





# A year of grief and collective action

The past year has been marked by a deepening assault on human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Across the world, violence, repression, and impunity have accelerated, while the systems meant to protect civilians and uphold international norms have continued to erode.

The world watched in horror as Israel's military campaign in Gaza caused catastrophic loss of life and infrastructure, amid credible allegations of genocide. Elsewhere, conflicts in Ukraine, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, the Sahel, and beyond continued to trap millions in cycles of fear, loss, and displacement. And COP30 failed to deliver the binding commitments and systemic shifts required to confront the climate crisis.

At the same time, civic space shrank further, with growing numbers of people living under governments that criminalise dissent and attack those who speak out. State capture, AI-amplified misinformation, and corruption weakened human rights, the rule of law, institutional trust, and press freedom.

These pressures were compounded by political decisions that weakened already fragile systems of international solidarity. In the United States, the Trump administration dismantled USAID and attacked foundations and institutes furthering peace and democracy, while several European governments slashed foreign aid budgets.

These moves **stripped resources from programmes that support human rights defenders, independent media, and grassroots movements**, and seriously undermined many of the organisations working to keep them safe. The result has been immediate and devastating for communities already under strain from interlocking systems of persistent stress: ecological, economic, digital, emotional, and political.

Taken together, these trends point to a world in which power is increasingly exercised without accountability, and those working for rights and justice are left more exposed than ever. **Safety and resilience are now foundational to social change.** It is within this context that our work takes place. Open Briefing has become a vital part of the infrastructure enabling defenders and movements to act safely, effectively, and with care.

## Surging demand

Demand for trusted, rigorous, and integrated security and wellbeing support grew sharply in 2025 - particularly for organisations able to respond quickly and at scale.

Open Briefing received **774 calls for assistance** from grassroots activists, community groups, and social movements at risk. This represents a six-fold increase over five years, and our team is now responding to around **15 new cases every week**.

Many of these cases are complex - featuring intersecting physical, digital, and psychological harms - and high-risk, involving highly capable adversaries acting with impunity.

We are holding this responsibility with care - for the people we support, and for the team and partners who make this work possible - knowing that protection must itself be sustainable.

Despite the challenges, we continue to provide timely, compassionate, and highly effective support. As an LGBTQIA+ rights defender in Nigeria reflected:

*"Open Briefing never disappointed. Even when threats emerge, we are now strong enough to tackle them. We are deeply thankful to the Open Briefing team. You are truly passionate about the work you do."*

Over the course of the year, we **supported organisations and activists at risk in at least 68 countries** across the world, underscoring the global scale of the pressures facing civil society. The largest numbers of requests for assistance came from Kenya, Uganda, the United States, DR Congo, and Mexico.

Risk exists wherever people challenge unaccountable power. **More than three-quarters of our cases came from the global majority**, with demand concentrated across West, Central, and East Africa; Latin America; and West Asia. At the same time, a significant share came from the global minority - particularly North America and Western and Southern Europe - reinforcing that threats to civic space cut across regions and contexts, as demonstrated by the United States' slide towards authoritarianism.

## Real impact

We **delivered nearly 7,000 hours of mentoring and capacity-sharing** last year and **trained 1,400 at-risk activists in 155 holistic security workshops**. This marks a significant increase on previous years. We also complemented remote accompaniment with in-person support more frequently, operating alongside communities and movements in Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, Cameroon, Kenya, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, and elsewhere.

Our support delivered clear, measurable impact. In surveys conducted before and after our work together, defenders and organisations reported a **10% reduction in perceived risk** and a **38% increase in capacity** to manage that risk. Self-reported **resilience also rose by 13%** following our engagements. Taken together, these shifts indicate that partners and clients felt better equipped to navigate the challenges they faced during an exceptionally difficult year. This conclusion was reinforced by an external impact evaluation of our work, which found that:

*"The most consistent outcome is that people and organisations continued operating where they might otherwise have paused, withdrawn, or collapsed."*

Feedback on our support was highly positive, with a median **approval rating of 90%**, underscoring appreciation for both the support itself and the way it was delivered.

Over the year, we worked in solidarity with those fighting for human rights and social justice, demanding climate action, defending their land and rivers, exposing corruption and reporting the truth, striving for peace and democracy, and championing reproductive justice, women's rights, and the rights of LGBTQIA+ people. We are privileged to share some of their stories in this report.

