

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH



People wave their mobile phones during a pro-democracy protest in Hong Kong, June 2019. © 2019 Chris McGrath/Getty Images

**HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH SCANDINAVIA
INSAMLINGSSTIFTELSEN
HRW SWEDEN IMPACT REPORT
(EFFEKTRAPPORT)
SEPTEMBER 2019-2020**

ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH SCANDINAVIA INSAMLINGSSTIFTELSEN

Name: Human Rights Watch Scandinavia Insamlingsstiftelsen

Organisation number: 802478-1885

Legal Number status: Insamlingsstiftelse

Human Rights Watch Scandinavia Insamlingsstiftelsen (hereinafter HRW Sweden) was established in 2015 with a purpose to support high-level research and advocacy on human rights; bring Human Rights Watch's work to the attention of the Swedish public, the private sector, and the government; and intensify advocacy to these stakeholders on key human rights issues both in Sweden and around the world. Establishing the first formal presence of Human Rights Watch in Scandinavia has been a critical step in enlisting Sweden's strong human rights culture to effect lasting improvements for victims of abuses worldwide. HRW Sweden collaborates closely with other parts of Human Rights Watch and shares its mission and purpose.

To accomplish its aims, HRW Sweden fundraises and organises larger public and smaller private events throughout the year. It promotes publicity for Human Rights Watch research through Sweden's media and supports a Swedish-language website (<https://www.hrw.org/sverige>). HRW Sweden regularly engages with Swedish decision-makers in government and other sectors as part of the organisation's advocacy work.

HRW SWEDEN AND HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH'S WORK

Human Rights Watch Inc. is a nonprofit, nongovernmental human rights organisation that was established in 1978. Its headquarters in New York closely coordinates with a network of 12 independent sister charities that share its name (hereinafter "Human Rights Watch"), including HRW Sweden. This network encompasses 482 human rights professionals, including country experts, lawyers, journalists, and academics of diverse backgrounds and nationalities.

Human Rights Watch is known for its accurate fact-finding, impartial reporting, effective use of media, and targeted advocacy, often in partnership with local civil society groups. Each year, Human Rights Watch publishes more than 1000 reports, dispatches, and briefings on human rights conditions in some 90 countries, generating extensive coverage in local and international media. With the leverage this brings, Human Rights Watch meets with governments, the United Nations, regional groups like the African Union and the European Union, financial institutions, and corporations to press for changes in policy and practice that promote human rights and justice around the world. HRW Sweden participates in these activities whenever effective strategy calls for its involvement. For additional information about Human Rights Watch research on Sweden, please go to the Sweden country research page at <https://www.hrw.org/europe/central-asia/sweden>.

HOW HRW SWEDEN AND HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH WORK

1. ***We investigate.*** HRW Sweden and Human Rights Watch are committed to systematically researching and analysing human rights conditions worldwide to uncover abuses. Researchers interview victims, witnesses, alleged perpetrators, local rights activists, and government officials to form an accurate and impartial picture of what happened. They also review media and academic reports, and domestic and international law and policy papers to gain a further understanding of the situation. In closed or conflict countries, we also draw on investigative tools such as remote sensing, geospatial techniques, and verified open source material.
2. ***We expose.*** Human Rights Watch is a media production and broadcasting powerhouse with the capacity to activate media coverage and mobilise audiences. All researchers in the Human Rights Watch network, including those serving HRW Sweden, publish their findings in the form of reports, articles, and multimedia. These are then made accessible to the public as well as local authorities to raise awareness of the abuses. The publications are available in multiple languages and formats and are often referenced in news articles worldwide. Our work is cited in the media some 6,000 times weekly.
3. ***We bring change.*** Following the identification and publication of human rights abuses, advocates for HRW Sweden and Human Rights Watch work closely with local authorities and organisations to advance credible policy solutions and apply pressure on those who abuse, profit from, or neglect human rights. We create spaces for partners and members of affected communities to speak directly to those in power. The ultimate goal of all advocates in the Human Rights Watch network is to ensure that human rights are upheld worldwide and to promote justice and change.



Researcher Belkis Wille interviews families forced to flee fighting in Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, when Iraqi forces retook it from the Islamic State, March 2017. © 2017 Bran Symondson for Human Rights Watch.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN SWEDEN

Since opening the Stockholm office in September 2015, HRW Sweden has hosted numerous events to grow its local community and further deepen its relationships with existing and potential supporters. HRW Sweden engages with key advocacy targets and media on a regular basis. Starting in 2016, HRW Sweden was selected as a beneficiary of the Swedish Postcode Lottery. Using funds raised in Sweden, HRW Sweden has supported and implemented several projects this past year, as described below. This report outlines impact from these projects.

