


HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND NEW VOICES IN THE PURSUIT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

 <https://doi.org/10.56238/arev7n5-438>

Date of submission: 04/30/2025

Date of publication: 05/30/2025

Claudia Márcia Costa¹ and Marco Aurelio Moura dos Santos²

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the crucial role of human rights defenders and the emergence of new voices in contemporary activism. In the current context, there is a growing participation of marginalized and vulnerable groups in the defense of their rights, driving significant social change. However, these defenders face numerous acts of violence and threats that undermine their efforts and put their lives at risk. The struggle for human rights has been characterized by persistent challenges. Advocates engaged in social and political causes frequently encounter physical violence, death threats, intimidation, and criminalization. These attacks are intended to silence their voices and deter the defense of fundamental rights. Despite these obstacles, many defenders remain resilient and committed to their cause, confronting adversity and continuing the fight for social justice. A notable shift in the activist landscape is the emergence of adolescents and young people who have become prominent figures in human rights advocacy. Greta Thunberg and Malala Yousafzai are two inspiring examples of young activists who have achieved global impact. Through their courageous actions, they have brought urgent issues—such as the climate crisis and girls' education—to the forefront of international discourse. The participation of young activists underscores the importance of amplifying the voices of future generations and recognizing their potential in building a more just world. These voices have influenced policy and mobilized communities worldwide, emphasizing the need for an inclusive and intergenerational approach to the promotion of human rights. In this context, it is essential to support and protect human rights defenders, particularly those facing heightened risks. Strengthening national and international legal frameworks to ensure the safety and freedom of these defenders, while creating safe spaces for their voices to be heard and valued, is imperative. In conclusion, the activism of human rights defenders plays a vital role in the pursuit of social justice, despite the constant acts of violence and threats that hinder their efforts. The rise of young and marginalized voices—such as Greta Thunberg (20), Malala Yousafzai (25), Amanda Gorman (25), Catarina Silva (20), Isaias Hernandez (25), Txai Suruí (26), and Manu Gaspar (25)—highlights the importance of expanding representation and inclusion in human rights discussions. Supporting and protecting these defenders is fundamental to ensuring a more just and equitable future for all.

Keywords: Human rights defenders. Youth activism. Resistance. Intergenerational approach. Public policy.

¹ PhD in Political and Economic Law - Mackenzie Presbyterian University – UPM, São Paulo/BRAZIL. Professor in Mackenzie Presbyterian University – UPM.

² PhD in International and Comparative Law – University of São Paulo – USP, São Paulo/BRAZIL. Professor in Mackenzie Presbyterian University – UPM.

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of social justice and the protection of human rights constitute central themes in contemporary academic and policy discourse. A critical milestone in this domain is the *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*—commonly referred to as the *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders*—adopted in 1998. This instrument formally acknowledges the pivotal role of human rights defenders and delineates their responsibility to promote and safeguard fundamental rights and freedoms.

Nonetheless, the contemporary global context presents novel and multifaceted challenges to the advancement of social justice. Emerging social movements and non-governmental organizations have assumed an increasingly significant role as new actors in the defense of human rights. These entities are motivated by the imperative to address an array of complex and intersecting issues, including but not limited to inequality, discrimination, violence, social exclusion, and the profound consequences of environmental degradation and climate change.

This article aims to critically examine the role of young human rights defenders as key agents in the contemporary struggle for social justice. It offers an analytical review of the principles and normative frameworks established in the *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders*, emphasizing their continued relevance and applicability in the current socio-political milieu. Moreover, it interrogates the manifold challenges confronting human rights defenders, including threats to personal safety, legal constraints, and institutional impediments that collectively circumscribe their capacity for effective action.

Human rights advocates engaged in social and political activism frequently encounter physical violence, death threats, intimidation, and criminalization. These repressive measures are systematically employed to suppress dissenting voices and to deter efforts aimed at the defense and promotion of fundamental rights. Despite these adversities, numerous advocates exhibit remarkable resilience and steadfast commitment to their causes, continuing to confront systemic injustices and to advance the pursuit of social justice. A particularly salient development within the current activist landscape is the increasing prominence of adolescent and youth voices, who have emerged as influential protagonists in the defense of human rights.

Drawing upon this analysis, the article proposes strategies for the strengthening and protection of human rights defenders, with the objective of enhancing their capacity to promote social justice effectively. It further presents case studies that elucidate the contributions and impacts of young human rights defenders across diverse socio-cultural and geopolitical contexts.

In conclusion, this article underscores the enduring significance of human rights defenders in the ongoing quest for a more just and equitable society. It seeks to provide a comprehensive and critical examination of the topic, while also identifying potential avenues for future scholarly inquiry and practical engagement within the broader field of human rights and social justice.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups or Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Human Rights Defenders) 1998

The *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders*, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1998, constitutes a significant milestone in the international framework for the protection and promotion of human rights. This declaration formally recognizes the indispensable role of human rights defenders and establishes their fundamental rights, freedoms, and responsibilities within the global human rights system.

