



UpRights⁷

20
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ANNUAL REPORT



Building Partnerships To Advance Human Rights Through International Law

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Dear Readers,

As UpRights marks its fifth year, we continue to grow — not only in the scope of our work, but in the strength of the partnerships that define it. These are challenging times. We find ourselves, and our colleagues, having to navigate waning commitments and drastic changes in perspective about the value of human rights and international cooperation.

But our cooperation also reminds us that there is a willing and able community that continue to promote just and stable societies that respect human rights. It is in the context of this turbulent landscape — where conflict proliferates and democratic values are increasingly under pressure — that change requires more than mere principles.

It demands practical support, patient collaboration, and a recognition that meaningful progress comes through the efforts of those on the front lines.

That is why UpRights continues to invest in relationships with national actors — civil society organizations, prosecutors and judges, government institutions and affected communities — who are best place to address human rights violations and build the systems necessary to prevent their recurrence. We believe that lasting change is only possible when those most directly impacted are also those shaping the response.

In order to work towards this goal, we have deepened our focus on transitional justice and institutional reform. In Ukraine, for example, we collaborated with civil servants, legal professionals, and international partners to support a national transitional justice process.

In the area of business and human rights, we continued to advance the idea that companies operating in complex environments must take concrete steps to identify and mitigate the risks they pose to people and communities.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, we have been supporting judicial authorities by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the current system in prosecuting and adjudicating international crimes and proposing tailored solutions for future international support to national efforts to combat impunity.

At its core, our approach remains grounded in a simple idea: justice is not only about accountability for the past, but also about creating structures that prevent future abuses and promote human rights. That is why we combine legal support, training, and technical assistance with a broader vision of partnership and empowerment.

We know we cannot do this work alone. Everything we accomplish is made possible by the support and shared commitment of our partners and community. As we look ahead, we are seeking to broaden this network — to diversify the sources of support that sustain our work, and to continue building a community committed to advancing human dignity through international law.

We remain grateful for those who work with us, and we invite others to join. These are difficult times, but they also present a shared opportunity: to strengthen our collective efforts and contribute to a more just and humane world.

Valerie Gabard
Co-Director

Asa Solway
Co-Director



OUR 2024:

UpRights' mission is to **contribute to just, resilient and sustainable societies** that effectively address human rights violations, strengthen the structures necessary to prevent future violations and are responsive to the needs of their citizens.

Our support takes two forms. First, we **assist partners in documenting human rights violations and international crimes and in building the foundations to pursue legal accountability**. Second, we **provide legal assistance, policy recommendations and capacity-building support**, particularly in the areas of business and human rights and transitional justice. **Some of our accomplishments this year include:**



Trained over 100 civil society actors and staff from international organizations on the documentation and adjudication of human rights violations and international crimes



Strengthened the capacities of over 200 representatives of national authorities across Ukraine to confront challenges related to transitional justice matters.



Supported the worldwide leading textile processing standard for organic fibres in due diligence certification and developed a training programme on auditing human rights due diligence



With partners, analyzed and set out legal and policy recommendations promoting the rights of migrants and refugees, women, children, and LGBTQIA+ persons.



PROMOTING PEACE AND JUSTICE IN UKRAINE

In 2024, UpRights deepened its commitment to **advancing justice and accountability across Ukraine**. In response to the accountability challenges posed by the Russian full scale invasion, we maintained a strong focus on **supporting transitional justice processes and institutional capacity-building**. Our contributions were designed to **respond to the evolving needs of Ukrainian actors** at multiple levels—ensuring that accountability mechanisms are locally informed, legally sound, and broadly participatory.

A key milestone was our partnership with the **T.M.C. Asser Institute** and **The Hague Academy for Local Governance (THALG)** to deliver a **Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop** aimed at building the capacity of Ukrainian regional government officials to work on issues of transitional justice.



This workshop marked a crucial step within the programme **Restoring Dignity and Justice in Ukraine**, funded by the **Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs** and implemented by the **International Development Law Organization (IDLO)**, in partnership with UpRights, **the Asser Institute**, the **Center for International Legal Cooperation (CILC)**, and the **Netherlands Helsinki Committee (NHC)**.