Growing HRW's Presence in Sweden

The year 2020 is a significant milestone for HRW Sweden. The organisation celebrated its five-year anniversary since the launch of its Stockholm office in 2015. With the Covid-19 outbreak, it has also been a year marked by changes and challenges to its activities and goals. The pandemic made it necessary to limit and reorganise activities centred on advocacy, fundraising, and growing the HRW community in Sweden, and for all staff to work from home. In spite of this, the Stockholm office still implemented advocacy strategies on which Sweden can make a difference, increased its revenues from nearly 17.9 m SEK in fiscal year 2019 to over 21 m SEK in fiscal year 2020, and further developed its supporter base in Sweden. The team also grew from four staff in 2019 to seven in 2020.

Human Rights Watch has exposed the urgent human rights implications of Covid-19 and how people across the globe are affected by the crisis. There has been a strong interest in the HRW perspective, demonstrated by record-breaking traffic on the HRW website, and the HRW Executive Director has met virtually with Foreign Minister Ann Linde to discuss the human rights aspects of Covid-19. To continue engaging people despite Covid-19 restrictions, HRW Sweden has sought new ways of reaching out virtually. For example, in March 2020, HRW Sweden started a series of weekly online seminars on Covid-19 and human rights, which has reached thousands of viewers to date. The seminars have expanded into other urgent human rights areas such as the current human rights situation in Hungary and the Black Lives Matter movement. More seminars will follow in fall 2020.

Over the course of the year, on multiple occasions, Human Rights Watch raised concerns with Sweden about human rights in China, including China's intrusive surveillance and abuses against Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region. HRW Nordic Director Måns Molander [emphasised the need for Sweden](#) to raise its voice publicly at the United Nations and press for an independent investigation into abuses in Xinjiang. As a result, there was increased media attention and pressure on Sweden to act in defense of human rights in Xinjiang, and the rest of China.

In 2020 Human Rights Watch arranged a new initiative, the World Report Day, on the day of the release of the 2020 HRW World Report. The day included an opening press conference focused on human rights in China, followed by seminars on war crimes in Yemen, sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and on human rights and new technology. The event reached 350 guests and featured speeches from former Foreign Minister Margot Wallström, Yemen envoy Ambassador Peter Semneby, various experts, and HRW researchers Fred Abrahams, Abir Ghattas, Afrah Nasser, and Jonathan Pedneault.

The Covid-19 outbreak prevented HRW Sweden from organising physical gatherings to support the organisation's outreach and fundraising work. This posed a significant challenge, not least because the annual Voices for Justice dinner, which honours human rights defenders around the world, is an important occasion at which the organisation raises revenue in Sweden and a key opportunity to expand its community of human rights supporters. Against this backdrop, HRW Sweden decided to organise its first-ever virtual Voices for Justice event in 2020. The online event took place on the 28th of May. It was broadcasted live and attracted an audience of around 450 people and raised a total of 3,3 m SEK. HRW Sweden has also commenced work to diversify its fundraising sources by setting up a monthly giving program for recurring donations. This program was launched in the autumn of 2020..

HRW Sweden's most closely knitted community of supporters, the Stockholm Committee, has continued to grow stronger and become more self-driven. The Committee's now 17 members— from various backgrounds and walks of life—support fundraising, advocacy, and outreach efforts throughout Sweden. HRW Sweden has also continued to work toward the long-term goal of diversifying its supporter base. In 2018 it launched a Young Professionals Network in Stockholm for people aged 18-35. Today this network is called Next Generation, and spreads awareness of human rights issues and engages other young people. In the last year, this group, which today consists of 12 members, has become more solidified and a stronger actor to support HRW's work.

IMPACT AROUND THE GLOBE

Ending Mass Arbitrary Detention in Xinjiang

The [Chinese](#) government is conducting a mass, systematic campaign of human rights violations against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang. We published a major report in 2018 that [exposed](#) how the government operates “political education” camps in Xinjiang, where it holds over 1 million ethnically Turkic Muslims for unspecified periods without charge or access to family or lawyers. Despite **China’s** claims that it has [released](#) most detainees, no evidence has shown this to be true. We have documented the Chinese government’s [forced separation](#) of children from their families, housing countless children whose parents are detained or in exile in state-run child welfare institutions and boarding schools without parental consent or access.

