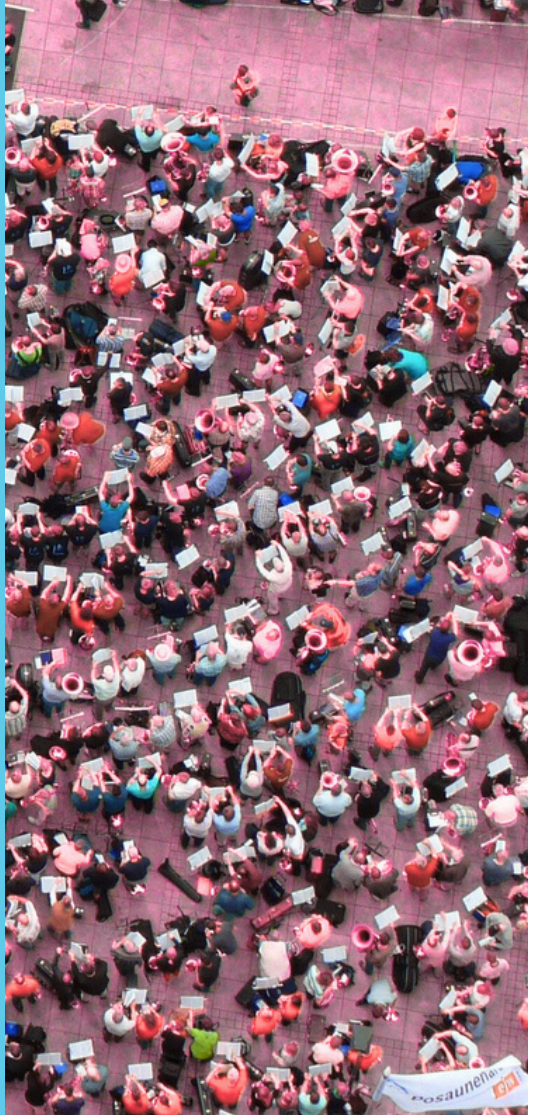




RIGHTS & SECURITY
INTERNATIONAL

STRATEGIC PLAN

2025-2029



Introduction and summary

Here at Rights & Security International (RSI), we find many reasons for optimism. We have been increasing our impact in line with detailed strategic plans for each of our projects, raising our profile both internationally and within the UK, greatly expanding our advocacy relationships, and retaining a dedicated and skilled team. Most of our current funders have awarded us multiple or multi-year grants, thanks to conscientious relationship-building. Despite challenging economic times and upheavals among funders in the UK charity sector, we have grown in size during the past few years and have developed increasingly effective work.

However, in order to remain impactful, we realise we will need to deepen our connections with people who are directly affected by the issues we address, both within the UK and internationally. Our work will also need to have a broader and more demonstrable benefit for individual lives, and we will need to ensure that we are accountable to directly affected people and communities.

Under the plan outlined below, RSI would become the UK's **pre-eminent charity promoting the freedoms of thought, religion, belief and opinion**, along with the **freedom to express** those views and ideas (as well as one's identity).

This refinement of our mission would mean a move away from the strict focus on 'security' issues we adopted when we rebranded as Rights & Security International in 2020. However, this change would not mean a loss of focus, and in fact would allow us to be more targeted and therefore more effective. It would also reconnect us with our roots in anti-discrimination and accountability work, which we have been pursuing since our early days in Northern Ireland.

We would also become one of the most effective international organisations promoting these rights at the national level in locations where local partners request our help and where there is a gap in support from UK organisations, such as Latin America and East Africa. We would maintain a concerted effort to tackle 'national security' laws that harm the rights listed above, but we would no longer limit ourselves to working on issues or legislation that governments describe explicitly as 'security' matters. As discussed below, we think our earlier 'security' framing has become both over- and under-inclusive – including because governments are taking bad models from 'national security' programmes (such as massive surveillance, heavy immigration restrictions and crackdowns on protests) and applying them to other areas, such as environmental movements.

Our project work will be organised into three divisions: **Freedom of Expression and Belief; Migration, Citizenship and Belonging; and Advancing and Protecting Human Rights Movements**. All these divisions will work both in the UK and internationally, to aid our gradual internationalisation while deepening our connections with UK partners and communities. We will develop an advice service for migrants in the UK and continue creating anti-Islamophobia and anti-racism projects to help us directly serve some of the people most impacted by the human rights issues we address. Work related to climate justice movements, gender justice, digital rights and the misuse of AI would be integrated into the work of each division.

