



Urgent action and response to human rights violations:

Lessons from KHRC experience



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF DENMARK
Denmark in Kenya



Uraia

Acknowledgment

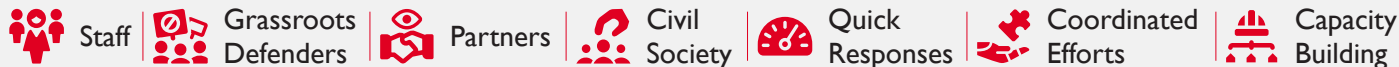
This publication came together through the combined efforts of a dedicated team. Davis Malombe provided the policy direction that shaped its strategic focus. Cornelius Oduor offered an overall review and supervision that safeguarded the publication's quality and integrity. Martin Mavenjina and Jerameel Odhiambo coordinated the assembly of content and ensured it flowed as a coherent narrative. Ernest Cornel Oduor handled the editing and guided the design and layout, sharpening clarity and visual appeal. We also thank the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) and the Uraia Trust for financing the production and publication of this work.



Purpose of this publication

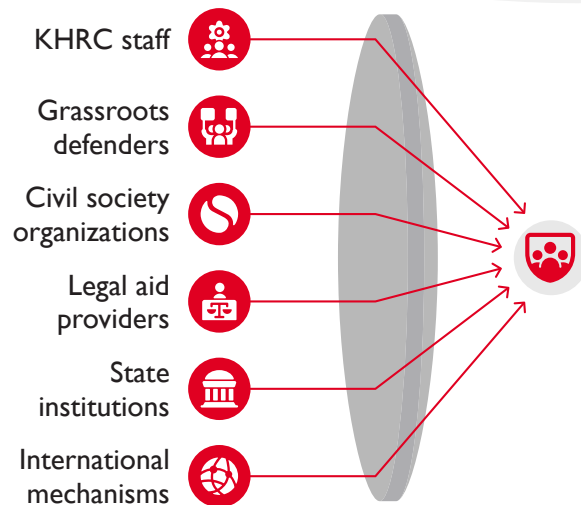
This publication combines KHRC's urgent action and response strategies, guiding staff, grassroots defenders, partners,

and civil society. It helps ensure quick, coordinated responses and builds lasting capacity for human rights protection.



Intended users

The intended users of this publication are broad and diverse. They include KHRC staff directly engaged in urgent interventions, grassroots human rights defenders working in volatile environments, allied civil society organizations, legal aid providers, psychosocial service partners, state institutions willing to uphold human rights obligations, and regional and international mechanisms with which KHRC collaborates.



Definition of urgent action and response

Urgent action and response mean fast, coordinated steps to stop or address serious human rights violations.

→ Acts within hours or days.



→ Mobilizes legal, medical, psychosocial, and advocacy support.



→ Goes beyond routine work to prevent irreversible harm.



What constitutes an urgent action?

This is when urgent action and response are needed:

Note: this list is not exhaustive, but the violations give an idea of what abuses urgent action and response tend to address. The goal is to stop harm, provide relief, and set the stage for accountability.



Arbitrary arrests or detention of human rights defenders.



Enforced disappearances.



Torture or cruel treatment.



Extrajudicial killings.



Forced demolitions and evictions.



Threats to journalists.



Systemic discrimination.



Mass atrocities.



Violent repression of protests.

Importance of urgent action and response in human rights protection

Human rights violations strike fast and hard. Acting quickly can save lives. Even hours matter. KHRC's rapid responses:



Prevent further harm.



Give immediate relief to victims.



Preserve evidence for justice.



Deter perpetrators.



Expose systemic failures to push for reform.

KHRC's role in urgent interventions

KHRC acts fast in times of crisis by doing the following:



1. Legal support

Defends those arbitrarily detained by mobilizing bail and bond, and backs those facing other violations from state actors or corporations.



2. Medical and psychosocial support

Defends victims of torture and survivors of gender-based violence, among other abuses, through referrals or direct intervention.