We have conducted extensive outreach and advocacy with key governments including the [US](#), the European Union and member states, the [Organisation of Islamic Cooperation](#), and the [UN](#) to pressure Beijing to close the camps and to cease unnecessarily separating children from their families, and seek justice for those wrongfully detained. Thanks in part to our advocacy, in July 2019, 25 countries at the UN Human Rights Council—including Sweden—issued an unprecedented joint statement urging China to end its abuses against Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang and calling for China to allow the UN meaningful access to the region. The group delivered another [stinging public rebuke](#) of China’s Xinjiang policies to the UN General Assembly in October.



Government social media post in April 2017 shows detainees in a political education camp in Lop County, Hotan Prefecture, Xinjiang. © Xinjiang Bureau of Justice.

Pushing for Universal Jurisdiction

Over the past decade, mass atrocities occurring in countries such as **Syria**, **Iraq**, and **Yemen** are too often beyond the reach of global institutions designed to prevent heinous abuses and hold perpetrators accountable. But there is another solution. In the face of these challenges, universal jurisdiction—the legal principle enabling judicial officials to prosecute serious crimes in their own domestic courts, regardless of where those crimes occurred—is an increasingly important route to secure some measure of justice for victims.

Human Rights Watch has urged European judicial officials to use universal jurisdiction laws to help fill longstanding gaps in accountability. Our 2017 [report](#) and [video](#) on Germany's and Sweden's efforts to pursue cases linked to crimes committed in Syria helped prompt judicial authorities in both countries to take noteworthy steps.

A landmark universal jurisdiction trial began in April in Koblenz, **Germany**. The case concerns two alleged former Syrian intelligence officials implicated in [serious crimes in Syria's prisons](#) which we worked to expose. We secured international and national coverage of our [press release](#) on the trial's opening, including stories in Deutsche Welle TV, [BBC News](#), the [Associated Press](#), and [AFP](#). It is the first criminal trial in the world involving state-sponsored torture in Syria, where a brutal civil war has claimed countless lives since 2011 and sent hundreds of thousands of people fleeing the country.

In our work to secure justice, we have played a role in convening NGOs involved in criminal litigation to share lessons learned and discuss possible areas of collaboration on universal jurisdiction cases. And, in January of this year, we played an important role in [ensuring UN member states defeated an attempt by Russia to block regular funding](#) for an ongoing UN investigation into grave abuses in Syria. It is likely that the findings of this investigation will bolster universal jurisdiction cases in Europe. In line with our recommendations, the UN investigation has also concluded agreements with various judicial authorities in Europe to facilitate effective cooperation on ongoing investigations and prosecutions where possible.

Reporting on Conflict and Refugee Rights in the Middle East and Europe

Over the past year we have continued to investigate the conflicts driving migration from the Middle East and defend the rights of displaced people, refugees, and asylum seekers both in the Middle East, during their flight, and in Europe. Our work covers Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Libya, Greece, and Italy. In the course of this research, we have documented indiscriminate attacks on civilians, torture, enforced disappearances, and other abuses. We have defended refugees' rights to claim asylum. We have protected children's right to education in refugee camps and called for safe, sanitary living conditions. Key highlights of this work include:

In **Iraq**, we continue to push for accountability for victims of ISIS, which includes fair trials for ISIS suspects that incorporate victim participation. In 2019 we [documented](#) how courts in Iraq are consistently allowing confessions extracted by torture to be used as evidence of ISIS affiliation. These trials are flawed and do not even address the crimes ISIS actually committed. We showed that in cases where the lower court acquitted a defendant after he told the judge he had been tortured, the appeals court systematically overruled the acquittal and convicted the defendant, relying on the confession extracted by torture. Due to our efforts, the Federal Court has ordered investigations and retrials for 27 cases that we flagged as not meeting international standards. Additionally, appeals judges have not overturned a single terror acquittal since our report release.