However, we remain informed by our unique – and ongoing – history as a London-based organization established to investigate abuses in Northern Ireland and demand transparency and accountability from the UK government for its role in these harms.

We recall that some of the key aspects of our most successful work from 1990 until our internationalisation in 2020 included factfinding regarding serious alleged abuses; advocating for concrete accountability measures such as official inquiries and the release of secret documents; providing direct guidance and support to families of people in Northern Ireland who were killed during the conflict; and helping families and survivors from Northern Ireland engage in advocacy at Westminster and the UN.

We will continue building on this legacy by doing – and expanding on – some of the things we have always done best:

- Carrying out fact-finding investigations of alleged abuses and supporting others to do the same.
- Using international law – particularly human rights law – as a tool for change in reform efforts at the national level.
- Helping activists develop and take advantage of specific, effective tools and advocacy opportunities, especially at the international level, where governments can be pressured to make changes.

These elements combine to form our organisation-wide theory of change: we find the facts about what a government is doing that harms rights, develop advocacy plans together with our partners and impacted people, then use litigation and campaigns at both the international and national levels to achieve change. Each of our projects also rests on a specific theory of change.

We have become adept at using a variety of activities to pursue our goals, from freedom-of-information requests and legal challenges to parliamentary and UN advocacy, coalition-building, and (at a small scale) grant-making. We will continue to take this ‘Swiss army knife’ approach to achieving impact and change, with all staff trained in a variety of skills.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities (SWOT) Analysis

Strengths

- Positive internal culture that enables us to achieve far more impact than might be expected of a small organisation.
- Ability to carry out accurate, detailed fact-finding work.
- Clear project plans based on specific theories of change.
- Agility: Our small size and minimal internal bureaucracy allow us to adapt our plans quickly to new developments.
- Increasingly strong and diverse relationships with other organisations, both within and outside the UK. We regularly build or participate actively in coalitions.
- Engaged donors that regularly entrust us with continuation funding and introduce us to other potential funders and partners.
- Growing relationships and increasing clout in Northern Ireland.
- Strong and growing advocacy relationships with Members of Parliament and Lords across a range of parties in the UK. We have also been building advocacy relationships with many state missions to the UN in Geneva as well as UN Special Rapporteurs.
- Growing work and relationships in the UK digital rights space.

Weaknesses

- The risk of becoming excessively funder-driven or funder-focused in a challenging funding environment. We are highly mindful of this risk and consciously strive to avoid it.
- Challenges in securing funds from international foundations and in identifying potential individual donors.
- Challenges in locating new sources of UK foundation funding; the pool is small, and funders are increasingly closed to unsolicited approaches, making entry points difficult to find.
- Funding fluctuations that could lead to staff turnover. While some amount of turnover is normal and even desirable, we want to maintain our internal expertise and morale.
- Reputational risks of addressing unpopular issues.
- Misperception of our work as relating only to 'counter-terrorism', which is an increasingly vague term for the public and which funders seem to view as decreasing in importance.
- Potential threats to our physical safety if we begin providing direct advice to migrants and reporting on problems such as paramilitary intimidation in Northern Ireland more extensively.
- Online safety and security issues. Deepfakes may become a concern, although in the near term, our relatively low profile may help prevent us from becoming a target.
- The UK's geopolitical isolation post-Brexit, which may make us less appealing to international funders.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities (SWOT) Analysis

Opportunities

- Growth and change arising from the current challenging funding landscape: Uncertainty will drive us to develop a stronger funding strategy, greater accountability to – and incorporation of – directly impacted people, stronger relationships between the Board and staff, and more creative project work.
- Greater and stronger partnerships with other civil society groups increase our impact and give us the potential for joint funding applications.
- The new Labour government in the UK may increase our ability to achieve stronger rights protections.
- Establishment of a US entity, and potentially an entity in the EU, should help us diversify our work and (eventually) our funding sources.
- Climate justice: Several staff have pre-existing experience in this area, and the ‘securitisation’ of climate and resource issues across the world is an increasingly recognised threat. Our expertise will be relevant.
- Unique ability to build links with partners in Latin America, as we consistently retain fluent Spanish speakers with expertise in the region on staff; increasingly strong relationships with partners in Kenya.
- Increasing ability to do effective work on digital rights.
- Small grant programme, which has the potential for outsized impact.
- Growing freedom-of-information practice, which should increase our impact in the UK.
- Increasing relationships with UK lawyers who are willing to provide *pro bono* or discounted help, as well as UK journalists whose coverage could help raise our profile.

