

## PRESS RELEASE

### HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS OF THE YEAR AWARD 2017

**NAIROBI, KENYA:** On the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 2018, the Working Group on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in Kenya will award the outstanding work of Human Rights Defenders.

The Awards are an initiative of the Working Group on Human Rights Defenders, that comprises of CSOs and development partners in Kenya. By means of the HRD Awards, the Working Group will honour three human rights defenders that have demonstrated courage and impact in the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The HRD Awards will be handed out for the second time, after the initiative was first launched in 2016.

#### *Background*

Human rights defenders play a critical role in the development of a society that would thrive on the values and principles as intended within the Constitution of Kenya 2010. Article 10 spell out accountability, transparency, good governance and public participation. Human rights defenders (HRDs) complement the government in promoting and protecting these values along with respect for human rights.

Despite the noble work HRDs are faced with numerous challenges that range from personal injury, surveillance, vilification, arbitrary arrests, malicious prosecutions, torture, threats to their life and livelihoods.

Despite these challenges aimed at intimidating them and limiting their operating space HRDs continue to show resilience, creativity and extraordinary courage in advancing human rights.

“These awards seek to honour personal dedication, sacrifice and commitment to stand up for the rights of the community and someone else rights. It is an appreciation of those committed to speak truth to power” said Kamau Ngugi, Executive Director of the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders – Kenya.

#### *HRD of the Year 2017 Awards – 26<sup>th</sup> of January 2018*

The Award Ceremony will be hosted by the Netherlands Ambassador to Kenya, H.E. Frans Makken. Netherlands is the current chair of the HRD Working Group.

Ambassador Makken: “I am extremely proud to host the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of these awards. The protection of Human Rights Defenders is a key priority of our human rights policy. In Kenya, many brave women and men have stood up for other people’s rights, in spite of challenging circumstances, repercussions, and sometimes even threats to their lives. Sometimes their work is very public, but much more often, their work goes unnoticed. Therefore, they deserve to be in the limelight today.”

The Award has three categories: 1) the upcoming Human Rights Defender of the year award; 2) the Human Rights Defender of the year award and 3) the Munir Mazrui Lifetime achievement award to recognize the long service and dedication of HRDs to the promotion and protection of human rights. All of the awards will go to individuals whose exemplary human rights work has had demonstrable impact to the community.

The panel responsible for the selection of the winners of the 2017 HRD Awards consists of former Chief Justice Dr Willy Mutunga (chair), Rachael Mwikali (Coalition of Grassroots Human Rights Defenders), Lorna Dias (GALCK), Jane Meriwas (Samburu Women Trust), Commissioner George Morara Monyoncho (KNCHR), Boniface Mwangi (Pawa254), and Jusuf Aboubakar (HAKI Africa).

Members of the press who are interested in covering the Award Ceremony, kindly contact Ms. Stijn Janssen, Political Counsellor & Press Officer at the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands ([stijn.janssen@minbuza.nl](mailto:stijn.janssen@minbuza.nl) or 0700 872 173), for further details and interview requests.