The Declaration defines human rights defenders as individuals, groups, or civil society organizations that actively promote and safeguard human rights and fundamental freedoms. It affirms that these defenders possess the right to act, either individually or collectively, in the pursuit of the promotion and protection of human rights. Moreover, it emphasizes that states bear the primary responsibility to protect human rights defenders from violations, threats, reprisals, and acts of intimidation³.

Member States are further obligated to implement the necessary measures to establish favorable conditions across social, economic, political, and other spheres, accompanied by requisite legal guarantees, to ensure that all individuals within their jurisdiction can fully and practically enjoy these rights and freedoms, both individually and in

³ **ONU.** Declaración sobre el derecho y el deber de los individuos, los grupos y las instituciones de promover y proteger los derechos humanos y las libertades fundamentales universalmente reconocidos. Available: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Defenders/Declaration/declaration_sp.pdf. Access in 22/06/2023.

association with others. In this regard, states must also adopt appropriate legislative, judicial, and administrative measures to foster a broader understanding and realization of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights ⁴.

It is reaffirmed that everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at national and international level; to meet or demonstrate peacefully; to form non-governmental organisations, associations or groups and to participate in their activities; to communicate with non-governmental or intergovernmental organisations.

The Declaration also reaffirms the universal right of all individuals, acting independently or collectively and at both national and international levels, to peacefully assemble and demonstrate; to establish non-governmental organizations, associations, or groups; to participate freely in their activities; and to communicate and cooperate with both non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations.

The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders is structured around a set of principles and guidelines that both inform the actions of human rights defenders and delineate the appropriate responses by states. The principal elements include:

- a) Right to Protection:** The Declaration recognizes that human rights defenders are entitled to carry out their activities without undue restrictions and that they must be afforded protection from threats, reprisals, and violations of their rights.
- b) Access to Justice:** Human rights defenders have the right to seek and obtain effective remedies for human rights violations through competent judicial mechanisms.
- c) International Cooperation:** The Declaration promotes the importance of international cooperation in support of human rights defenders, with the aim of enhancing their capacity to act effectively and to protect human rights at the global level.
- d) Awareness-Raising and Education:** It underscores the essential role of awareness-raising and human rights education in cultivating a culture of respect for human rights and in supporting the activities of human rights defenders.

An analysis of the principles and guidelines articulated in the *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders* provides critical insight into the legal and normative frameworks that

⁴ **ONU.** Declaración sobre el derecho y el deber de los individuos, los grupos y las instituciones de promover y proteger los derechos humanos y las libertades fundamentales universalmente reconocidos. Available: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Defenders/Declaration/declaration_sp.pdf. Access in 22/06/2023.

underpin the work of these actors in the pursuit of social justice. The Declaration offers a foundational basis for the protection and promotion of human rights, and a thorough understanding of its provisions is essential for assessing both the impact and effectiveness of human rights defenders in contemporary society.

NEW VOICES IN THE SEARCH FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: THE EMERGENCE AND PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM

In the contemporary context, profound social, political, and economic transformations have catalyzed the pursuit of social justice. Emerging challenges—including inequality, discrimination, violence, and social exclusion—have necessitated the development of innovative approaches in the struggle for human rights. Furthermore, the intensification of globalization and rapid technological advancements have served to amplify diverse voices advocating for social justice across multiple platforms and arenas.

Human rights defenders occupy a pivotal role in the promotion and protection of fundamental rights. They are committed to addressing rights violations, combating inequality and injustice, and fostering substantive social change. These advocates are particularly central to the defense of marginalized and minority groups, working diligently to develop and implement solutions to the complex social issues confronting contemporary societies.

Across virtually all national contexts, human rights organizations, networks, and social movements have mobilized in response to the deepening of authoritarian tendencies and the constriction of civic space. These actors are actively engaged in collective efforts to advance social change, expand the range of collective voices, and respond to the urgent needs of the most marginalized and targeted communities. Even within violent and repressive environments, feminist activists, women's rights advocates, and LGBTQIAPN+ defenders have persistently resisted discrimination, strengthening their networks and forging broader, intersectional alliances.

However, the defense of human rights often incurs significant personal and collective costs for those engaged in such advocacy. Human rights defenders frequently confront threats, violence, and repression as a consequence of their efforts to challenge entrenched systems of oppression and to advance the realization of fundamental rights and freedoms⁵.

⁵ **Front Line Defenders:** Global Analysis 2022. Available: https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/1535_fld_ga23_web.pdf. Access in 25/06/2023.

According to the 2022 report by Front Line Defenders, a total of 401 targeted killings of human rights defenders were recorded globally. Alarming, five countries—Colombia, Ukraine, Mexico, Brazil, and Honduras—accounted for more than 80% of these murders. Colombia alone represented a disproportionate share, comprising 46% of the total, with 186 documented cases.

Across various sectors of human rights advocacy, defenders working on issues related to land, environmental protection, and the rights of Indigenous peoples were disproportionately affected, constituting approximately 48% of the total killings. This data underscores the heightened vulnerability faced by those engaged in the defense of land and environmental rights, particularly in contexts marked by socio-political conflict, resource exploitation, and systemic impunity.⁶

In recent years, there has been an increasing and notable presence of young people in human rights activism and in the organization of their respective communities. Youth activists have successfully mobilized large-scale movements, holding their governments accountable and demanding that state authorities respect, protect, and fulfill human rights obligations. They are assuming progressively significant leadership roles within peaceful protest movements, often serving as a primary driving force for social and political change. Through organizing demonstrations, occupying public spaces, and engaging in direct dialogue with governmental representatives, young activists demonstrate a proactive approach to advocacy, refusing to be passively dictated to regarding their political engagement.