Threats

- Contractions in the foundation funder space and resulting uncertainty for us regarding our levels of support for 2025 and beyond. (As noted below, this can also be viewed as an opportunity.)
- Somewhat ambiguous name and branding. We understand that it is not always clear what we mean by ‘security’.
- Need to examine and improve how directly impacted people are represented within our organisation.
- Slow progress in building our media presence.
- Shortcomings in our previous strategy for international work that have arguably hindered our progress, although these could also be viewed as important forms of learning by experience.
- Competing pressures to internationalise our Board or, conversely, include more community-level UK activists / directly impacted people.
- Current gap in senior leadership roles below Executive Director and Trustee level, due to funding issues. We have experienced staff at the Team Leader level but have not had the funding to recruit a Deputy Director, for example.
- Reliance on external solicitors and counsel for legal advice and representation in the UK, which is costly.

Our plans for 2025-2029

To refine our mission, address challenges and take advantage of opportunities, we plan to do the following between 2025 and 2029:

Narrow our focus to issues of freedom of expression (including protests), thought, opinion and belief, alongside what we describe as the freedom of identity.

This issue area will include accountability for state-involved violence and failures to prevent violence against people because of their (actual or perceived) religious identity or the expression of their political opinions, for example. As part of our work on freedom of opinion and belief, we will work to end governments' misuse of the concept of 'extremism', including through over-policing and harmful immigration restrictions. We will also work to end belief- and opinion-based citizenship-stripping and barriers to naturalisation, both in the UK and worldwide. Similarly, we will work to end government practices of collecting and sharing sensitive data about opinion, belief, protest activities, etc. unnecessarily. As relevant, we will address the misuse of AI or other algorithms to predict whether someone may become an 'extremist' or holds a certain opinion.

Narrow our focus to issues of freedom of expression (including protests), thought, opinion and belief, alongside what we describe as the freedom of identity.

Our advocacy work will include outreach to and network-building with community-level organisations in the UK as well as a selected Global Majority countries, particularly El Salvador, Peru, Colombia and Kenya. We will continue connecting partners with one another and with international advocacy opportunities that enable them to pressure their governments to end rights-violating practices.

Create demonstrable impact, and deepen our relationships with people directly affected by the issues we address.

We will begin offering a free legal advice service for migrants facing hate in England and Northern Ireland, beginning with immigration advice and (when possible) expanding to anti-discrimination and other laws. We will also increase the representation of directly affected people among our trustees and staff.

Expand our legal work to include more freedom-of-information and human rights litigation in the UK.

We have found that freedom-of-information work in the UK is an effective way we can advance racial justice and counter the government's repressive impulses, even as a relatively small organisation. We will build on our successes in – for example – obtaining data about the racial impact of the UK's 'Prevent' counter-terrorism programme.

We will also coordinate international legal support for partners addressing acute violations in their countries.

Create additional demonstrable impact by continuing our investigative work in the UK – including Northern Ireland – and building movements for change.

Our investigations will focus on the practical consequences of laws and programmes that burden protest rights as well as the freedom of thought: for example, excessive and unfair restrictions on protests in Northern Ireland and the ways the 'Prevent' counter-terrorism programme discourages protests and political debate throughout the UK.

We will also continue investigating the role of the UK government in promoting harmful counter-terrorism, counter-extremism or anti-protest activities elsewhere in the world.

Provide coordination and funding support to enable partners in Latin America, East Africa and some parts of southeast Asia (e.g. Indonesia and the Philippines) to take advantage of specific advocacy or investigative opportunities.

We aim to help channel funding and decision-making power to Global Majority partners, which will contribute to decolonising the NGO space.

Build local advocacy against repression of climate justice movements that relies on 'national security' or 'emergency' laws, including crackdowns on protesters.

Our work will focus on specific countries, using the expertise we develop in human rights related to protests in Northern Ireland, but we will also identify opportunities to build impactful cross-border movements.

