a service provider is to ensure that all partners have a platform that they can confidently transition their data to, which is also securely maintained. Our team focused on translating existing data structures from

these soon-to-be-sunset systems into Uwazi and trained them to effectively use their new database to suit their specific workflows. The aim is to have this work completed by end of 2022.

Machine learning initiatives

It has also been a year of harvesting good results from our [machine learning](#) initiatives. We developed an architecture for highly scalable distributed tasks that allows us to deploy machine learning algorithms as network services.

In 2021, our machine learning team developed and deployed services such as optical character recognition (OCR) for documents, automatic table of contents generation, document segmentation and machine assisted metadata extraction. Our team is hard at work on research and development to extend these services to be able to handle more complex scenarios.

Evolving and expanding OUR TECH TEAM

HURIDOCS has gained a number of new **staff members** over the past year and this resulted in the Tech Team experiencing some growth and rotation too.

It is important for us to get a great team together: our aim is to find colleagues who are not only leading professionals in their field, but who are also great human beings.

We restructured the team to adapt to the emerging needs for better infrastructure reliability, improved organisational digital security and to respond to the different areas of technical specialisation such as front-end development, back-end development and machine learning.

This enabled us to appoint three developers, a machine learning specialist, and an infrastructure engineer.

“

It's really been amazing to see how a technology like machine learning can be applied to human rights and have a real impact.”

*— Grace Kwak Danciu,
Google.org Fellow
and HURIDOCS
Board Member*



Co-creation of community resources

KNOWLEDGE COLLABORATION

In June 2021, we started a pilot project to explore what would be possible if we engaged our network of human rights defenders and capacity builders in the co-creation of reusable community resources, based on their collective knowledge.

The [pilot project](#) resulted in the development of five community resources on topics related to planning for the information one would need when carrying out the documentation of human rights violations.

The resulting community resources on how to prepare for a database are:

- What is a database and do I need one?
- Determining your database goals and queries
- Designing your conceptual data model
- Determining your controlled lists of terms
- Creating your data dictionary

Sharing knowledge in the human rights community

The primary audience for these resources are local-level and regional-level human rights defenders engaged in short-term and/or long-term documentation and investigation work. In times of calm or in times of crisis, these defenders need to find appropriately secure and efficient ways to collect, organise and preserve their information about human rights violations.

Our community resources include worksheets and activities, and the content is available in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#). We are incredibly grateful to the 48 human rights defenders and capacity builders who contributed to these resources in a variety of ways, including sharing their information management challenges, sharing their knowledge, experience and solutions with us, and providing feedback on draft resources.



The community resources and information about the co-creation process can be found [on our website](#).



AWARDS

We are honoured to have been selected for the Peace and Justice Strong Institutions Award at the 2021 edition of [CogX](#), a UK-based festival of AI and emerging technology.

According to CogX, the Award is bestowed upon companies or organisations who champion human rights and direct its AI services towards the protection of fundamental liberties. Since 2016, our team at HURIDOCs has been actively exploring how machine learning can improve access to public bodies of human rights information.

We are humbled that this focus of ours has [received recognition](#) from the CogX Awards. We'd like to thank the award jury for choosing us for this honour, as well as our former machine learning intern Mackenzie Jorgensen for nominating us.

Furthermore, we'd like to extend our gratitude to all of our human rights partners whose trust and input have been crucial to these machine learning advancements—without you, this work wouldn't be possible.

Martin Ennals Award

RECOGNISING DEFENDERS

The **Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders** was created in 1992. The Award is named after Martin Ennals (1927-1991), a human rights activist who served as the first secretary general of Amnesty International and co-founded HURIDOCS as well as the organisations ARTICLE 19 and International Alert.

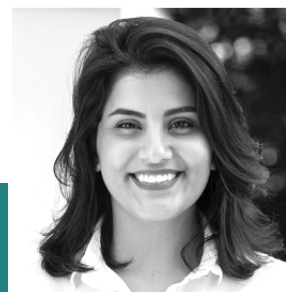
The annual Award is given to people who have made extraordinary contributions to human rights and are consequently under threat. HURIDOCS is a longtime jury member of this initiative that helps to mobilise support for the finalists and enhance their protection.

For his extraordinary strength and courage, Chinese human rights lawyer **Yu Wensheng** has been named the winner of the 2021 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders. He was arrested in 2018 on charges of 'inciting subversion of state power' and 'obstructing public service', shortly after publishing an open letter recommending amendments to the Chinese constitution, calling for fair elections and an oversight system for the Chinese Communist Party, amongst other reforms. He was released on 1 March 2022 after serving a four-year sentence.

He was honoured alongside finalists Loujain AlHathloul of Saudi Arabia and Soltan Achilova of Turkmenistan. We are all indebted to the **2021 finalists** for their incredible contributions to building a better world. Everyone at HURIDOCS stands with you in solidarity. Thank you for your courage!



*The road is rough and difficult,
the darkness is cruel,
but we do not give up trying;
we believe in love and that the light will come.
— Xu Yan, wife of Yu Wensheng*



Loujain AlHathloul
Saudi Arabia



Yu Wensheng
China



Soltan Achilova
Turkmenistan

2021 EVENTS

We have participated in a number of private and public events during the course of the year. Some of these events include RightsCon 2021, side events at the 48th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council, and the NetHope and Creative Commons Global Summits of 2021.