While most of our work is behind the scenes, we were invited to support several high-profile initiatives last year, including:

- Collective protection and safeguarding support for Indigenous, land, and environmental defenders during the **People's COP** and the **People's Tribunal against Ecogenocide** in Belém, Brazil, alongside the official COP30 climate summit.
- Risk advisory for the head of a national network coordinating prominent **legal and advocacy challenges to government attacks** on nonprofits in the United States, amid organised and gendered harassment and escalating political pressure.
- Security and wellbeing support for recipients of the **Right Livelihood Award** and the **Goldman Environmental Prize** - known as the Alternative Nobel and Green Nobel - as well as newer partnerships with the **Climate Breakthrough Award** and **Iris Prize**.

## Strength in diversity

To meet growing demand for our support, we have carefully expanded our organisation over the past year to **47 staff and consultants in 19 countries** across Latin America, East and Southern Africa, and West and Southeast Asia, as well as Europe and North America. We focused this growth on strengthening our digital risk and resilience team and expanding our in-country presence in **Brazil** and the **United States**. We also established a **development board** to support our long-term sustainability.

We have centred **diversity, equity, and inclusion** throughout this process. Women now make up two-thirds of our team, including within our senior leadership, while half of our colleagues are from minoritised racial, ethnic, and religious communities.

We support our staff with fully funded coaching and counselling, comprehensive healthcare for them and their families, enhanced annual leave, gender-neutral family leave, and provision for menstrual health, menopause, and gender transition. We also provide additional paid leave for colleagues taking part in climate and civic action.

These commitments shape how we work and reflect who we are. We are both experienced professionals - risk advisers, technologists, and psychologists - and human rights defenders, activists, and humanitarians. Our global reach and breadth of lived experience are central to how we work and why our support is so trusted.

## Partnerships

Open Briefing is also part of a larger protection ecosystem, where collaboration and complementarity are key. While the funding attacks and philanthropic uncertainty that marked last year threatened that ecosystem, our team rose to meet the moment and played a larger role than ever before.

We served on the steering committee of the **Building Responses Together** network and as members of the **Alliance for Land, Indigenous and Environmental Defenders** (ALLIED), the **Vuka!** coalition, **CIVICUS**, the **NGO Information Sharing and Analysis Center** (NGO-ISAC), and the security working group of the **Defenders in Development** campaign.

We led a series of dialogues with **Vuka!** to map and better understand wellbeing across different cultures, and to inform decolonised approaches to wellbeing. We partnered with **ALLIED and KERI** to strengthen the mental health and psychosocial support ecosystem for Indigenous, land, and

environmental defenders in the Philippines. We also partnered with two **regional protection hubs** in Southeast Asia - **Exile Hub** and **Tifa Foundation** - supporting them through capacity-sharing and mentoring, while learning from their local knowledge and experience.

We delivered workshops and clinics at the **People's COP** in Brazil, the **East Africa Philanthropy Network Conference** in Kenya, **Strengthening Our Security** with Proética and Rainforest Foundation Norway in Peru, the **Hearth Summit** in Slovenia, **Global Gathering** in Portugal, ActionAid's **People Power Conference** in Denmark, and the **#SaferToBeMe Summit** in the United Kingdom. We also joined colleagues from around the world at **RightsCon** in Taiwan.

Through these partnerships, we help spread good practice, learn lessons, and reduce duplication - strengthening collective protection capacity at a time of severe resource constraint.

## Consultancy and advisory

As both a **mission-driven nonprofit and a social impact consultancy**, Open Briefing operates at every level of civil society. Nearly a quarter of our income last year was generated through professional consultancy and advisory services, strengthening our financial resilience and enabling us to reinvest unrestricted resources into our frontline protection work.

Our clients ranged in size and scale and included leading nonprofits and foundations, such as the **11th Hour Project**, **Global Greengrants Fund**, and the **Human Dignity Trust**. Several organisations also trusted us as their retained provider, including **Global Witness**, the **Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime**,

and the **World Organisation Against Torture** (OMCT), reflecting long-term partnerships built on effectiveness and accountability.

Increasingly, we worked alongside clients to strengthen their own risk management and staff wellbeing, and to help them think through and meet their **duty of care to grantees and grassroots partners** - extending protection beyond individual organisations. As **Synchronicity Earth** noted:

*"We feel better prepared to support partners facing security risks through our partnership with Open Briefing. Their ability to listen and adapt, as well as the expertise and knowledge of the sector they bring, has made them an incredibly valuable partner."*

## A defining moment

The year ahead is crucial. Civil society must challenge the repressive governments, corrupt corporations, organised criminal gangs, and the radical right that have shaped this permacrisis. It will be difficult. The risks are real.

But we will prevail because we have two things they do not: **hope and community**. Hope gives rise to ideas. When shared, those ideas become stories that inspire and connect. When these narratives meet collective action, they reshape power and make lasting change possible.

