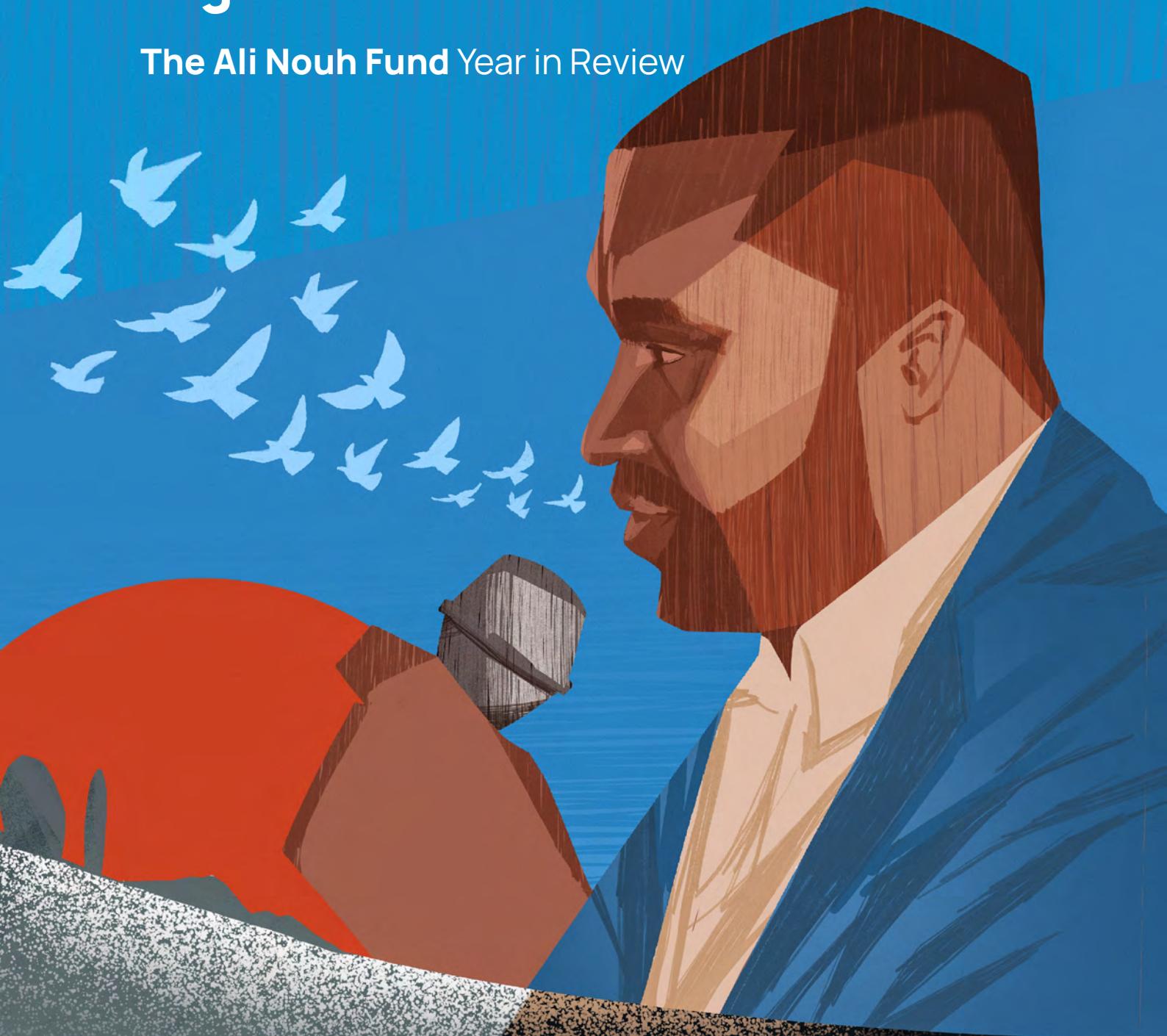


# Transformative Protection for Human Rights Defenders

The Ali Nouh Fund Year in Review



Lawyers  
for Justice  
in Libya



# 1 Introduction



**In February 2021, on the tenth anniversary of Libya's uprising, Lawyers for Justice in Libya (LFJL) established the Ali Nouh Fund (the Fund) for the protection of human rights defenders (HRDs). Named after one of LFJL's earliest partners,**

## Ali Nouh

**a father, husband and human rights defender who spent his life dedicated to fighting for justice and human rights in Libya, the Fund has been a lifeline for HRDs working on human rights in Libya ever since.**

While the 2011 uprising created space for civil society to organise and demand change, subsequent years of conflict, division and the absence of the rule of law across Libya have meant that speaking out frequently comes at a cost. Activists, journalists and defenders increasingly face threats, harassment, violent attacks,

enforced disappearance and other attempts to silence them.