RightsCon 2021

Tech Demo

At the 10th anniversary of [RightsCon](#), the world's largest human rights and technology summit, HURIDOCs was invited to deliver a presentation on Uwazi. The [10-minute tech demo](#) demonstrates how Uwazi can be used to organise human rights information and includes key features of Uwazi, new initiatives we're excited about, and what's next on our roadmap.

48th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council

Impact Iran side event

At a [side event](#) during the 48th session of the UN Human Rights Council, we joined [Impact Iran](#) and other human rights practitioners for a discussion on the use of data for rights and accountability in Iran. The discussion explored ways in which innovative documentation tools, strategies and online databases can help monitor human rights and foster a culture of transparency and accountability in Iran.

48th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council

Tech for Democracy side event

We collaborated with the Permanent Mission of Denmark to host a [side event](#) at the 48th session of the UN Human Rights Council to discuss how human rights actors can use data to achieve accountability. The [Tech for Democracy](#) discussion focused on how to better gather, manage and secure evidence of human rights violations, and how collaborations within the rights community can ensure that such evidence is leveraged for positive human rights change.

NetHope Global Summit 2021

20th Anniversary Virtual Global Summit

HURIDOCs and GOAL co-presented on how organisations can create accessible information repositories at NetHope's 20th Anniversary Global Summit, which was held online.

The title of our joint presentation was 'Insight to Impact: Information repositories, access, and use for evidence-based decision making'. Together we compared and contrasted our experiences in building a low-tech tool for quantitative data and basic analysis and a high-tech tool for qualitative data and in-depth searching.

Creative Commons Global Summit 2021

20th Anniversary Virtual Global Summit

We see great potential for Uwazi to support the Commons working in a diversity of contexts. Our team of multilingual developers, designers, project managers and partners hail from all corners of the world, and we introduced and demoed our online platform to the larger open community to bolster our shared advocacies and impact.

FINANCES

In 2021, HURIDOCS had a budget of 1.72 million USD, representing consistent growth compared to 2020, when it was at 1.5 million USD. Notably, we were able to continue to add to our organisational reserves, setting aside 42,000 USD for an overall cushion of 352,000 USD.

The landscape of funding for human rights is constantly changing, and it is our duty to ensure that our funding strategies are aligned with our organisational strategy. Our partners rely on us, therefore we have a duty to ensure that we are there to support, to monitor, to assist and to advise.

Focus on donor relations

In 2021, a dedicated position for a Donor Relations Officer was created to ensure that HURIDOCS maintains and grows our relationships with donors. With the increased demand for our support, and with the significant expansion of our team, it is imperative that we are able to sustain our activities and be there for our partners.

OUR FUNDERS

We are grateful to the following donors who supported us and the work of our partners during 2021:

- Google.org
- OAK Foundation
- Open Society Foundations
- United States Department of State (DRL) through a subgrant from PILPG
- Permanent Mission of Denmark to the UN in Geneva
- Principality of Liechtenstein's Office for Foreign Affairs
- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) through a subgrant from Meedan
- Capital Group
- Organisation internationale de la Francophonie
- Ville de Genève / City of Geneva
- HIVOS through its Digital Defenders Partnership

Almost a quarter of our income came through fee-for-service contracts—we are grateful for all of our partners who contracted us for advice and support.

Here's to 2022

THE ROAD AHEAD

In 2021 alone, we supported 70 human rights organisations. Our bespoke support to these groups is to help them manoeuvre through the possibilities and pitfalls in gathering, managing, preserving and analysing information.

Demand for our support has skyrocketed, with more than double the requests we have received in 2021 compared to 2020. We have added to our globally distributed team of human rights experts and technologists and we grew to more than 30 staff for the first time in our history. We have improved Uwazi, our flagship software tool, used by and created with more than 100 organisations across the globe. We explored new technologies, including machine learning, and made them useful in practical ways to save time and gain new insights.

Our goal now is to build on these successes, but also reflect on how we can have more impact, contribute to a healthy ecosystem to sustain this work and continue to learn. In the coming years we want to scale our team and operations to be able to meet the demand from human rights organisations and expand our reach to adjacent communities that increasingly intersect and jointly lead change.

To reach this, we will prioritise initiatives that will allow us to lower barriers to access to our services and tools. In particular, we seek to achieve this by focusing on more available knowledge, a more seamless user experience in our tool and an equitable cost structure. As a result, we aim to not only leverage economies of scale, but to broaden access for the diverse actors leading change across the globe.

We know that this change will take time. Human rights organisations will need a reliable partner, who is there, if need be, for decades. HURIDOCs is that partner. This means, we need to ensure we are intentional about the commitments we make, because we will need to sustain them.

This requires a dedicated focus on infrastructure on the one hand, and continuous exploration of new possibilities on the other hand.

Only when information is **accessible** in the long run, can it be of use.

Only when **human rights defenders** are part of the exploration of new technological advances, will they be able to fully use them to their **advantage.**



huridocs

HURIDOCs

Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems

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