In April 2020 Human Rights Watch launched a campaign calling on the **Greek** government to free hundreds of unaccompanied migrant children held in unhygienic police cells and [detention centers](#), where they face increased risk of coronavirus infection. The [#FreetheKids](#) campaign urges the government to move children into child-friendly housing, where they can access medical treatment, counseling, education, and legal aid. Weeks after the campaign launch, the Greek parliament amended a law to reduce the maximum time that an unaccompanied child can be detained, from 45 days to 25. In a media interview, the Greek special secretary for the protection of unaccompanied children also committed to ending child detention by the end of the year. In parallel, we also



A child places his hands on a fence as Greek police officers stand guard at a makeshift camp for migrants and refugees in Greece. © 2016 Reuters/Marko Djurica.

launched a joint campaign with over 60 Greek, European, and International NGOs, advocating for the relocation of unaccompanied children trapped in overcrowded and dangerous island camps, to other EU member states. Weeks after the launch of the campaign, Portugal announced it would take in 500 unaccompanied children from Greece, while France announced it would take in 350 children. Since then, another 11 EU member states have joined the coalition, committing to relocate hundreds of asylum seekers and unaccompanied children.

Harnessing Technology for Human Rights

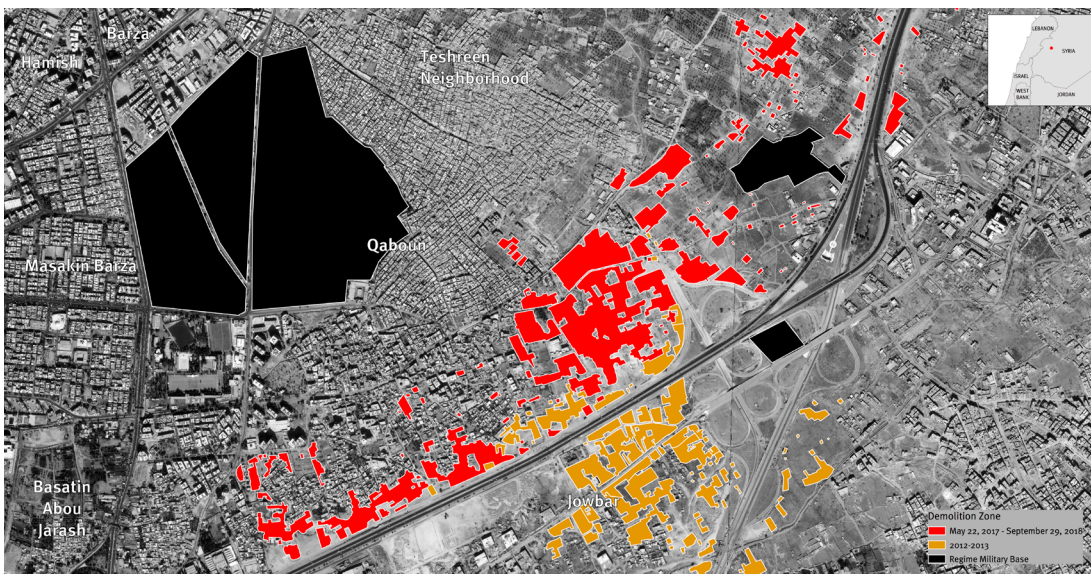
The Digital Investigations Lab at Human Rights Watch leverages powerful technologies to document human rights abuses that often occur in places that are dangerous or hard to reach. In other cases, the Lab supplements witness testimonies with corroborating geospatial, video, or data analyses to strengthen our advocacy efforts and help secure lasting impact.

Within the Lab, the Open Source Investigations (OSI) Unit finds, gathers, and analyses publicly available information that has been posted online to document and expose human rights violations. Photos and videos posted by witnesses and others to social media sites, when properly verified, can offer powerful evidence of abuses.

In the past year, the OSI Unit has worked on a wide range of projects. For a [report on Iran's crackdown of protesters](#), we analysed videos from social media that supported witness testimonies and highlighted previously undocumented incidents. We also reviewed video footage for projects exposing election violence in [Cameroon](#), police brutality in [Western Sahara](#), and the [Syrian government's](#) abuse of civilians.

We are currently working on a report on the targeting of civilian infrastructure in over 40 attacks across Idlib, **Syria**. We are corroborating witness testimonies with photos and videos recorded at the scene. This requires rigorous work: finding the content, verifying its authenticity, and contributing new pieces of information gleaned from the multimedia to fold into a rigorous and hard-hitting report.