Our recent impact (2022-2024)

Some examples of the impact on which we are building include:

- Exposing new information about the racial and international impact of the UK's 'Prevent' counter-terrorism programme, which focuses on people's beliefs and opinions. The new information we have published has included statistical data, as well as an exposure of the fact that the government is not keeping records that are thorough enough for it to conduct a meaningful equality impact assessment. We also published a report on data protection failures under Prevent, which Amnesty International and other UK campaigning organisations have cited.
- Exposing and obtaining changes to the UK Home Office's Prevent training on so-called 'left-wing' or 'single-issue' extremism.
- Together with partners, convincing Labour to oppose the Northern Ireland Legacy Act, which creates sweeping impunity for Troubles-era crimes; a commitment to repealing the act then appeared in the party's 2024 election manifesto. We also increased international pressure on the UK to abandon the Legacy Act, including by persuading the UN Human Rights Committee and US Congress to raise the issue.
- Fighting off the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill, which included harmful police surveillance provisions, in 2023 and 2024.
- Investigating and documenting the racist intent of certain UK nationality laws and how the Home Office could use them in a discriminatory manner.
- Regular, ongoing citations of our Global Repatriations Tracker in media coverage of repatriations of third-country nationals from life-threatening camps in northeast Syria where the families of alleged Islamic State members are confined indefinitely without trial, showing that the UK is an outlier in failing to repatriate its nationals (and people whom it has stripped of their British citizenship).

- Publishing *Abandoned to Torture*, a legal analysis concluding that conditions in the northeast Syrian camps result in pain and suffering amounting to torture, and submitting a third-party intervention to the European Court of Human Rights about this issue that the Court referenced to an unusual extent.
- Demonstrably building new relationships between experts on counter-terrorism and human rights worldwide through an ambitious study of civil society groups' perceptions of the UN, and increasing the presence of Latin American experts and organisations in these conversations.
- Through a small grant, enabling an organisation of journalists in Brazil to publish a first-ever website with comprehensive figures on killings by police and security forces in the country.

In sum, we have shown ourselves to be increasingly adept at:

- Exposing valuable new information through the tenacious pursuit of freedom-of-information requests. This new information aids reform movements.
- Investigations accompanied by compelling analyses as to why a government practice is illegal. These steps aid our peer organisations and might aid individuals bringing litigation in future.
- Persuading allies in the UK Parliament to propose amendments or raise our points during debates.
- Identifying strong arguments for judicial review claims in UK courts.
- Consulting with community-based groups to identify what tools they need.
- Holding equitable, well-planned international and UK events that build meaningful new relationships between experts and groups.
- Connecting local civil society groups in countries such as El Salvador and Kenya with international advocacy opportunities, and making specific, impactful projects possible through small grants to groups in locations such as Brazil.
- Persuading UN experts to embrace our arguments and make them in public settings.

Whom we serve and to whom we are accountable

Our staff have a clear idea of the people whose rights we have been trying to advance in recent years: primarily, those of UK Muslims, people impacted by repressive UK government actions in Northern Ireland, and human rights defenders in countries such as Kenya, Indonesia and El Salvador that have broad and repressive 'security' or 'emergency' laws. Our organisation has long included members of at least some of these groups, at a range of levels of authority; however, the extent to which we 'serve' people who identify these ways, rather than simply trying to advance what we believe their interests to be (such as by opposing rights-violating laws), remains an open question for us. We continually strive to address that question, including by resisting common approaches in the human rights field that reflect colonialist attitudes, and by ensuring that directly impacted people are in positions of authority within our organisation.

Notwithstanding our desire to make further progress on this front, we are not aware of any perceptions of RSI as inauthentic or exploitative; to the contrary, we are regularly welcomed into coalitions and have had success in building many new partnerships. We have also adopted new approaches to recruiting, and to consultation, that help improve our inclusivity and how we treat power within our work.

Our staff are in broad agreement that we should increase our local-level outreach and network-building in the UK, alongside our forthcoming legal services. We have also periodically considered adding a volunteer Advisory Committee for the organisation (i.e. experts and activists who are not RSI trustees) as a near-term way of gaining input from a greater number of directly impacted people.

These are some achievable ways of deepening our relationships with communities, identifying emerging issues and ensuring that impacted individuals have a platform for telling their stories while seeking change. We will also continue to try to recruit directly impacted people to our staff.

An important question remains regarding our accountability. At present, several of our trustees have lived experience of at least some aspects of the issues we address. Our board also includes people who are from, or work in, non-UK contexts. However, it does not yet include grassroots-level activists.