LFJL created the Fund in response to these threats. Initially, the Fund's mandate was limited to LFJL's partners, defenders we work with, who carry out investigative research in Libya under challenging and risky conditions, who advocate for human rights in Libya, including in capitals alongside LFJL and then return to Libya. Strengthening their safety, caring for them, especially when they face risks because of the work we carry out together (and which we could not do without them) is both, an ethical obligation and an attempt to reduce the risk of harm our partners face. Over time, partners asked for the Fund's mandate to be broadened, and to also include other HRDs not (yet) partners of LFJL but also at risk because of their work in Libya. Today, the Fund has that mandate: providing protection to HRDs at risk of persecution because they seek to advance human rights in Libya.

This review highlights the Fund's work in 2025 and shows how sustained funding and support has allowed us to turn it from a pure protection mechanism into a fund that can help HRDs move from living in fear to live in safety and dignity, allowing them to continue their important work if they wish to do so.

2025 was a challenging year for civil society globally and for human rights work more specifically. In Libya, and in neighbouring Tunisia, where many Libyan HRDs have sought safety and refuge, civic space has continued to shrink. Additional restrictions, intimidation, and attacks on activists further reduced their ability to work safely. This increased the risks and the need for protection. At the same time, major funding cuts throughout 2025 made it harder to provide much-needed support.

Despite these challenges, the Fund continued to grow and adapt. We strengthened our approach and formalised our processes to expand the types of support offered through the Fund, allowing it to more consistently respond holistically to defenders at risk, even in an increasingly hostile environment.

At its inception, the Fund primarily supported HRDs to address imminent danger by providing them with the financial means to move into a safe and more stable environment, covering costs of living in exile for a defined period of time. Over time we managed to build a more holistic and longer-term protection model going beyond the financial support mechanism. This includes providing HRDs with opportunities for professional development and strengthening their capacities through access to resources aiming to develop their skills and increase their employability to secure longer-term income beyond the grant. The Fund also integrated a component of guidance and long-term mentoring, where defenders are supported with regular check-ins and tailored advice. This component aims at identifying possible exit strategies with defenders, each tailored to their future aspirations and their profiles.

For example, a defender<sup>1</sup> approached the Fund after having been detained by the Internal Security Agency (ISA) for eight months on the background of their work as an activist. The Fund provided financial emergency support, but this was not the only thing the defender needed. Overall, the Fund, a vital component of LFJL's work across all our priority areas, provides our partners and other HRDs with much-needed periods of financial, emotional

**“The Fund gave me someone to talk to and someone to listen to me. I needed to think with someone to find a way out.”**

and professional respite and advice. This enables them to continue or resume their work, benefit from personal and professional development opportunities, and transition to longer-term safety.

<sup>1</sup> For the safety of human rights defenders, this review avoids—unless safe and relevant—the use of any information that could identify them, including names, ethnicity, gender, or location.



## 2 Human rights work in Libya in 2025

Since the Fund's existence, the human rights situation in Libya has continuously deteriorated, and remained precarious throughout 2025. State and non-state actors continued to commit gross human rights violations and serious international crimes, at times amounting to crimes against humanity and war crimes. They used arbitrary arrests and detentions and other forms of violence, including extrajudicial killings, torture and enforced disappearance, to target individuals for their alleged political affiliation, silence dissent, further restrict civic space and create a climate of fear. Throughout 2025, HRDs applied to the Fund after experiencing threats and violence related to their human rights work, seeking support to manage risk and survive difficult circumstances.

In examining applications to the Fund, LFJL documented cases of defenders facing sexual violence, torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and prolonged detention without trial, legal representation or due process. One defender who applied to the Fund recounted how they were arrested and detained:

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**“At noon, right outside my workplace in Tripoli, I was assaulted and abducted at gunpoint by three-armed men claiming to be ISA officers – all in front of witnesses who were threatened not to intervene. Without a shred of dignity, I was beaten up and humiliated in front of everyone in the street.”**



Often, applicants to the Fund were accused of alleged crimes and forced to confess. Video confessions were subsequently published online – mainly on Facebook – to intimidate and humiliate targeted individuals, particularly individuals belonging to minorities and marginalised groups.

