

# 2025 Highlights





# Letter from the President & CEO

**Dear Friends,**

As President and CEO of Human Rights First (HRF), I want to begin with gratitude. Your belief that people fleeing danger deserve protection, that democracy must be defended, and that accountability matters has powered this organization's impact for nearly five decades. But never before has our mission been more urgent, or more at risk.

Across the country and around the world, we face rising authoritarianism, attacks on the rule of law, and escalating assaults on refugee and immigrant rights. And yet, HRF is undeterred and proving what determined, principled action can achieve.

This past year, **we stopped unlawful government actions that put lives at risk**—quadrupling our strategic litigation capacity to halt secret deportation flights to Libya, prevent Guatemalan children from being spirited away in the middle of the night to fates unknown, and defeat efforts to punish international prosecutors investigating atrocities. Our aim is resolute: the United States must uphold—not undermine—human rights.

On Capitol Hill, we urged greater **oversight, accountability, and bipartisan support for human rights**, mobilizing thousands of advocates nationwide, helping remove harmful anti-NGO provisions, and testifying before key committees to defend U.S. government human rights capacity and decry rights-abusing dimensions of draft legislation. This pressure prevented worst-case outcomes and laid the groundwork for continued action.

Our legal teams, alongside thousands of pro bono partners, delivered **life-changing protection for people seeking asylum**, with an overall grant rate that exceeds 90 percent even as attempts to undermine the rights of people seeking asylum and their eligibility for protection have ramped up. When Venezuelan immigrants and asylum seekers were unlawfully deported to El Salvador's notorious CECOT prison, our rapid response team intervened within hours to defend their right to safety.

At this moment of truth, Human Rights First is sharpening its focus. In the year ahead, we will:

- **Defend refugee and immigrant rights** through expanded strategic litigation, rapid response, hosting the #WelcomeWithDignity Campaign, and innovations like ReadyNow! and ICE Flight Monitor to protect the targeted.
- **Protect U.S. democracy** by challenging assaults on constitutional protections, monitoring and mobilizing against anti-democratic legislation, and rallying a bigger tent to defend dissent and prevent misuse of our military for anti-democratic ends.
- **Advance human rights globally** by pivoting sanctions recommendations to non-U.S. jurisdictions, collective protection for front-line human rights defenders, and urging UN and regional human rights bodies to respond to U.S. rights abuses and uphold treaties.

As we look toward the future—a decisive period for human rights and for American democracy—your partnership will be essential. With your support, Human Rights First can protect thousands more people seeking safety, confront authoritarian threats at home and abroad, and ensure the United States lives up to its highest ideals.

Thank you for standing with us. I hope you will renew your commitment today.

**With deep gratitude,**

**Uzra Zeya**  
President & CEO



# Human Rights First

2025 BY THE NUMBERS

500,000+

HUMANITARIAN PAROLE  
RECIPIENTS DEFENDED  
FROM DEPORTATION

2,700

NO KINGS DAY EVENTS SUPPORTED BY  
OUR GUIDANCE IN KNOW YOUR RIGHTS  
RESOURCES THAT HELPED 7 MILLION  
PROTESTERS STAY SAFE

14,000+

14,000 PEOPLE EQUIPPED WITH  
OUR FREE *READYNOW!* APP

3,800+

PIECES OF ANTI-DEMOCRATIC AND  
RIGHTS-RESTRICTING LEGISLATION  
EXPOSED AND MAPPED

13,000+

LETTERS SENT TO CONGRESS  
BY SUPPORTERS URGING ACTION  
ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

400%+

GROWTH IN STRATEGIC  
LITIGATION CAPACITY



# Refugee and Immigrant Rights

## PROTECTING PEOPLE AND DEFENDING THE RIGHT TO ASYLUM



**Advocacy on the Hill:** Mobilized thousands nationwide against anti-immigrant provisions in the HR-1 budget bill; organized rapid-response “war rooms,” Hill briefings, and events with Reps. Yvette Clarke and Summer Lee to hold ICE accountable.

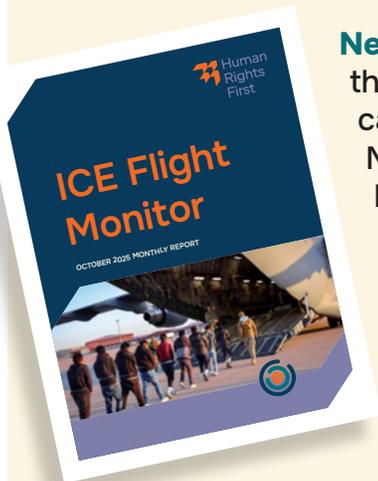
**Future Vision:** Launched SAFE Path with 20+ partners – a blueprint for a humane, well-resourced asylum and border system that influences upcoming policy and legislation.