As we grow in two complementary but opposite directions – rooting down into local-level work while also building our international networks and advocacy reach – we will need to strike a balance between trustees with international expertise and those with community organising or other grassroots experience. With limited seats on our Board, these competing needs pose something of a challenge. However, we will strive to ensure that we have a Board that can creatively and effectively drive all aspects of our work and in which all trustees learn from one another. We expect that dialogues between locally and internationally oriented trustees will enrich our organisation's ability to innovate, as well as our accountability and understanding of diverse perspectives.

Future of our work

Five years from now, we aim to be a premier advocate for the freedom of thought, which is often overlooked despite the fact that repressive governments throughout history have targeted it. We also aim to be a leading, impactful advocate for the freedom of expression – including protesters' rights – along with the related freedoms of religion, belief, opinion and privacy, particularly in the UK but also in locations such as Kenya, Colombia, El Salvador and Peru. Our litigation and advocacy will have resulted in legislative changes in the UK, while our advice service will have demonstrably improved the lives of migrants at risk of insecurity in the form of hate crimes, discrimination and destitution resulting from hostile policies. Our international work will have tangibly advanced the rights of climate justice protesters and members of human rights movements elsewhere in the world, and our US entity will be operational. Our staff and Board will be more directly inclusive of, and more accountable to, impacted people in UK communities – particularly British Muslims and communities in Northern Ireland – as well as our countries of focus.

Ten years from now, we will have worldwide recognition as a principled, impactful and effective organisation that supports a wide range of partners to carry out investigations and advocacy. Our UK and international investigations will be thriving, as will our legal work and advice service. We will have established a second entity outside the UK for both project and fundraising purposes, most likely in the Republic of Ireland or Brussels. We will be indispensable to developments and dialogues at the UN and regional levels on counter-‘extremism’, and we will have achieved landmark victories in ending Islamophobic policies (including algorithmic discrimination) in the UK.

To achieve these long-term goals, our project work will be organised along the following lines:

Freedom of Expression and Belief, focused on:

- Ending Prevent in the UK, and ending similarly repressive ‘countering violent extremism’ programmes in other countries in East Africa and Europe.
- Promoting equality, accountability and effective measures to end racist as well as sectarian violence in Northern Ireland.
- Protecting the human rights of protesters in the UK, particularly Northern Ireland.
- Working to end tangible institutionalised Islamophobia in the UK, e.g. in schools. Investigating and advocating to end government databases and AI practices that harm the freedoms of thought, opinion and belief.
- Investigating ‘counter-terrorism’ and ‘counter-extremism’ measures by states such as the UK and US that repress fundamental freedoms in other states.

Migration, Citizenship and Belonging, focused on:

- Developing and delivering an immigration, benefits and anti-discrimination advice service for migrants in underserved areas of the UK that have particular problems with hate crimes and anti-migrant violence. The service will do particular outreach to migrants from majority-Muslim countries and others who identify as Muslim, but will be open to other communities in the locality that are particularly at risk of hate crimes or discrimination.
- Investigating and tackling the UK government’s apathetic response to attacks against and intimidation of migrants in Northern Ireland by paramilitary and far-right groups.
- Stigmatising and ending citizenship deprivation worldwide, including by obtaining helpful resolutions and statements at the UN and regional levels.
- Ending belief- and opinion-related barriers to naturalisation or leave to remain in the UK and other selected focus countries.

Future of our work

Advancing Human Rights Movements, focused on:

- Protecting climate justice movements from ‘security’-based crackdowns and heavy-handed administrative laws.
- Helping partners that work on ‘security’ and state-involved violence issues, and abuses committed in the name of countering ‘extremism’, to connect with international and national advocacy opportunities. We will do this in East Africa, Latin America and the UK, with the potential to add other regions. As part of this effort, we will continue strengthening our UN advocacy.
- When possible, providing small grants for impactful investigations and advocacy.
- Addressing criminal and administrative measures that constrain civil society in the UK – especially those related to counter-terrorism or ‘extremism’.
- Promoting the safety of human rights and climate justice advocates in selected countries by providing trainings on digital security that are tailored to their contexts and needs.

Cross-cutting themes

Digital rights:

We have a long history of combatting rights-violating surveillance, including (under one of our previous names) successfully bringing the case of *Liberty and British Irish Rights Watch v UK* to challenge cross-border UK surveillance before the European Court of Human Rights.