An additional noteworthy characteristic of this phenomenon is the predominance of female leadership within these youth-led movements. The increasing representation of young women in activist leadership positions highlights the intersectionality of contemporary social movements and the role of gender dynamics in shaping new forms of resistance.

However, this growing engagement of young people in human rights advocacy comes at a considerable cost. Regrettably, state responses to the peaceful civic participation of youth are frequently characterized by repression, including acts of violence and the arbitrary arrest of activists. A salient example is the case of Myanmar, where more than one hundred student leaders—including human rights defenders and activists—were arrested in connection with protests against the new National Education Law. Among those

⁶ **Front Line Defenders:** Global Analysis 2022. Available: https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/1535_fld_ga23_web.pdf. Access in 25/06/2023.

detained is Phyo Phyo Aung, a 26-year-old leader of one of the country's largest student movements, whose case has drawn significant international attention and condemnation⁷.

Unfortunately, the violent responses of states to the peaceful activism of young human rights defenders are not limited to the context of Myanmar. Across the globe, young human rights defenders are frequently subjected to arbitrary detention and other forms of repression as a consequence of their activism. Societal attitudes often fail to embrace the acts of resistance undertaken by youth, perceiving such initiatives as disruptive rather than as legitimate exercises of civic engagement.⁸

The systematic exclusion of young people from decision-making processes significantly undermines their opportunities to participate meaningfully in deliberations concerning the advancement of human rights. Even when young individuals are permitted to engage, they are frequently underestimated or relegated to the role of apprentices, rather than being recognized as equal stakeholders and contributors to the formulation of solutions. It is therefore imperative to critically reflect upon this dynamic and to consider how state authorities respond to the peaceful civic engagement of youth. If governments are genuinely committed to safeguarding the lives and well-being of young people, they must ensure that young human rights defenders are able to assert and exercise their rights freely and without fear of reprisal.

In addition to youth engagement, social movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have emerged as significant actors in the pursuit of social justice. These entities play a vital role in exposing human rights abuses, mobilizing communities, and advocating for structural transformations. Through their defense of specific rights and their articulation of collective demands, they contribute to expanding diversity and representativeness within the broader struggle for human rights.

Recognizing and understanding the significance of these emerging voices—including the role of young activists, the work of social movements, and the contributions of NGOs—is essential for analyzing contemporary dynamics in the promotion and protection of human rights. Furthermore, such an understanding is fundamental to the development and implementation of effective strategies aimed at fostering a more just and equitable society.

⁷ **Envolverde Jornalismo.** Jovens defensores de Direitos Humanos. Available: <https://envolverde.com.br/jovens-defensores-dos-direitos-humanos/>. Access in 23/06/2023.

⁸ **Envolverde Jornalismo.** Jovens defensores de Direitos Humanos. Available: <https://envolverde.com.br/jovens-defensores-dos-direitos-humanos/>. Access in 23/06/2023.

CHALLENGES FACED BY HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND THE CONTEXT OF YOUTH ACTIVISM

Young human rights defenders are frequently subjected to threats and violations of their rights due to the sensitive and often contentious nature of their advocacy. Their courageous engagement in the defense of fundamental human rights—such as gender equality, climate justice, and the rights of LGBTQAIPN+ communities—frequently exposes them to significant risks. These individuals routinely face intimidation, harassment, criminalization, defamation, arbitrary detention, and, in some cases, physical violence. Such repressive actions are strategically employed to silence dissent and to dissuade young defenders from continuing their work in the promotion and protection of human rights⁹.

Many of the principal issues on the agenda of contemporary activist movements are intrinsically connected to global processes. These include concerns regarding international trade regulations; the influence and governance practices of key international institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank; the imperative for corporate accountability; the persistent global disparities in the distribution of resources; environmental degradation resulting from transboundary pollution and unsustainable industrial practices; and widespread non-compliance with labor laws and international treaties that safeguard workers' rights.¹⁰

Activism has undergone substantial transformations in both form and focus over recent decades. Many of these changes are attributable to the processes of globalization and the profound shifts introduced by the proliferation of digital communication and social media platforms. These technological developments have sparked scholarly debate regarding whether there has been a discernible decline or increase in the frequency and scale of public demonstrations. For instance, the global anti-war protests in early 2003 witnessed unprecedented, coordinated mass mobilizations across multiple countries. Notably, however, preceding these demonstrations, there appeared to be a decline in the use of public protests, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001¹¹.

⁹ **Amnesty International**. Report 2022/23. Available. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/WEBPOL1056702023ENGLISH.pdf>. Access in 25/06/2023.

¹⁰ KOFFEL, Carla. **Globalisation of Youth: Activism and Human Rights**. Available: <http://kaleidoscope2007.pbworks.com/f/YGACTIVISMHUMANRIGHTS.pdf>. Access in 25/06/2023.