**Exposing Abuses:** Published reports on refoulement, CBP violations, and third-country transfers; contributed to two UN reviews and led a hearing before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

Brought suit to protect the rights of hundreds of thousands of immigrants in the United States granted parole; challenged the Trump administration’s policy of removing people to third countries without due process or screening for risk of torture; and fought to free clients from arbitrary detention under the administration’s mass detention campaign.

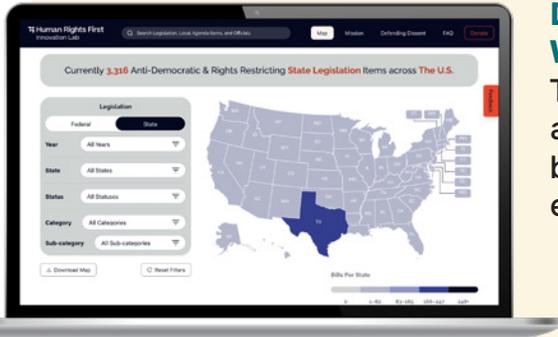
### STRATEGIC LITIGATION

**New Initiatives:** Integrated the Welcome With Dignity campaign and ICE Flight Monitor project into HRF, strengthening rapid response and data-driven advocacy exposing human rights abuses.



# U.S. Democracy Protection

## DEFENDING THE RIGHT TO DISSENT AND ADVANCING ACCOUNTABILITY



### Democracy Watch:

Tracked 3,800+ anti-democratic bills; 4,800 users engaged.



**Defending Dissent:** Launched a national campaign to safeguard peaceful protest and free speech, expanding through coalition efforts to all 50 states in 2026.

**Veterans for American Ideals:** Mobilized thousands of veterans to defend democracy, advocate for Afghan allies, and reduce civilian harm.

**No Kings Movement:** Distributed a Know Your Rights and community engagement resource guide to 7 million protesters at 2,700 events – the largest single-day mobilization in U.S. history.



### STRATEGIC LITIGATION

**Chung v. Trump** – Protected student from deportation for peaceful protest.

**WESPAC Cases** – Defended nonprofits from politically motivated SLAPP lawsuits; secured multiple dismissals.

# International Human Rights

## UPHOLDING GLOBAL JUSTICE AND STANDING WITH DEFENDERS

# 270

### Protecting Treaties & Refugees:

Galvanized 270 NGOs worldwide to defend human rights treaties; advocated for Afghans at risk in Pakistan.

### Accountability & Justice:

Advanced Magnitsky sanctions in 10+ countries; protected ICC independence; pursued Menendez-Egypt corruption accountability; co-wrote amicus brief to protect NGOs' 1st Amendment rights.



**On the Frontlines:** Evacuated civilians from Ukraine's Kharkiv region with local human rights defenders (HRDs) the Roza Na Ruke team; supported Northern Ireland efforts to repeal soldier immunity laws and ensure pathways to truth and accountability. Reported first-hand on challenges facing HRDs, anti-corruption activists, and persons with disabilities in Ukraine, and on the human rights trajectory in post-Asad Syria.



**STRATEGIC  
LITIGATION**

**Iverson v. Trump** – Restored ICC U.S. veteran lawyer's ability to pursue Darfur war-crimes cases.



# International Human Rights

## U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

HRF CEO and President Uzra Zeya testified before Congress and headlined public rallies to oppose draconian cuts to State Department human rights funding and policy capacity, followed by HRF Vice President Enrique Roig's Hill testimony on the national security damage wrought by U.S. abdication of human rights leadership in the Western Hemisphere. Year-round, HRF pushed back against efforts to weaken and politicize the annual U.S. human rights reports.

Internationally, we engaged the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the UN Working Groups on Arbitrary Detention and Enforced Disappearance, and the UN Human Rights Council to spotlight the deteriorating human rights situation in the United States and externalization of these policies that undermined freedoms globally. Across all these forums, we advanced concrete policy recommendations to reverse negative rights trends and urged stronger bipartisan commitment and Congressional oversight to ensure human rights remain central to U.S. foreign policy.