3. Fact-finding missions

Visits sites of human rights abuse, gathers evidence, and produces reports for justice and advocacy.



4. Public action

Issues urgent statements and runs media campaigns to expose violations and amplify community voices.

Thresholds for activation

KHRC applies three primary thresholds when deciding whether to activate an urgent action:



1. Severity

Serious threat to life, liberty, or dignity.



2. Immediacy

Harm is happening or about to happen.

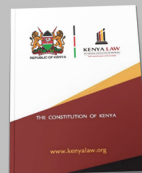


3. Feasibility

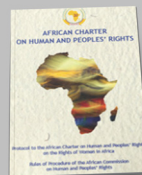
Action can make a real difference (e.g., release, prevent eviction, get medical help, or raise public alarm).

Legal basis

KHRC's urgent action and response rest on strong legal grounds:



→ **National:**
Constitution of Kenya.



→ **Regional:**
African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, among others.



→ **International:**
Universal Declaration of Human Rights, among others.

Guiding principles

Principles guiding KHRC's urgent action and response:

Do no harm
Prioritize the safety and dignity of victims and informants.



Know your mandate

Understand objectives and limits before acting.

Consult widely
Work with local allies for insight and trust.



Respect authorities

Engage as partners, not adversaries.

Stay neutral
Avoid bias to protect credibility.



Be precise

Report only accurate, verified information.

Keep confidentiality
Protect identities and testimonies.

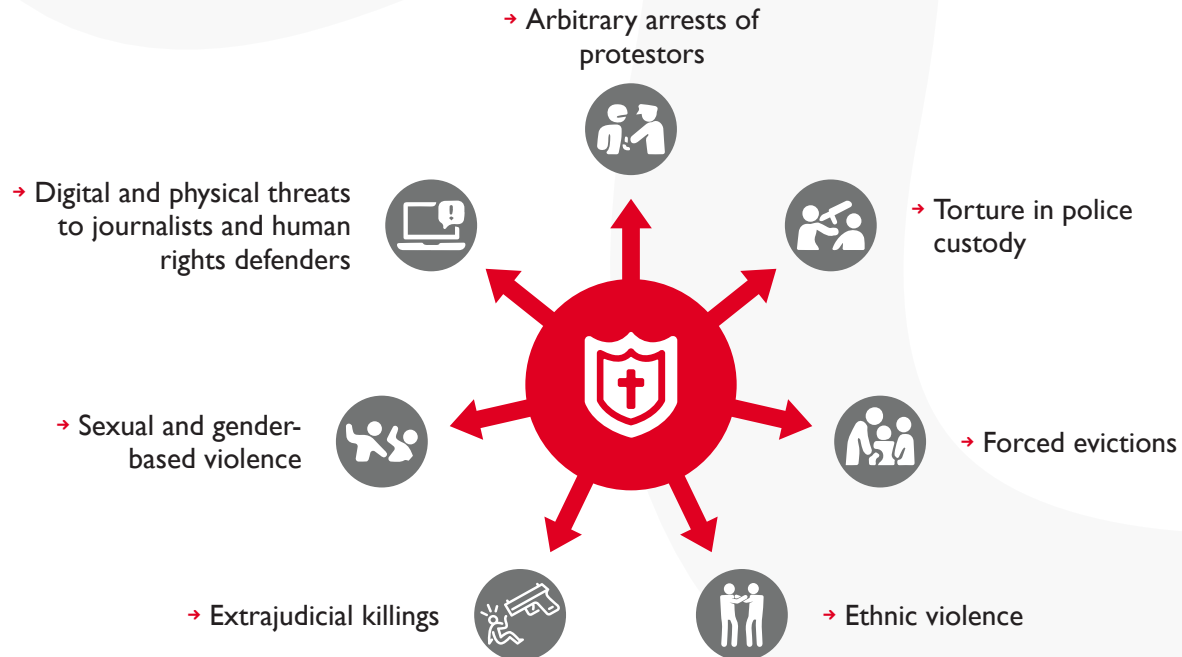


Show sensitivity

Respect culture, context, and victims' experiences.