**“In one of the videos the ISA took of me, I was told to admit having sex with the same gender and to apostasy. I felt humiliated knowing that my friends and family will see this video on TV,”** Said a recipient of the Fund from an ethnic minority community.

Throughout 2025, applicants reported that the ISA targeted them and other individuals speaking out about freedoms on social media, further restricting online and offline civic space and intimidating the public into silence.

**“During interrogation, the ISA officer came with printed screenshots from my Facebook Messenger. It turned out that for the last three months they had been monitoring my private conversations with a friend. We were talking about freedom of expression and freedom of thought and opinion. I was shocked to see all my messages on paper, for everyone to see.”**

The same tactic was used with other defenders where they would be confronted with their private conversations with friends about their views and beliefs during interrogation.

LFJL also documented cases of women HRDs facing gender-specific threats, including online violence and defamation, resulting in both physical and reputational risks. In one of the cases documented by LFJL’s team, a woman journalist told us:

**“After appearing on a live programme on social media, speaking about women’s rights, without wearing hijab and with my so-called ‘coloured’ hair, threats and smear campaigns unleashed on me for ‘corrupting the morals of Libyans’ on air. The incitement and the online violence I suffered from pushed me to flee Libya when it became too dangerous to stay.”**

Regional dynamics further compounded the risks associated with human rights work in Libya. Tunisia, previously considered a refuge for Libyan HRDs, experienced its own crackdown on civil society by the Tunisian authorities. The suspension of critical refugees-supporting entities and increased cross-border cooperation between Libyan and Tunisian authorities left many Libyan HRDs stranded, undocumented and in precarious legal and security situations, prone to deportation risks. A defender told us

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**“I travelled to Algeria to renew my 90-day grace period in Tunisia. Upon reaching the border, despite presenting my UNHCR card, border officials detained me for five hours where I was interrogated about my work and background, during which an officer threatened to send me back to Libya.”**

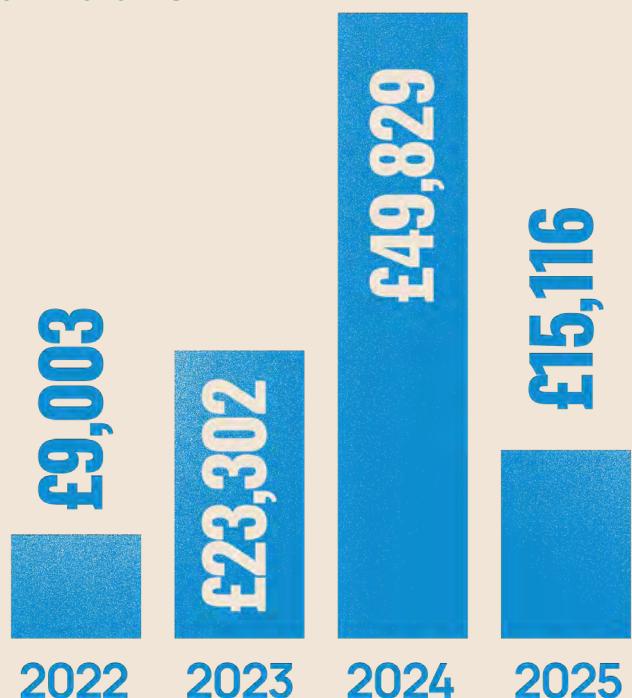
These developments also underscore the need for longer-term protection planning. In the first years of the Fund, defenders would be forced to flee Libya and could reside in Tunisia safely with a wider margin of freedom and more opportunities for professional and personal development. This changed in 2024 and even more throughout 2025, with the risk of being returned to the Libyan authorities at any moment.

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## The Ali Nouh Fund in transition: from emergency financial assistance to holistic support

Since its inception in 2021, and the start of the programme in July 2022, the Fund has provided 23 HRDs with direct financial support. Over the same period, the Fund referred tens more to other protection mechanisms, for example because the cases included applicants that fell outside the Fund's HRD specific mandate or because the Fund was not in a position to provide the support needed.<sup>2</sup> In particular during the initial period of the Fund's existence, when its mandate was limited to LFJL partners, many cases were referred to other mechanisms. As the crackdown on civil society intensified, and following requests from our partners, we extended the mandate to provide protection also to other HRDs, notwithstanding our very limited resources.

Total amount of support provided from 2022-2025 in GBP<sup>3</sup>



<sup>2</sup> The Fund is part of an informal consortium of protection funds supporting HRDs in the region to help coordinate targeted support, including through a referral process, and to avoid duplication of efforts.