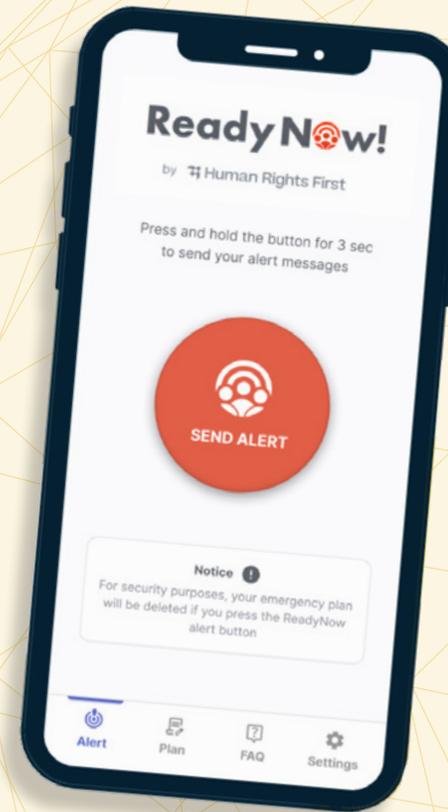
# Innovation Lab | Human Rights & Technology

## HARNESSING TECH FOR JUSTICE

The Lab was founded in 2019 to bring the power of advanced technology to the human rights movement. The Lab brings together product strategists, designers and engineers with human rights experts, advocates and impacted communities to design, develop, and test force multiplying technology. When a Lab product has a successful pilot, proving its intended impact, we identify the ripest pathway to scale – which can mean spinning out a non-profit or for-profit venture, keeping the project on the books at HRF, or finding another organizational home with the capabilities necessary for scale.

### FOR DEMOCRACY PROTECTION

Launched AI-driven, people-powered Democracy Watch online platform that exposed, mapped, and categorized 3,800+ pieces of anti-democratic and rights-restricting legislation at state and federal levels, informing nationwide and local-level citizen engagement.

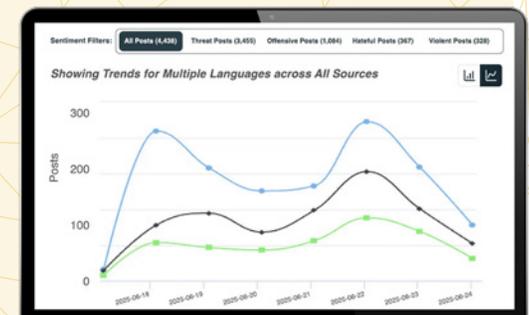


### FOR REFUGEE PROTECTION

Equipped 14,000+ people with our free ReadyNow! emergency planning and alerts app to help immigrants facing detention stay protected, connected, and supported.



Pyrratech, a security intelligence platform, spun out of the Lab as a venture backed start-up in 2022, and was acquired by AlertMedia in 2025.



# Awards & Honors



## OneJustice Champion of Justice Award (June 2025)

The annual OneJustice Champion of Justice Awards recognizes transformative legal partnerships expanding access to justice. Human Rights First received this hard-earned 2025 honor alongside Munger, Tolles & Olson for more than a decade of collaborative pro bono work securing safety and protection for people fleeing persecution.



## University of Oslo Human Rights Award – Lisl and Leo Eitinger's Fund (2025)

This prestigious international award honors exceptional personal commitment to defending human rights. The University of Oslo recognized Brian Dooley, HRF Senior

Advisor, for his decades of advocacy and his steadfast work supporting human rights defenders and advocates worldwide.

## 2025 HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST ANNUAL AWARDS CELEBRATION • OCTOBER 2025

Each year, we bring together hundreds of human rights champions, advocates, legal leaders, and supporters to honor remarkable champions advancing human rights around the world, at personal risk and with outside impact. From honoring courageous frontline defenders and legal advocates for human rights, in the names of our Emeritus Chairs William D. Zabel and Marvin E. Frankel; to recognizing brave guardians of global accountability who stood up to tyranny to advance justice; to putting a spotlight on human rights innovators and visionaries who bring their unwavering resolve and remarkable professional achievements beyond the human rights space to advance the cause of human freedom and dignity against the odds – these honorees remind us that because human rights are for everybody, we need everybody in the fight for human rights.



### OUR 2025 HONOREES INCLUDE:

#### William D. Zabel Human Rights Award – Cristosal

FOR FEARLESS PURSUIT OF JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN CENTRAL AMERICA.

#### Marvin E. Frankel Award – WilmerHale

FOR DECADES OF EXCEPTIONAL PRO BONO REPRESENTATION OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS.

#### Spotlight Award – Tom Cartwright

FOR BRINGING TRANSPARENCY TO IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT THROUGH HIS GROUNDBREAKING ICE FLIGHT-TRACKING WORK.

#### Global Accountability Guardian Award – Evgenia and Vladimir Kara-Murza

FOR EXTRAORDINARY COURAGE IN CONFRONTING TYRANNY AND DEFENDING DEMOCRACY IN RUSSIA.

#### Inaugural Visionary Award – Richard Gere

FOR A LIFETIME OF ADVOCACY AND MORAL CLARITY IN THE FACE OF INJUSTICE.

# Thank You for Supporting an Action-Packed 2025!