¹¹ KOFFEL, Carla. **Globalisation of Youth: Activism and Human Rights**. Available: <http://kaleidoscope2007.pbworks.com/f/YGACTIVISMHUMANRIGHTS.pdf>. Access in 25/06/2023.

The contemporary context is characterized by an increased flow of communication mediated through digital technologies, which has facilitated the organization and coordination of activist actions on a transnational scale. Formal political channels are no longer perceived as the sole or even primary avenue for activism. Many young people view governmental institutions as having ceded considerable influence to multinational corporations, thereby diminishing the perceived relevance of traditional political processes. This perception contrasts with the dynamics of social movements in the 1960s and 1970s, which were predominantly oriented against political oppression perpetrated by the state¹².

Currently, there is growing recognition and concern regarding the role of transnational corporations in undermining the human rights of young people, particularly with respect to their economic and cultural rights. The expansion of corporate power has contributed to the commodification of public goods and services, exacerbating economic inequalities and impeding the realization of fundamental human rights for marginalized youth populations¹³.

Simultaneously, processes of globalization have contributed to the political marginalization of young people. The restructuring of the global economy has eroded the authority and autonomy of national governments, leading to a widespread perception among young people of increased detachment from formal political processes compared to previous generations.

Nonetheless, the growing participation of youth in international debates is increasingly evident through their engagement in global forums, where partnerships between young people and adults offer potential for further development. Technological advancements have enabled unprecedented global communication, broadening public participation in activist campaigns and enhancing access to information. These developments have fostered greater collaboration among campaigns and organizations, catalyzing transformations in activist networks at both national and international levels.

Furthermore, new social media platforms have mitigated the sense of isolation historically experienced by marginalized activists, allowing for the creation of transnational solidarity networks. However, these gains are tempered by the fact that major media outlets are predominantly controlled by corporate entities, which often face conflicts of interest in

¹² KOFFEL, Carla. **Globalisation of Youth: Activism and Human Rights**. Available: <http://kaleidoscope2007.pbworks.com/f/YGACTIVISMHUMANRIGHTS.pdf>. Access in 25/06/2023.

¹³ KOFFEL, Carla. **Globalisation of Youth: Activism and Human Rights**. Available: <http://kaleidoscope2007.pbworks.com/f/YGACTIVISMHUMANRIGHTS.pdf>. Access in 25/06/2023.

their coverage of activism-related events. Such dynamics frequently result in the selective dissemination of information, the neglect of reports on human rights violations, and the portrayal of activism in a negative or delegitimized manne¹⁴.

There are numerous documented cases of young human rights defenders who have faced persecution and threats as a result of their activism. A prominent example is Malala Yousafzai, a young Pakistani activist who, at the age of 15, survived an assassination attempt by the Taliban in 2012 due to her advocacy for girls' right to education. Her survival and continued activism transformed her into a globally recognized figure and a powerful voice for the advancement of girls' education worldwide.¹⁵ Other case é o de Greta Thunberg, uma jovem ativista sueca que recebeu ameaças e ataques pessoais após iniciar o movimento Fridays for Future, que busca conscientizar sobre a crise climático ¹⁶. Once again we see the female role in young human rights activism.

In addition to individual threats, young human rights defenders also face legal restrictions and institutional obstacles that limit their actions. In many countries, restrictive legislation is used to criminalize youth activism by restricting their freedom of expression and association. This may include laws that prohibit the organization of protests, peaceful demonstrations or that label their activities as subversive. These restrictions make it more difficult for young advocates to access resources and funding for their causes, and create an environment of legal uncertainty that compromises their security and effectiveness¹⁷.

The prevailing context creates substantial institutional obstacles, notably a lack of support from public authorities and the imposition of excessive bureaucratic requirements. Such governmental structures often fail to adequately acknowledge the concerns and demands of young human rights defenders, thereby hindering the effective implementation of advocacy initiatives aimed at the promotion and protection of human rights.

In this regard, important jurisprudence has been established, notably in the case of *Escaleras Mejía and Others v. Honduras* (2018). In the Settlement Agreement, the State of Honduras explicitly recognized the precarious and dangerous situation faced by human rights defenders within its jurisdiction. The State committed to the approval and

¹⁴ KOFFEL, Carla. **Globalisation of Youth: Activism and Human Rights**. Available: <http://kaleidoscope2007.pbworks.com/f/YGACTIVISMHUMANRIGHTS.pdf>. Access in 25/06/2023.

¹⁵ **BBC News**. Malala Yousafzai: The girl who was shot for going to school. Available: <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-24379018>. Access in 26/06/2023.

¹⁶ **Reuters**. Activist Thunberg channels youth fury to U.N. climate summit. Available: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-change-accord-greta-idCAKBN1Y70T1>. Access in 26/06/2023

¹⁷ KOFFEL, Carla. **Globalisation of Youth: Activism and Human Rights**. Available: <http://kaleidoscope2007.pbworks.com/f/YGACTIVISMHUMANRIGHTS.pdf>. Access in 25/06/2023.

implementation of a due diligence protocol for the investigation of crimes committed against human rights defenders. This protocol must incorporate, at a minimum: consideration of the inherent risks associated with human rights defense; the socio-political context in which defenders operate; the application of a gender-sensitive and intercultural perspective in the investigation of crimes; and adherence to international best practices and standards for due diligence according to the specific type of crime, including extrajudicial executions, homicides, torture, and threats.