<sup>3</sup> This only reflects the direct cash contributions provided to applicants who received funding. It does not include any other costs, for example, of administering the Fund.

## Financial assistance

Financial assistance and support provided by the Fund typically includes covering costs of accommodation and living expenses. For many HRDs, this support is critical to address the immediate consequences of reprisals, including arrest, detention, forced relocation or flight abroad, and, at times, the need for medical care. One HRD who was forced to flee Libya highlighted how receiving financial support had helped them abroad:

**“For the first time in a long while, I closed a door for a house that was actually mine. Having this space, did not just give me a place to stay, it allowed me to breathe, have a break and privacy, something of which I was deprived in prison.”**

## Transition to holistic support

In the majority of cases, financial support is only the beginning of a longer-term relationship between the HRDs, the Fund and LFJL. Although the funding cycle often ends after three to six months, wellbeing and mentoring support and advice are often required for years. Many HRDs who are obliged to flee Libya to avoid persecution, and who do not have any prospect of safe return in the near future, have to start anew in exile. They may require new skill sets (for example, learning English or French) to help them increase their employability chances and to open doors to further education. Some need emotional or psychological support to overcome isolation, depression and loneliness.

Understanding these needs more deeply resulted in a gradual shift throughout 2024/2025 towards longer term support and a more holistic protection and support model. Through regular check-ins, defenders continue being supported beyond the usual grant cycle and are not left alone to figure things out after the funding comes to an end. The Fund provides long-term guidance on relocation pathways, professional development opportunities, clarifying priorities, facilitating psychosocial support sessions, and advising strategically on exit planning, allowing HRDs to speak about their fears, identify options and plan for the future.

A HRD who was forced to flee abroad stated:

**“The grant was not just a bank transfer. It was a turning point that reorganised my life, restored my psychological wellbeing, and transformed my human rights work. The multi-layered support I received allowed me to restore my confidence and defend migrants’ rights with renewed determination I thought I had lost amidst exile.”**

Guidance and advice complementing financial support helped several HRDs in exile in Tunisia to take necessary steps for their relocation to safety. A stateless HRD who received financial support for four months highlighted:

**“I was able to focus on my resettlement process for the first time in ages. I was worried about providing for my family to the point that I forgot to follow up, send reference letters or think about a way out. I just needed to breathe; I needed someone who I could rely on for support.”**

Six months after they received the funding and a reference letter to support their resettlement, they called from their new location, where they and their family had reached safety.

Similarly, in another case, a HRD detained for several months for their human rights advocacy, applied for financial support one month after their release and flight to Tunisia.

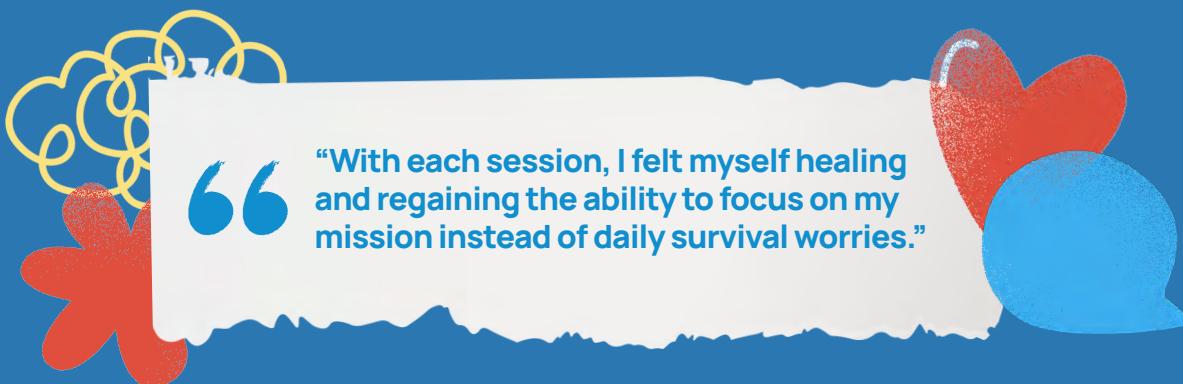
**“I could not stand the idea of being back in the cell again, nor the sexual harassment that I endured at the hands of the officers there.”**

With a six months grant and psychosocial support sessions, they were able to prepare for their resettlement from Tunisia. The Fund facilitated coordination between different international resettlement organisations, provided references and practical guidance, eventually resulting in their resettlement to a safer country. They followed up in January 2026, sending a picture of themselves in the snow of their new home, stating that

Other longer-term outcomes reflect similar trajectories, with HRDs who received financial assistance having eventually been able to relocate or resettle in Canada, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Norway.