In the wake of the Covid-19 crisis, we wrote a [dispatch](#) about the importance of protecting digital research, especially as governments restrict the public's access to content by censoring information, limiting freedom of information requests, and imposing internet shutdowns. We have lead training sessions for staff on OSI research methods, which have assumed greater importance while many researchers still cannot travel.



Demolitions in Qaboun, Syria. © Human Rights Watch. Images: DigitalGlobe 2018.

Ending the Shackling of People with Psychosocial Disabilities

Human Rights Watch aims to end the practice of chaining and promote humane, rights-respecting treatment of people with psychosocial disabilities. Building upon our longstanding work in Ghana, Somaliland, and Indonesia, we conducted new research on **Nigeria**. Mental health conditions are widely stigmatised, and myths that evil spirits cause mental health conditions fuel horrific abuses. With limited or no community-based services available, relatives or police place individuals, often without their consent, in institutions, such as psychiatric hospitals, traditional or religious healing centers, and government or privately-run rehabilitation centers. Wherever they are brought, they are often shackled with iron chains, including to heavy objects or other detainees for months or even years. Far from being anomalies, detention, chaining, involuntary treatment, and violence against people with mental health conditions were pervasive in the facilities we visited.

In November 2019 we published a [short report](#) and [video](#) exposing how thousands of people with mental health conditions are chained, locked up, and abused in facilities across Nigeria. Our reporting received extensive international media coverage, including articles in [The Guardian](#), the [BBC](#), and [Reuters](#). Our video also reached a wide audience, with more than 212,000 views on Instagram.

Following our report release, President Buhari denounced “torture chambers and physical abuses of inmates in the name of rehabilitation” in Islamic rehabilitation centers. The President of the National Association of Psychiatrists personally thanked us for our work. And the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and Social Development wrote us to commit to bringing “perpetrators of chaining to justice.” Riding this wave of political will, we testified before the Nigerian Senate in February, presenting our recommendations on the Mental Health Bill and urging the Senate to issue a ban on chaining.



The use of chains to restrain people with mental health conditions is common in Nigeria. The traditional healer who runs this center uses herbal medicine and prayer to treat people living with mental health conditions, Ibadan City, Oyo State, Nigeria, September 2019. © 2019 Robin Hammond for Human Rights.

Building the Foundations for Post-Pandemic Equal Rights

The coronavirus does not discriminate, but its impacts do. Calls for social distancing ring hollow for people who lack the luxury of space, from those living in crowded low-income housing to those confined in [overflowing jails](#) and [refugee camps](#). Without sufficient access to clean water and sanitation, [homeless](#) and displaced people cannot practice basic hygiene to keep themselves or their loved ones safe. Millions of [people living in poverty](#) face an impossible daily choice: stay home and go hungry, or go to work and risk illness. Amongst others, Human Rights Watch has contributed to significant changes protecting marginalised communities in the United Kingdom, Serbia, Russia, Brazil, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Panama, South Sudan, Greece, Kenya, and Russia. Below is a selection of those impacts.

On March 31, **Ethiopian** authorities [agreed](#) to restore telecommunications services in Oromia state, after shutting down internet and phone communications in the region for almost three months. Weeks before this decision, we had [exposed](#) how the shutdown risked depriving millions of Ethiopians of access to timely and accurate information needed to protect themselves from the coronavirus. Days after we published a [second statement](#) on the situation, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights echoed our appeal. A campaign by Ethiopian social media activists to #ReconnectTheWest also helped build enormous pressure we needed to effect positive change.

On April 21, the **Australian** prime minister called on all nursing home facilities to revise their visitor bans, subject to infection control measures. He highlighted that the isolation of older people harms them and their health—the very same points we raised in an April 2 [op-ed](#) on the issue. This positive impact builds on our broader work to protect people in aged care facilities in Australia, including an October 2019 [report](#) exposing the use of chemical and physical restraints in aged care facilities. We continue to advocate for reforms to end this abusive practice.

Around the world, Human Rights Watch is closely monitoring the development and use of digital apps ostensibly designed to facilitate Covid-19 contact tracing. We are engaging with companies such as Apple and Google, to ensure that any resulting technology is built with [human rights concerns](#) in mind. And we are engaging in national discussions in countries such as Australia and France to ensure that the public health benefits of such apps outweigh their potential [negative impact](#) on the right to privacy. The **German** government has been particularly responsive to our concerns, regularly soliciting our feedback and that of our ally, Reporters Without Borders, as they develop their own app.