The ToT brought together **sixteen government officials** from across Ukraine to bridge connections between different sectors of government and **build the capacity of the attendees to deliver training on transitional justice to their colleagues**. By equipping local actors with knowledge of the fundamentals of transitional justice and its specific application in de-occupied communities in Ukraine, the initiative **contributed to assisting Ukrainian civil servants in responding to harms arising from the conflict**.



We are all traumatized by the war. [...] We are traumatized but we are ready to work on transitional justice, we are ready to speak about transitional justice and promote the concept further.”



Complementing this effort, UpRights continued providing **capacity-building support to Ukrainian legal practitioners, judges, and policymakers**. Notably, UpRights contributed to **expert discussions** on potential amendments to Ukrainian legislation for international crimes and **delivered training programs** focused on fair trials and the adjudication of international crimes. These sessions aimed to **reinforce the national legal system's ability to respond to international crimes** by integrating international legal standards and fostering legal rigour.



CC : TMC Asser Instituut

Importantly, the trainings not only provided technical knowledge but also offered a **space for dialogue on best practices**, enabling legal actors to navigate legal questions with strategic foresight.



CC : TMC Asser Instituut

Furthermore, UpRights was also commissioned to develop a **training program for Ukrainian judges on the topic of judgement drafting**, as well as a **complementary manual** on the same topic for the National School of Judges of Ukraine.



PROMOTING BETTER BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES

Throughout 2024, UpRights fostered its commitment to **strengthening corporate accountability mechanisms** by supporting the development and implementation of **robust human rights due diligence (HRDD) frameworks**.

In particular, we deepened our collaboration with **Global Standard**, the organisation responsible for managing the **Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS)**.

As part of this collaboration, UpRights contributed to the development of the **Due Diligence Handbook for Auditors**, released in November 2024. This resource provides practical guidance for auditors tasked with evaluating companies' compliance with human rights due diligence requirements under the GOTS framework.

By equipping auditors with clear **methodologies, practical tools**, and **case-based analysis**, the Handbook strengthens the role of auditing as a preventive, rather than reactive, mechanism for identifying and addressing human rights risks.



In February, Co-Director Valérie Gabard participated in a seminar organised by the **Union Internationale des Avocats**, in collaboration with the **International Criminal Court Bar Association** and the **Association of Defence Counsel Practising before the International Courts and Tribunals**. Drawing on UpRights' 2023 expert report on the human rights due diligence process of the Mozambique LNG Project operated by TotalEnergies the presentation underscored the critical importance of **heightened due diligence process in conflict zones**.

Later in the year, UpRights contributed to a **conference on corporate due diligence** co-organised by the **University of Nîmes** and **Juristes sans Frontières**, with the support of the **Montpellier, Nîmes, and Alès Bar Associations**. Through this forum, UpRights continued to emphasise that the application of heightened human rights due diligence in high-risk environments is essential not only to protect affected communities but also to prevent corporate complicity in serious human rights violations.



CC : GOTS



CC : GOTS



SUPPORTING LGBTI EQUALITY AND NON- DISCRIMINATION

In 2024 UpRights contributed to the **protection and promotion of the rights of LGBTI persons** by drafting the **Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of LGBTI People in Europe and Central Asia**, published by **ILGA-Europe**. This comprehensive publication drew on cooperation with activists across 54 countries to offer an evidence-based overview of developments in the region.



CC : ILGA- Europe

The review functioned not only as a monitoring tool, but also as a **strategic resource for national and international actors** seeking to reinforce protections for LGBTI communities.

In countries where backsliding on minority rights continues to pose serious threats, the Review served as an **accountability mechanism** — calling attention to ongoing violations and creating pressure for compliance with international human rights standards.



SAFEGUARDING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF MIGRANTS AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

In 2024, against the backdrop of ongoing human rights concerns tied to migration management and cross-border cooperation agreements, UpRights undertook a **rigorous legal and factual analysis of the cooperation framework between Italy and Libya**, shedding light on the systemic violations embedded in current policies and advocating for reforms aligned with international human rights standards.

This work marked a significant contribution to the human rights landscape in the Mediterranean area, combining detailed legal expertise, methodological precision, and a deep concern for the lived experiences of those navigating displacement and border violence.



At the heart of UpRights' work was the continued scrutiny of the **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Italy and Libya**. Through a longstanding **partnership** with **StraLi**, UpRights built upon previous efforts to conduct a comprehensive legal and factual assessment of its implementation and impact.