Within the Inter-American Human Rights System, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has established a broad and inclusive definition of human rights defenders. It recognizes as such any individual who promotes or seeks the realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms, whether recognized at the national or international level. This definition encompasses not only professional activities but also personal struggles that may intersect with human rights advocacy. Furthermore, it includes justice operators—such as legal representatives, prosecutors, judges, and other judicial actors—who, through their functions of representing victims, investigating, prosecuting, sanctioning, or providing redress for human rights violations, or by administering justice independently and impartially, contribute to ensuring access to justice. It is noteworthy that this definition aligns with that articulated by the United Nations and its Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders.

Although Brazil currently may not have a comparable number of prominently reported cases involving threatened young defenders, there have been significant decisions by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights related to the protection of human rights defenders in the country. Notable examples include the cases of *Escher and Others v. Brazil* and¹⁸ *Nogueira de Carvalho and Another v. Brazil*¹⁹.

The situation concerning the protection of human rights defenders in Brazil deteriorated significantly during the final years of President Jair Bolsonaro's administration. According to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, the period was marked as one of the most severe in terms of violations against human rights defenders. In its June 2023 report, the Committee expressed profound concern regarding the increase in homicides, acts of violence, harassment, threats, intimidation, arbitrary detentions, and the

¹⁸ Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos. *Escher and Others v. Brazil*. Available: https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_200_ing.pdf

¹⁹ Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos. *Nogueira de Carvalho and Another v. Brazil*. Available: https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_161_por.pdf

criminalization of human rights defenders, particularly targeting Indigenous peoples, environmental activists, and women's rights defenders. The Committee also lamented the failure to investigate these crimes adequately. Additionally, it criticized the ineffective implementation of the *Program for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Communicators, and Environmentalists* (PPDDH) in Brazil, citing insufficient resources and lack of institutional autonomy as significant barriers. The protective measures offered by the program were deemed inadequate, with specific needs related to gender, race, ethnicity, and cultural connections to territory left unaddressed.

The media plays an instrumental role in amplifying the voices of young human rights defenders by disseminating their struggles, demands, and advocacy efforts. Through media coverage, public awareness of human rights issues can be enhanced, thereby increasing pressure on authorities to implement meaningful reforms.

However, media engagement also presents considerable challenges for young defenders. In certain cases, defenders are subjected to stigmatization by media outlets, which can jeopardize their personal safety and damage their reputations. Furthermore, inadequate media coverage and instances of information manipulation may undermine the efforts of young defenders in their pursuit of justice and equality.

Understanding and addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by young human rights defenders is imperative, given their vital role in advancing social justice and safeguarding human rights. It is essential that governments, international organizations, and civil society actors collaborate to strengthen mechanisms for the protection and empowerment of these young advocates. Ensuring that their voices are heard and that they can engage in human rights defense activities without fear of persecution is fundamental to the advancement of human rights globally.

In conclusion, it is evident that the effective protection of these new voices within the human rights defense community plays a critical role in the ongoing pursuit of social justice.

CASE STUDIES: EXAMPLES OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

In this sub-item, we will present the profile of young human rights defenders whose performance exemplifies commitment and courage in the search for social justice. We will describe their contexts and trajectories, highlighting significant contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights.

Greta Thunberg (20 years old) was born in Sweden in 2003 and became known worldwide even before finishing school. His mother, Malena Ernman, is an opera singer. His father, Svante Thunberg, is an actor and descends from the Nobel Prize winner, scientist formulating the greenhouse effect model. Together with her sister Beata, they live in Stockholm. But her career as an activist began within the classroom²⁰.

At the age of 8, he began to learn about the consequences of climate change. The reaction was disbelief, because he was outraged by the apathy of political leaders in the face of the problem. In May 2018, Greta wrote an essay on the weather condition that was published by a Swedish newspaper. Shortly afterwards, he decided that he would go on strike to pressure the Swedish government to meet the environmental targets stipulated in the Paris Agreement.

His plan was to stop attending classes every Friday to go to the Swedish parliament to protest, at least until the September 2018 elections.

So every Friday, instead of going to school, the 15-year-old girl sat outside the Swedish parliament with a sign that said "School strike for the weather".

Thus, Greta remained there until the time that corresponded to the end of the school day. On the first Friday of the strike, Greta was alone all day. The girl and her poster caught the attention of people passing by and some media approached to interview her. The second time, however, some people joined Greta.

Soon, each Friday gathered more and more people, until they turned into a crowd. At the same time, Greta's strike became known outside Sweden and thousands of young people in different countries of the world decided to join her. Thus was born the organization Fridays for Future. This is an international movement of students who miss Friday classes to participate in protests demanding that leaders and organizations take action to prevent climate change by reducing consumption, reducing toxic gas emissions, and use of renewable energy sources. Today, this movement led by Greta since 2018, is present in more than 7 thousand cities on all continents, with the participation of more than 14 million people worldwide²¹.