Defending Marginalised People Across Europe and Central Asia

Human Rights Watch works across Europe and Central Asia responding to campaigns of fear and scapegoating by populists, protecting freedom of expression, and promoting the fundamental ideals of equality, justice, dignity, and compassion. Of the countless impacts we have contributed to, large and small, some highlights include:

In 2019 we researched and [reported](#) on families' increased reliance on emergency food aid in the **United Kingdom**. The right to food is a fundamental human right contained in several international treaties which the UK has signed. This right, however, remains unrealised for an increasing number of people, many of whom are families with children, living on the breadline. In response to our [reporting](#) on food poverty and our sustained advocacy with many partners, the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats have both committed to making the right to food part of domestic law.

One of the main [highlights](#) of our work over the past year came in March 2020, when the **Azerbaijani** government freed Afgan Mukhtarli, an independent journalist, from prison. Afgan had been living in forced exile in Tbilisi, to avoid politically motivated prosecution, when he was kidnapped in 2017 and bundled off to Azerbaijan, arrested, tried, and sentenced to six years in prison on utterly unfounded charges. We left no stone unturned in pushing for Afgan's freedom and we are delighted that he has been reunited with his family.

This August the **Italian** Ministry of Health revised its outdated guidance on medical abortion. We had called for Italy's government to revise these guidelines in our recent [short report](#) highlighting how the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated longstanding barriers to legal abortion. The report supported and amplified efforts by local activists to push for updated guidance on medical abortion, among other measures. Improved medical abortion access will help ensure implementation of Italy's national [law](#), which permits abortion during the first 90 days of pregnancy for any reason. Burdensome requirements and medical personnel's extensive use of "conscientious objection" have denied women care within the legal time frame. Though Italian law requires authorities to ensure that conscientious objection does not prevent legal abortion, this is not upheld or enforced. The revised guidelines are, however, an important first step towards ensuring abortion access in Italy.

EVALUATION OF HRW SWEDEN'S PROGRESS

HRW Sweden and Human Rights Watch are committed to rigorous, transparent, and consistent monitoring and self-evaluation. When looking at impact, Human Rights Watch determines whether it has met its goals to bring about positive change for those facing human rights violations. HRW Sweden and Human Rights Watch consider input on progress from key interlocutors, local human rights partners, and critics. They gauge how effectively they have allocated resources. To ensure that Human Rights Watch reaches the highest standards of accuracy and objectivity in its research and achieves the greatest impact from its advocacy, it engages in self-evaluation throughout the year.

Often, since it takes a great deal of time to bring entrenched human rights abuses to an end, HRW Sweden and Human Rights Watch consider interim criteria for evaluation. These include whether they have succeeded in generating prominent Swedish media coverage about abuses they investigate; whether the Swedish or other governments act on our findings by protesting the abuses or exerting diplomatic or economic pressure on the abusive government; whether we succeeded in building or protecting Swedish opposition to abuses; whether and how Swedish and other governments engage with Human Rights Watch or adopt and implement new policies to address the abuses it identifies and documents; and whether efforts are reflected in support from public media and Swedish donors.

Measured against these criteria, we have seen considerable accomplishments. Over the course of the last year, more than 4,000 Swedish articles referred to Human Rights Watch's work. Key radio and news outlets regularly interview, and often seek out, the Nordic Director Måns Molander, researchers, and advocates for expert advice with a human rights perspective on current political affairs. Swedish media regularly interview HRW staff, including Swedish Radio, SVT, TV4, Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, and TT News Agency, among many other news outlets. As a result, Human Rights Watch is becoming one of the leading commentators in Sweden on global human rights issues. Furthermore, HRW Sweden arranged around 100 advocacy meetings with key decision-makers in Sweden. HRW Sweden also held its first-ever virtual Voices for Justice dinner which, despite being held online, proved to be one of our most successful fundraising events to date. The support from the public can moreover be seen in the increasing number of followers on the Swedish Facebook and Instagram pages and the strong interest for the Facebook-live seminars broadcasted in the spring of 2020.

HRW Sweden and Human Rights Watch recognise the critical role of partnerships and beneficiaries in all our work, including the planning and evaluation process. When Human Rights Watch evaluates its work it regularly speaks to victims, partner groups, advocacy targets, media, and others. Their feedback is invaluable in helping the organisation further improve its strategies on a project basis and design and implement subsequent projects to be undertaken by HRW Sweden and Human Rights Watch.