## Psychosocial and medical support

Many HRDs turning to the Fund for support seek psychosocial and medical assistance. The Fund put in place a confidential referral pathway to provide such support in close collaboration with the [Restart Centre](#) in Lebanon, offering remote, trauma-informed care to HRDs who experience emotional or psychological trauma, often the result of torture, detention, or ongoing threats. A defender who had been detained in Libya and managed to flee abroad after their release, received such support:



In other cases, the Fund offered medical support and assistance, including surgeries, medication, and treatments for injuries resulting from detention or other violations. This included, for example, facilitating medical support for an HRD who had been detained for eight months, where they were kept in inhuman conditions and were repeatedly beaten including on their genitals, resulting in serious injury requiring treatment.

## Professional development

The Fund also offers HRDs opportunities for professional development, including by identifying relevant scholarship and residency programmes available to HRDs from Libya. In addition, HRDs can apply to the Fund to gain access to LFJL's Adala Academy, an online human rights education and learning platform in Arabic. This allows them access to courses on documentation, international law, advocacy and campaigning, documentation of sexual and gender-based violence, and universal jurisdiction, amongst others. One of the recipients who enrolled in the Academy four months into their funding and support, highlighted that

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“After two years of feeling that my professional growth had stalled, the courses I took at the Adala Academy helped me realign with my potential and gave me the clarity needed to re-discover and re-connect with my skills and passion as a human rights advocate.”

Working together with the Fund, they applied to several international graduate programmes and were accepted into a scholarship programme, through which they will relocate to a safer country in September 2026.

Across these stories, HRDs expressed that without the initial financial stability provided by the Fund, combined with the practical support provided through guidance and mentoring, it would have been very challenging to focus on long-term exit strategies, to deal with the emotional toll and the bureaucratic processes of resettlement. Defenders expressed that the Fund offered them not only protection but time to regroup, reflect and plan for the future.

## 4 Outlook – the Fund in 2026

The Fund's work to date underlines the importance of transitioning the Fund from an emergency focused protection mechanism to a more holistic HRD-centred protection fund equipped to respond to the full spectrum of risks faced and needs expressed by HRDs. This transition has strengthened the Fund's ability to provide timely emergency support while also addressing longer-term protection needs. It has helped HRDs to continue with their human rights work.

Looking ahead, throughout 2026, the Fund will build on these achievements and consolidate core emergency response while continuing to diversify the forms of support offered. Sustained, successful, fundraising efforts will be critical to ensure that the Fund can deliver (financial) emergency support timely and effectively. They will also be central to maintaining a dedicated Fund Coordinator who can continue to consistently implement existing complementary protection approaches.



Together with HRDs, LFJL identified additional areas the Fund could explore to provide targeted support. These will include, in 2026:

### **Solidarity Network:**

The establishment of a solidarity network of Fund recipients and other HRDs in exile and strengthening their connections with defenders in Libya and across the wider region. This can help address feelings of isolation and loneliness, while also allowing HRDs to stay engaged, share expertise and experiences. It will create opportunities for engagement and help amplify human rights issues of concern through collective research and advocacy despite displacement and repression.

### **Justice and Accountability:**

Through LFJL's justice and accountability priority area, the Fund will offer targeted legal advice to HRDs who have experienced human rights violations and pursue strategic litigation before relevant mechanisms. This will not only support individual defenders in seeking justice for the harm suffered but also contribute to broader efforts designed to challenge the shrinking civic space, while promoting accountability.

### **Coordination and cooperation:**

The Fund will strengthen collaboration with other protection mechanisms to maximise impact, identify gaps in protection frameworks and assess the potential expansion of its mandate to support HRDs working beyond Libya.

### **Protection inside Libya:**

In response to ongoing processes and efforts to develop a political roadmap towards elections in Libya, the Fund will explore context-specific protection options, including the feasibility of protection inside Libya. This will allow HRDs in Libya to participate more safely in and provide input into these processes and ensure that these are informed by and uphold human rights law and principles.

These priorities for 2026 will allow the Fund to remain responsive to HRDs and adapt to ongoing developments while maximising its impact. With sustained funding and support, the Fund will contribute to keeping defenders safe and thus support them do their work to advance human rights in Libya and beyond.



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