²⁰ **Reuters.** Activist Thunberg channels youth fury to U.N. climate summit. Available: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-change-accord-greta-idCAKBN1Y70T1>. Access in 27/06/2023.

²¹ **Fridays for Future.** Available: <https://fridaysforfuture.org/what-we-do/who-we-are/>. Access in 27/06/2023.

In 2018, Greta attended COP24, the UN climate conference in New York, and in 2019 was part of the Climate Action Summit, organized by the same organization, in which she gave her famous speech "How dare you?":

(...)How dare you! You stole my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I am one of the lucky people. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are at the beginning of a mass extinction, and you only talk about money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you! For over 30 years, science has been clear. How dare they continue to look away and come here saying that they are doing enough, when the necessary policy and solutions are not yet in sight.²².

As Greta protested against global warming and the problems generated by climate change, she became an example that inspired awareness.

In fact, several media outlets began to use the expression "the Greta Effect" to explain the effect caused by the young woman on others. In research conducted by The Conversation, people who come into contact with Greta's ideas become more likely to think that her actions were effective and meaningful and were more willing to do something about climate change²³.

Greta Thunberg is one of the most influential young activists of her generation. Due to her impact, Greta has received numerous recognitions for her efforts, including an honorary scholarship from the Royal Scottish Geographical Society. She was also named one of the 100 most influential people in the world by Time magazine and was also acclaimed as "Person of the Year" by Forbes in 2019²⁴.

In the same year, Forbes magazine included the young woman in its list of the 100 most powerful women in the world. The young woman was also nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for three consecutive years, from 2019 to 2021. It is an activism, vocalized by a young woman, who rethinks the very realization of Social Justice in a global context of readjustment of economic interests and the realization of sustainability.

Malala Yousafzai, 25, is a child rights activist and a young Pakistani girl who faced an attack for defending girls' right to go to school. At the age of 17, she became the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Born on 12 July 1997 in the Swat Valley in northern

²² **UNEP**. Cúpula de Ação Climática 2019. Available: <https://www.unep.org/pt-br/events/summit/cupula-de-acao-climatica-2019>. Access in 27/06/2023.

²³ **The Conversation**. Greta Thunberg effect. Available: <https://theconversation.com/greta-thunberg-effect-people-familiar-with-young-climate-activist-may-be-more-likely-to-act-154146>. Access in 27/06/2023.

²⁴ **Forbes**. Greta Thunberg. Available: <https://www.forbes.com/profile/greta-thunberg/>. Access in 27/06/2023.

Pakistan, Malala was born into a community where only the birth of boys was celebrated, while the girls were intended for early marriages and motherhood at age 14. However, thanks to the support of his family, who always encouraged his desire to study, Malala escaped from this fate²⁵.

His father, a teacher and school director, saw in Malala an exemplary student and, contrary to local customs, stimulated his interest in physics, literature, history and politics, arousing his indignation at the injustices of the world. When Malala was 10, the Swat Valley was taken by the Taliban, who imposed their fundamentalist rule on the region. The schools were forced to close, and those who disobeyed were destroyed. At that time, Malala was studying at her father's school, who also had to close his doors²⁶.

With only 11 years, Malala already defended the right of girls to education in her blog. At the age of 12, to continue attending school, she hid the uniform in her backpack to avoid attacks and aggression on the way. In a New York Times documentary, Malala expressed her desire to become a doctor and stated that she would continue studying anywhere to fulfill that dream.

In 2010, even after the government announced the expulsion of the Taliban from the Swat Valley, the militia continued to threaten the region. Malala, already known for her interviews and lectures in defense of girls' right to education, started receiving death threats. When she was 15, she was studying in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. On October 9, 2012, while returning home in his school bus, the vehicle was stopped by members of the Taliban, who asked, "Who is Malala?". No one responded, but one of the terrorists recognized her and fired three shots into her head²⁷.

Malala was rescued and taken to a hospital, where she remained in critical condition. After some improvement, she was transferred to a specialized hospital in Birmingham, England, to receive treatment for war wounded. On July 12, 2013, when she turned 16, Malala spoke at the United Nations Youth Assembly in New York, before an audience of representatives from more than 100 countries. In her speech, she emphasized that her cause, for which she almost lost her life, remained the same: "Our books and pens are the most powerful weapons. A child, a teacher, a book and a pen can change the world. Education is the only solution"²⁸.

²⁵ **Malala Org.** Malala History. Available: <https://malala.org/malalas-story> . Access in 27/06/2023.

²⁶ **Malala Org.** Malala History. Available: <https://malala.org/malalas-story> . Access in 27/06/2023.

²⁷ **Malala Org.** Malala History. Available: <https://malala.org/malalas-story> . Access in 27/06/2023.

²⁸ **Malala Org.** Malala History. Available: <https://malala.org/malalas-story> . Access in 27/06/2023.

Despite the bombing, Malala survived, recovered and did not abandon her convictions. He became a spokesman for the right to education and his family went into exile in Birmingham. In October 2013, her story was told in the autobiography "I Am Malala", written by Christina Lamb, for which she received a remuneration equivalent to 7 million reais. Malala announced the creation of a fund in her name to promote girls' education in Pakistan. On 10 October 2013, she received the Sakharov Prize, awarded by the European Parliament²⁹.