This analysis culminated in the publication of **Navigating Troubled Waters: Italy's Human Rights Dilemma in the Mediterranean**. The report provided a detailed examination of how Italy's support to Libyan authorities — particularly the Libyan Coast Guard (LCG) — contributes to a **cycle of abuse** experienced by migrants and asylum seekers attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea. The report documented how Italy's **externalisation policies** have enabled practices such as interceptions at sea, arbitrary detention, and ill-treatment within Libyan detention centres.





ENABLING CIVIL SOCIETY AND JUDICIARIES TO COMBAT IMPUNITY

In 2024, UpRights expanded its engagement with the global **fight against impunity** through efforts to **support civil society and national judiciaries**.

Notably, in partnership with the **International Commission of Jurists**, we developed and delivered a comprehensive training program on the documentation of serious human rights violations and international crimes for accountability purposes, tailored to the needs of **3 civil society organisations operating in fragile contexts**.

Furthermore, in December, we supported **Amnesty International** in the preparation and **submission of a legal filing to the President of the Pre-Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court**. The filing urged the Court to take action to ensure the Prosecutor's compliance with **Article 15(3) of the Rome Statute** and to open an investigation into the situation in **Nigeria**.

The submission was made on **behalf of victims' networks** advocating for accountability and redress. UpRights' provided legal analysis and drafting support to reinforce the submission's legal basis and to **strengthen the articulation of the accountability needs expressed by survivors**.



CC : TMC Asser Instituut

In parallel, UpRights played an integral role in the 7th edition of the training course, “**Building the Capacity of Judges to Deal with International Crimes in Africa**”, a high-level initiative organized by the **T.M.C. Asser Institute**, the **Antonio Cassese Initiative**, and the **International Nuremberg Principles Academy** to enhance the judicial capacity of **judges and prosecutors from French-speaking African countries** in addressing international crimes effectively.

A highlight of UpRights’ contribution was an interactive and insightful case study which provided a detailed exploration of the **investigative strategies and legal qualifications of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)**.

By dissecting the complexities surrounding the classification of SGBV within the context of **war crimes** and **crimes against humanity**, we provided participants with legal tools and practical strategies to strengthen accountability for addressing such violations of international law.



In 2024, UpRights also **extended its work on justice and accountability to the Korean Peninsula**, contributing to a **growing body of legal analysis** concerning **accountability pathways** for North Korean crimes and the **involvement of North Korean nationals in armed conflicts outside the region**.



Throughout the year we continued our collaboration with the **Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (NKDB)** through a joint initiative with the **Public Interest Journalism Lab** and **The Reckoning Project**. Together, we co-organised a **webinar** which explored the involvement of North Korean nationals in Russia's war against Ukraine and **examined the legal and human rights challenges** arising from their dual status as both potential perpetrators and victims.

Building upon this exchange, UpRights published a **legal analysis in Opinio Juris** examining the legal frameworks applicable to the capture and potential repatriation of North Korean soldiers under international humanitarian and human rights law.



OUR PARTNERS

In 2024, the work of UpRights was made possible thanks to **strategic collaborations with like-minded partners** whose support is essential to advancing our commitment to a more just world.

Together, we have **worked across borders to confront injustices on a global scale**, strengthen legal frameworks to enhance human rights protection and accountability, and amplify the voices of those seeking justice in diverse contexts.

We extend our gratitude to our **partners and board members** who have stood alongside us throughout the year. Their support and dedication have been instrumental in driving and shaping impactful initiatives and reinforcing the pursuit of justice.



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ABOUT US

UpRights is an independent, non-profit organization composed of international lawyers and human rights practitioners with expertise in international law and human rights law. In line with our values, UpRights only accepts funding that allows us to act without restriction and in accordance with international law. We remain committed to ensuring that no contribution compromises our ability to pursue impartial, rights-based interventions and to advocate for victims and affected communities worldwide.

While our financial statements reflect core contributions and project-based funding, the full scope of our impact also draws on the dedication of our expert staff, pro bono collaborators, and volunteer contributors, whose time and knowledge constitute invaluable in-kind support.

Financial statements and administrative reports are available upon request. We remain committed to transparency and accountability in all our operations.

2024

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