Our work has since evolved organically to include investigations and litigation concerning government handling of sensitive personal data about characteristics such as race, religion and disability; database architectures and data sharing among police, intelligence and immigration agencies; and the potential misuse of AI for profiling.

These and other surveillance and data-sharing issues have an impact on people’s abilities to express themselves freely without facing government scrutiny and repression; they are therefore relevant to our vision for our UK and international work. Our work on database architectures, including how they relate to accountability, is unique and appears to hold particular promise.

Climate justice:

In the coming years, RSI’s work on protecting protest rights will include an emphasis on climate justice activists and others who join environmental demonstrations, as such groups are now among the main targets of government repression under ‘security’ laws (or similar laws restricting free expression).

Around the world, climate justice movements are often led by indigenous peoples or other minoritised groups and are tied to racist repression by authorities, meaning that this work will always have a racial justice element. We will convene organisations from a range of contexts to identify fresh ideas and build movements, while connecting groups with international advocacy opportunities, funding support and legal assistance whenever possible. We will also advocate for laws, court rulings, UN resolutions and other measures that protect non-violent protesters from being treated as ‘terrorists’ or ‘extremists’. Our desired impacts include a strengthened network of advocates and allies at the international level, along with recognitions of protest rights by the UN and other regional bodies and courts.

Gender justice:

Many rights-protecting movements around the world are driven by women, who must also fight repression on the basis of their gender. (Our own organisation was founded by women advocates for peace in Northern Ireland, whose experiences and expertise are often overlooked in work to address the conflict and its aftermath.)

Future of our work

We have found the 'national security' and 'counter-terrorism' spheres to be especially gendered, with government authorities relying on masculine voices and ideals to promote their goals, treating men and boys from minoritised groups as threats, and regarding women as mere victims – or as irrelevant.

We will continually promote gender justice through our projects by:

- Insisting on gender diversity in accountability mechanisms such as courts, official inquiries and reviews, inquests and 'reconciliation' bodies, as well as UN and other consultations.
- Ensuring that we are gender-diverse and that our work features a wide range of perspectives and voices.
- Using our advice service to identify systemic problems that affect women migrants in the UK (or that reflect intersectional biases against any gender).
- Continuing to advocate for gender-sensitive interpretations of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment under the law.
- Examining the gendered aspects of citizenship deprivation worldwide, as part of our effort to end the practice altogether.

The US entity; potential EU entity

With the help of the US-based law firm Skadden, Arps, RSI is well on its way toward creating a US charitable entity when the circumstances are suitable. This entity will help us to carry out a range of substantive work that RSI-UK cannot do as easily, including:

- Conducting effective in-person advocacy with Member State missions at UN Headquarters in New York, where most UN counter-terrorism policies and resolutions are debated and adopted. A consistent on-the-ground presence is essential to having an impact on UN activities at headquarters.
- Helping anti-Islamophobia groups in the UK and continental Europe build productive relationships with, and learn from, such groups in the US.
- Conducting investigations of US and UK support for rights-violating counter-terrorism and counter-extremism practices in Latin America, aided by closer geographic proximity.
- Building networks with Latin American organisations, including by employing staff with relevant linguistic skills and cultural knowledge (which are more common in the US, with its large Latinx communities, than in the UK).
- Influencing US government policy on rights and accountability in Northern Ireland.

By the end of 2029, RSI will also have explored establishing an entity in an EU Member State. The most likely candidates are Belgium, for the purpose of influencing EU policies adopted in Brussels, and the Republic of Ireland, for the purpose of furthering all-Ireland work on migrants' rights and other human rights.

Fundraising plan

To sustain the work we were doing as of 2024, we will require an income of at least £525,000 per year. Our goal is to have an income of at least £800,000 by the end of 2029.

Our initial growth is likely to be slow due to the long-planned end of our funding from two large foundation donors in the first half of 2025, and we may therefore face a contraction in that year. However, through the diversification of our activities as well as committed, creative fundraising, we anticipate that our work will be attracting at least £600,000-700,000 annually in foundation funding and individual donations by the end of 2027.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Rights and Security International
Hornsey Rd, London N19 4DR
We are a registered charity (charity
commission number 1048335) and a
company limited by liability (companies
house number 2489161)