On 10 October 2014, at the age of 17, Malala became the youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner. The award was shared with Kailash Satyarthi, a 60-year-old Hindu activist who led rescue missions for 80,000 children working in slavery conditions in India. On 29 March 2018, after six years, Malala returned to Pakistan and met with the Pakistani prime minister in Islamabad. In a brief televised speech, she was moved to say that if she had depended on her, she would never have left the country. In 2020, at the age of 22 and eight years after the bombing, Malala Yousafzai completed her degree in Political and Economic Philosophy at the University of Oxford³⁰.

Malala Yousafzai, in her contributions to human rights activism, tirelessly defended girls' right to education, even under the oppressive Taliban regime in Pakistan's Swat Valley. Her courage was evident when she survived an attack by the Taliban, who sought to silence her, but this did not stop her from continuing to fight for her cause. Malala has become a global spokesperson, inspiring millions of people around the world with her message about the inalienable right to education. In addition, she created the Malala Fund, an initiative that aims to promote girls' education in Pakistan and other regions. Through her autobiography, Malala shared her story, amplifying her message about the importance of education and the challenges faced by girls around the world. For her achievements and impact on human and educational rights activism, Malala has received numerous international awards and recognitions, including the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize.

Txai Suruí, whose full name is Walelasoetxeige Suruí, is a 25-year-old indigenous woman living in the state of Rondônia, Brazil. She belongs to the Paiter Suruí people and is recognized as the founder of the Indigenous Youth Movement in her state. Currently, Txai is a law student and plays an important role in the legal department of the Kanindé

²⁹ **Malala Org**. Malala History. Available: <https://malala.org/malalas-story> . Access in 27/06/2023.

³⁰ **Malala Org**. Malala History. Available: <https://malala.org/malalas-story> . Access in 27/06/2023.

Ethnoambiental Defense Association, an entity renowned for its work in matters related to indigenous causes³¹.

In addition, she is a young representative of the Guardians of the Forest - an alliance formed by communities dedicated to the protection of tropical forests around the world. Txai also plays the role of adviser in the Global Alliance "Amplifying Voices for Just Climate Action". Demonstrating her commitment to socio-environmental issues, she voluntarily contributes to the organization Engajamundo and was honored to represent her people at the UN Climate Conference - COP25 in Madrid³².

From an early age, Txai became an activist inspired by her parents - the cacique Almir Suruí and the Indigenist Ivaneide Bandeira Cardozo, known as Neidinha Suruí. In addition to her involvement in the indigenous struggle, she also played a prominent role in the student movement, becoming the first indigenous rector of the Academic Center of Law of the Federal University of Rondônia. His dedication is focused on the preservation of standing forests, the defense of human rights and the search for environmental and social justice for all. As part of her commitment, she is part of the WWF-Brazil Deliberative Council, contributing to effective actions for conservation and sustainability³³

Jeremiah Thoronka (22 years old – Sierra Leone) was born during the Civil War in Sierra Leone and experienced the hardships of a childhood and adolescence without electricity at home. Every day, starting at 6 PM, his neighborhood on the outskirts of Freetown (the country's capital) faced total darkness. Residents had to burn coal and wood to obtain lighting and heating. Jeremiah became familiar with electricity at the age of 10 when he earned a scholarship to one of the best schools in the region. While in university, he created a kinetic energy system based solely on the movement of pedestrians to generate a stream of clean energy. Today, he dreams of providing sustainable and accessible electricity to his neighbors³⁴.

Vandita Morarka (26 years old - India), the founder and CEO of One Future Collective, is a young queer activist and human rights lawyer in India. When COVID-19 reached her community, Vandita adapted by using simple technology such as SMS, calls,

³¹ **WWF**. Txai Suruí. Available: <https://www.wwf.org.br/?80429/Txai-Surui-jovem-indigena-brasileira-acaba-de-discursar-na-abertura-da-COP26> . Access in 27/06/2023.

³² **WWF**. Txai Suruí. Available: <https://www.wwf.org.br/?80429/Txai-Surui-jovem-indigena-brasileira-acaba-de-discursar-na-abertura-da-COP26> . Access in 27/06/2023.

³³ **WWF**. Txai Suruí. Available: <https://www.wwf.org.br/?80429/Txai-Surui-jovem-indigena-brasileira-acaba-de-discursar-na-abertura-da-COP26> . Access in 27/06/2023.

³⁴ **Front Line Defenders**: Global Analysis 2022. Available: https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/1535_fld_ga23_web.pdf. Access in 25/06/2023.

and learning through Google Drive, along with hybrid partnership models involving those in the field providing assistance and having internet access, to deliver services to those without any access³⁵.

FINAL REMARKS

The *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders*, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1998, constitutes a significant milestone in the international legal framework for the protection and promotion of human rights. This instrument formally recognizes the vital role played by human rights defenders and delineates their fundamental rights, freedoms, and responsibilities.

