

Executive Summary

# **We Are The Target**

## **Experiences of Women Human Rights Defenders In Confronting Online Gender-Based Violence**

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## **Background**

The General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) ratified the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders in 1998 and affirmed the rights of human rights defenders to be able to carry out various jobs, including the right to obtain protection when opposing state actions that result in human rights violations. Not only guaranteeing the rights of human rights defenders, this declaration also emphasizes the duty and role of the state to protect, promote and implement human rights and ensure that everyone under national law can enjoy all these rights.

Now, 23 years after the adoption of the declaration, the condition of human rights defenders globally does not seem to be getting any better. On the contrary, they remain targets of attack with an increasingly worrying trend. One of them is online gender-based violence (OGBV) which makes the position of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) more vulnerable. The online space opens the door to new forms of violence such as online harassment, doxxing, sending sexually explicit content to threats of rape. National Commission on Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan) has actually been monitoring the WHRDs situation since 2007 and identified the existence of OGBV as a type of threat in 2015.

On the other hand, it is impossible to abandon the use of social media platforms to campaign for human rights issues in the current digital era. In addition to the personal motives and revenge that have been recorded quite large in OGBV cases, since the last few years political motivations have begun to emerge as a driving force for OGBV. With OGBV, women human rights defenders are attacked not only for their opinions, but also for their identity as women or other gender and sexual identities.

We can't abandon the use of social media platforms to campaign for human rights issues in the current digital era, on the other hand, the last few years shows political motivations have begun to emerge as the driving force of online gender based violence. With the online gender-based violence, women human rights defenders are attacked not only for their opinions, but also for their identity as women or other gender and sexual identities.

There is not yet comprehensive enough data to map the trends of OGBV face by women human rights defenders, the pattern of attacks, and the impact they have on the WHRDs, both personally and related to their activities as human rights defenders. Therefore, the research team together with SAFEnet through the Awas KBGO initiative conducted research on the experiences of women human rights defenders in Indonesia in confronting online gender-based violence.

## **Findings**

Portraying the experience of women human rights defenders facing challenges in its work, must be understood as more than just individual events, but to see the extent to which systematic and structural oppression occurs due to differences in gender identity and or because of the work they do on gender-related issues.

This study attempts to describe the various forms of online gender-based violence experienced by women human rights defenders in Indonesia individually, as well as in organizations. The violence experienced by individuals has an impact on the organization where they are sheltered in carrying out work to protect human rights and democracy, and conversely, organizational work also threatens individual women human rights workers. The portrait of violence that occurred in the 2015-2020 period with various human rights issues being fought for, ranging from issues of feminism, violence against women, gender identity, anti-corruption, environment and agrarian, LGBTQ rights, labor rights, and issues of democracy, including the issue of Human Rights violations in Papua.

There are two qualitative data collection methods used in this research, namely in-depth interviews with 11 sources with various WHRDs identities and Focus Group Discussions with 13 organizations and initiatives that focus on work including victim assistance, legal services for victims, feminism, reproductive health and sexual rights, human rights, women's and customary rights, and freedom of the press.

The types of OGBV targeting WHRDs found included privacy violations, surveillance and monitoring, damage to reputation/credibility, harassment and threats to violence, direct threats and violence, and attacks targeted at certain communities. Meanwhile, the characteristics of OGBV that often occur are arguments in the form of hate comments but have yet to attack gender identity; then trolling in the form of sexually suggestive and degrading expressions, including intentionally sending intimate photos without being asked; then photo manipulation, either degrading (eg. memes) or sexually nuanced (eg. pornographic content); some are in the form of hate speech, namely calls and incitements to do physical violence against the WHRDs (beating, murder, rape); and threats of violence directed at the WHRDs or her family, as well as threats of rape or death threats.

The perpetrators that have been mapped through this research include fake accounts and political buzzers; parties belonging to religious-based, nationalist, and anti-feminist groups; alleged involvement of the apparatus and corporations; Gender-based violence perpetrators whose cases are being handled by WHRDs; and digital media and platforms.

The impact of online gender-based violence touches on various aspects of life, ranging from psychological and physical conditions, to affecting a person's social, economic, and political conditions. The psychological and physical impacts that hinder the interviewees from living their daily lives also affect their work. In addition, the impacts of online gender-based violence experienced by the 11 WHRDs were self-censorship, depression and anxiety, and decreased quality of life. These impacts need to be looked at as a whole that affect each other.

## **Recommendations**

This study emphasizes the importance of security guarantees for WHRDs in their work. Thus, integrated protection needs to take into account political, social, economic, cultural factors, resolve issues that generate and reproduce conflict, displacement, inequality, violence, to patriarchal attitudes and practices that are at the root of gender-based violence. The guarantee of participating in the digital realm is first of all the responsibility of the state to uphold human rights for all citizens.

From the research, in addition to the need for law enforcement commitment, comprehensive regulation making and fair policy determination by the government are also needed. This study recommends to encourage holistics and integrated protection in order to prevent and eliminate all forms of online gender-based violence actions against WHRDs by ensuring each of WHRDs has the capacity to personally mitigate, making sure the work environment have operational guidelines for security protocols and rapid response mechanisms, as well as asking for support and demanding responsibility from digital platform.