Open Briefing exists to keep that hope alive and to protect the people and movements who turn it into action. With your continued support, we can renew and extend this protection infrastructure at a time when it matters more than ever. ●

## Our community of donors

Open Briefing was not immune to the funding cuts that hit civil society in 2025. We are deeply grateful to our funders for recognising the vital role holistic security support plays in resilient civic action, including **Waverley Street Foundation**, **Luminate**, the **National Endowment for Democracy**, **Packard Foundation**, **Oak Foundation**, and **Mott Foundation**.

We are also pleased to welcome new donors, including **Wellspring Philanthropic Fund**, **Equation Campaign**, **Waterloo Foundation**, **Christensen Fund**, and **Bernina Initiative**.

Together with our circle of individual supporters, these partnerships sustain our work and reflect strong confidence in both our impact and our stewardship as we enter our 15th year.



# Stories of impact

## Protecting people-led climate action

When the COP climate summit unfolded in Belém, Brazil, in November 2025, the city became more than the backdrop to a global meeting. It became a site of people-led climate action, Indigenous resistance, and collective protection. At least 70 people-led spaces took place across cultural centres, community territories, and universities.

For the first time, Open Briefing was on the ground during COP, invited by the Instituto Zé Cláudio e Maria and local civil society partners. Our team in Brazil provided holistic security and safeguarding support at the **Casa da COP do Povo** (People's COP House), a community-led space and parallel event organised by traditional communities and environmental defenders.

We also supported the **People's Tribunal against Ecogenocide**, a public hearing that gathered testimony from affected communities and issued a final statement naming those responsible for environmental destruction. Many witnesses faced credible threats or had been attacked. Our role was to help organisers and participants anticipate, prevent, and respond to risk, so testimony could be given safely.

This support was grounded in months of preparation, including producing a COP30 security guide with **Global Climate Legal Defense** (CliDef). We also provided holistic security support to clients and partners attending the summit.

People-led spaces like the People's COP show where climate justice is built: by those living closest to the land. Belém made clear that their safety and wellbeing are not peripheral to climate action – they are essential.

## When safety does not end harm

Open Briefing worked with the **Exile Hub** to address a critical gap in protection for defenders and journalists from **Myanmar** living in exile. For many who fled following the 2021 coup, reaching physical safety did not end the harm. Living in precarious conditions in **Thailand**, activists continued to experience deep psychological distress.

Through a 12-month programme, Open Briefing supported a local network of counsellors and mental health practitioners working with exiled activists and their families. Our team provided mentoring, reflective practice, and guidance on trauma-informed and healing-centred care, while nurturing peer support structures to sustain care beyond the project. As the research director of the Exile Hub reflected, "Mental health is often overlooked in the face of immediate physical dangers, but the invisible scars can last much longer."

## Continuing work under pressure

Open Briefing supported an anti-hate organisation in the **United States** facing targeted attacks from white-supremacist groups during the Trump transition and early in his second term. These attacks included assaults on offices, homes, and public events, alongside sustained doxxing campaigns targeting board members. The threats were persistent and escalating, placing staff and their families at risk.

Working closely with the organisation, our team conducted risk assessments, delivered training, co-designed contingency plans, and supported the implementation of practical risk-reduction measures. Following this support, the organisation reported feeling safer and more confident, and better able to continue its work - including in-person engagement with allies - despite an increasingly volatile political environment.

## Strengthening grassroots protection

Throughout 2025, Open Briefing worked with partners in **Indonesia** to strengthen a national protection ecosystem grounded in the lived experience of defenders most exposed to risk. Our partnership with the **Tifa Foundation** and the **Integrated Security Service Provider Network** (JPLKI) focused on expanding access to holistic security through local organisations and networks.

Tifa plays a central role in Indonesia's protection landscape as both a solidarity partner and a national convenor. Through JPLKI, it supports community-based protection responses for civil society actors defending human rights, the environment, free media, and access to justice. In February 2025, our team joined Tifa in Jakarta to work with grassroots protection practitioners from across the country and mark the start of a deeper phase of collaboration.

In the months that followed, we co-hosted workshops and provided mentoring and accompaniment to strengthen JPLKI's governance, build the skills and resilience of security and wellbeing providers, and expand the tools and services available to at-risk defenders across the country. We also reviewed case management systems - offering practical recommendations to improve threat assessment, decision-making, and response.