The Declaration defines human rights defenders as individuals, groups, or civil society organizations that actively promote and safeguard human rights and fundamental freedoms. It affirms that these defenders possess the right to act, either individually or collectively, in the promotion and protection of human rights, and that states bear the corresponding obligation to protect them from violations, threats, reprisals, and acts of intimidation.

An analysis of the principles and guidelines articulated in the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders provides critical insights into the legal and normative frameworks that support the activities of these agents in the pursuit of social justice. The Declaration serves as a foundational instrument for the protection and advancement of human rights, and a comprehensive understanding of its provisions is essential for evaluating the impact and effectiveness of human rights defenders within contemporary societies.

Young human rights defenders exemplify remarkable commitment and courage in their efforts to promote social justice. Their trajectories and contributions have been significant in advancing and protecting human rights globally.

Greta Thunberg, aged 20, born in Sweden in 2003, has achieved worldwide recognition for her climate activism. Her engagement began at the age of 15, when she initiated solitary school strikes in front of the Swedish Parliament, demanding substantive action to combat climate change. Her protest evolved into a global movement, inspiring millions of young people to join the *Fridays for Future* initiative, which seeks to pressure political leaders and institutions to implement effective measures against climate change.

³⁵**Front Line Defenders:** Global Analysis 2022. Available: https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/1535_fld_ga23_web.pdf. Access in 25/06/2023.

Similarly, Malala Yousafzai, now 25 years old, is a Pakistani activist dedicated to the defense of children's rights and the right to education for girls. Despite facing threats from the Taliban, Malala persisted in her advocacy for educational rights. Her efforts earned her international acclaim, culminating in her receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 at the age of 17, making her the youngest laureate in the history of the award.

Another notable figure is Txai Suruí, a 25-year-old Indigenous activist from the Paiter Suruí people in Brazil. She is recognized for her steadfast advocacy in defense of Indigenous rights and environmental protection, confronting both local and global challenges to the preservation of Indigenous territories and biodiversity.

These young activists exemplify profound courage and unwavering commitment in addressing critical global challenges and striving for transformative change. Their voices resonate on an international scale, inspiring others to engage in the defense of human rights, social justice, and environmental sustainability. The participation of youth in human rights advocacy underscores the importance of amplifying the voices of future generations and acknowledging their potential in constructing a more just and equitable world.

It is also important to emphasize the increasing presence of young women in these leadership roles, reflecting a broader trend of enhanced female representation within contemporary human rights activism. These voices have significantly influenced public policies and mobilized communities worldwide, highlighting the necessity of adopting an inclusive and intergenerational approach to human rights promotion.

In this context, it is imperative to support and protect human rights defenders, particularly those who face heightened risks due to their activism. Strengthening national and international legal frameworks to ensure the safety and freedom of defenders is essential, alongside the creation of safe and enabling spaces where their voices can be heard, respected, and valued.

REFERENCES

1. **Amnesty International**. Report 2022/23. Available. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/WEBPOL1056702023ENGLISH.pdf>. Access in 25/06/2023.
2. **BBC News**. Malala Yousafzai: The girl who was shot for going to school. Available: <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-24379018>. Access in 26/06/2023.
3. **Envolverde Jornalismo**. Jovens defensores de Direitos Humanos. Available: <https://envolverde.com.br/jovens-defensores-dos-direitos-humanos/>. Access in 23/06/2023.
4. **Forbes**. Greta Thunberg. Available: <https://www.forbes.com/profile/greta-thunberg/>. Access in 27/06/2023.
5. **Fridays for Future**. Available: <https://fridaysforfuture.org/what-we-do/who-we-are/>. Access in 27/06/2023.
6. **Front Line Defenders: Global Analysis 2022**. Available: https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/1535_fld_ga23_web.pdf. Access in 25/06/2023.
7. KOFFEL, Carla. **Globalisation of Youth: Activism and Human Rights**. Available: <http://kaleidoscope2007.pbworks.com/f/YGACTIVISMHUMANRIGHTS.pdf>. Access in 25/06/2023.
8. **Malala Org**. Malala History. Available: <https://malala.org/malalas-story>. Access in 27/06/2023.
9. **ONU**. Declaración sobre el derecho y el deber de los individuos, los grupos y las instituciones de promover y proteger los derechos humanos y las libertades fundamentales universalmente reconocidos. Available: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Defenders/Declaration/declaration_sp.pdf. Access in 22/06/2023.
10. **Reuters**. Activist Thunberg channels youth fury to U.N. climate summit. Available: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-change-accord-greta-idCAKBN1Y70T1>. Access in 26/06/2023
11. **The Conversation**. Greta Thunberg effect. Available: <https://theconversation.com/greta-thunberg-effect-people-familiar-with-young-climate-activist-may-be-more-likely-to-act-154146>. Access in 27/06/2023.
12. **UNEP**. Cúpula de Ação Climática 2019. Available: <https://www.unep.org/pt-br/events/summit/cupula-de-acao-climatica-2019>. Access in 27/06/2023.
13. **WWF**. Txai Suruí. Available: <https://www.wwf.org.br/?80429/Txai-Surui-jovem-indigena-brasileira-acaba-de-discursar-na-abertura-da-COP26>