This collaboration reinforced the value of decolonised approaches to holistic security, reducing reliance on external actors and enabling protection to scale through local networks. As the executive director of the Tifa Foundation reflected, "Your support in building JPLKI's capacity and governance will be very meaningful for our efforts to strengthen the protection ecosystem in Indonesia in the future."

## When relocation is not enough

Open Briefing supported a human rights defender from **Burundi** through a rapidly evolving protection situation. In a context where civic space is tightly controlled and threats escalate quickly, international relocation became the only viable option. But relocation did not bring safety. Ongoing surveillance and uncertainty left the defender and their family exposed.

Working closely with the defender, our team provided continuous risk assessment and integrated wellbeing support to better address harm. We also coordinated with international partners to identify safer relocation options and funding pathways. Reflecting later from a safer third country, the defender shared, “Regular meetings with Open Briefing helped me manage my stress levels and feel equipped to protect my safety and that of my family.”

## Collective protection in practice

Open Briefing supported a grassroots advocacy and rights organisation in **West Africa** working with queer and trans communities. Operating in a hostile environment shaped by pressure from law enforcement and anti-LGBTQIA+ groups, the organisation faced constant digital risk, including harassment, surveillance, doxxing, phishing, and device compromise. Exposure carried immediate legal, physical, and psychological consequences.

After a rapid risk assessment, we shared practical training and co-designed clear, usable policies for everyday digital practice. We then supported a train-the-trainer approach that enabled staff to pass this knowledge on to volunteers and community members. Over time, this reduced risk and strengthened collective ownership of digital safety across the organisation and the communities it serves.



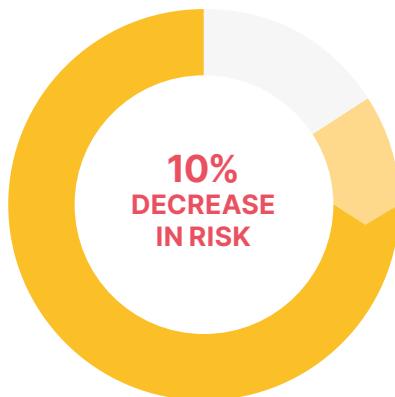
## Outcomes:

### Effects of our support on partners



## Impact:

### Long-term effects of our work



*The dominant long-term impact of Open Briefing's work is not the elimination of risk, but the **restoration of agency, continuity, and confidence** in contexts where fear, threat, and burnout could otherwise have stopped people's work entirely.*

*Impacts are experienced at individual, organisational, and movement levels, with **clear ripple effects** beyond the immediate engagement.*

**Conclusion of an external impact evaluation**



“Open Briefing is a vital support system for our organisation. Their resources and guidance have helped us improve our safety and resilience while working in a high-risk environment.

We deeply value their inclusive, practical, and respectful approach to supporting marginalised communities.”

**TRANS COMMUNITY ORGANISATION, UGANDA**



“Open Briefing’s approach made everything feel simple and possible. Our team now feels confident to lead similar trainings and conversations at the community level.

To the entire Open Briefing team, thank you for your unwavering commitment. Your work is unique and it shows.”

**HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATION, NIGERIA**

# Renewing the space for change

Over the last 15 years, defenders have repeatedly shown us that when we work alongside them and build on their lived experience and local knowledge, they are able to sustain their work and even thrive under pressure. The year behind us has brought the lesson into sharper focus: **protection can no longer be treated as a defensive act alone.** In a world shaped by overlapping crises, shrinking civic space, and sustained attacks on those who speak out, safety and wellbeing have become preconditions for hope, action, and change.

At Open Briefing, this understanding continues to reshape how we work. We are evolving our approach to holistic security into what we call **regenerative protection:** a framework that does more than reduce harm and instead renews the people, relationships, and systems that make collective action possible. It means co-designing protection and care in ways that support defenders not only to survive moments of risk, but to lead change with courage, care, and agency over time.

As demand for our support continues to grow, we know that scale cannot come from organisational growth alone. We will never be large enough to meet every need directly, and nor should we try.

Instead, over the coming years we will focus on scaling protection through partnership, shared infrastructure, and influence, while strengthening our ability to respond to the most complex and high-risk cases.

In practice, this means deepening our rapid response and advisory work where the risks are greatest, while sharing tools, practices, and capacity in ways that allow others, over time, to sustain and adapt protection within their own contexts. It also means investing in what already works, while testing new approaches that enable defenders and movements to manage risk on their own terms.

We enter this next chapter clear-eyed about the challenges ahead, but confident in our role. **Open Briefing exists to build protection and care with people and movements turning hope into action.** With your solidarity and support, we will continue to hold and defend the space in which that action can take root and become change. ●