Types of threats

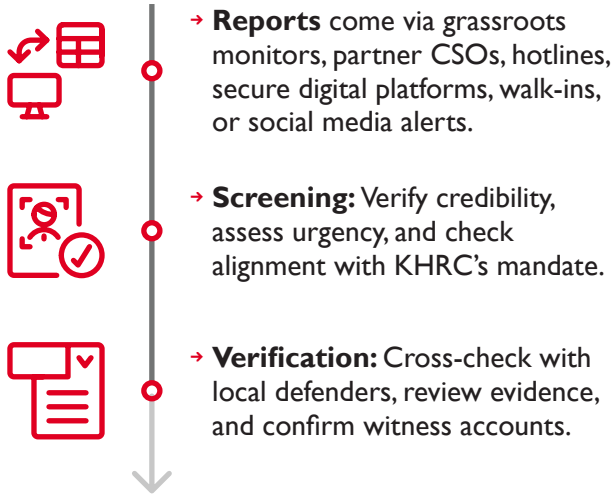
KHRC responds to threats such as:



Response workflow

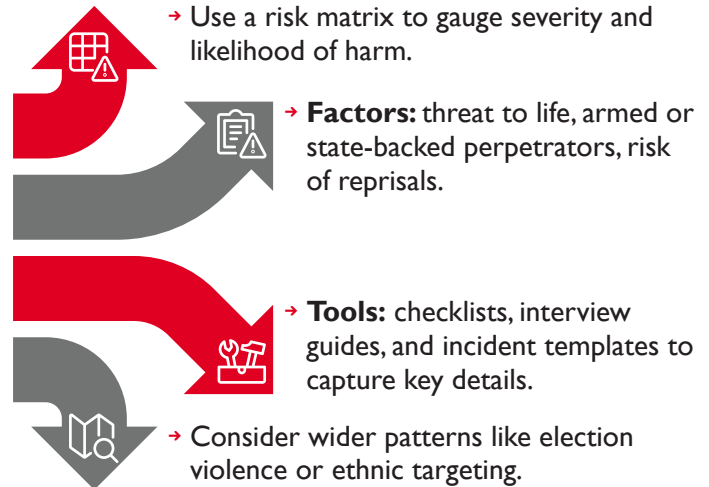
1. Intake process

This is how KHRC handles urgent complaints:



2. Case assessment

The following rapid assessment after screening helps KHRC prioritize, allocate resources, and plan the correct response:



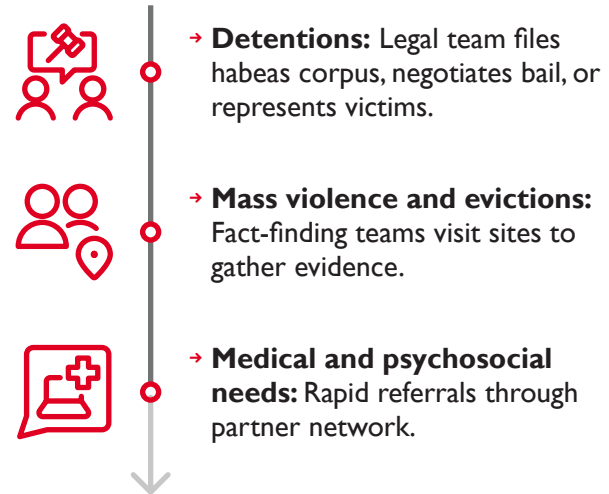
3. Decision-making process

This is how KHRC approves urgent action and response cases to ensure speed while maintaining accountability:



4. Action implementation

Implementing urgent action and response involves the following actions to ensure a fast, coordinated response:

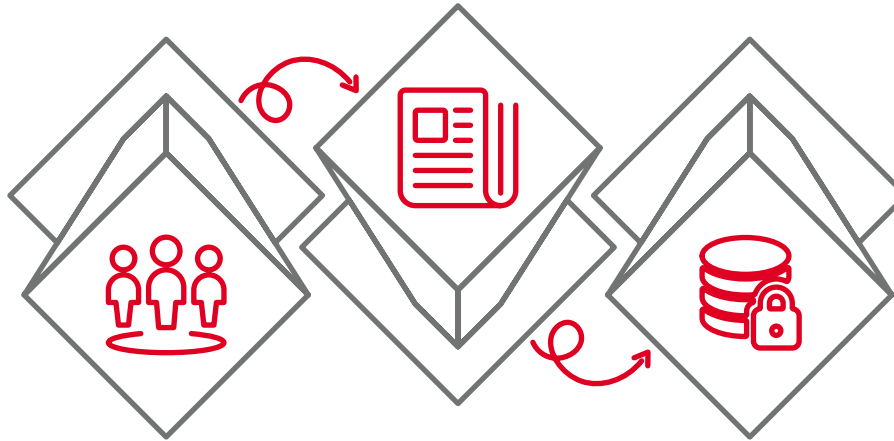


Clear roles:

- **Legal:** Court cases, petitions, liaising with the judiciary.
- **Research:** Collect and analyse evidence.
- **Communications:** Press statements, media, public awareness, and visibility.
- **Finance and administration:** Release emergency funds and support logistics.

5. Closure and follow-up

Follow-up after urgent action takes the following route:



→ **Victim feedback:**

Debrief sessions, interviews, and surveys on support quality, staff conduct, and unmet needs.

→ **Tracking impact:**

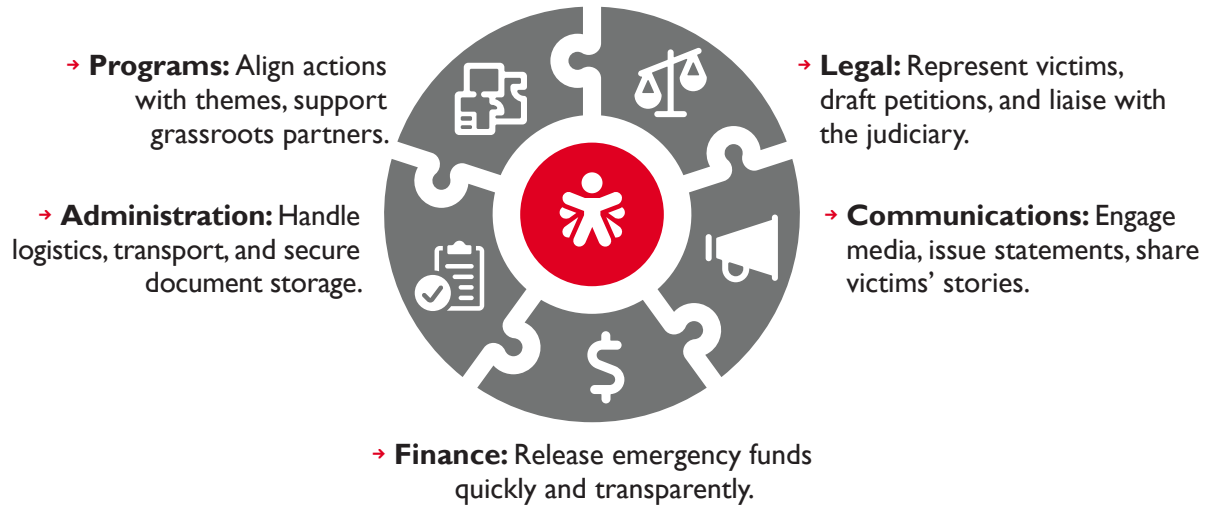
Record immediate results (e.g., release, court injunctions) and broader effects (policy shifts, media coverage, community safety).

→ Data stored securely and reviewed to improve strategies and referrals.

Internal coordination

I. Interdepartmental and program linkages

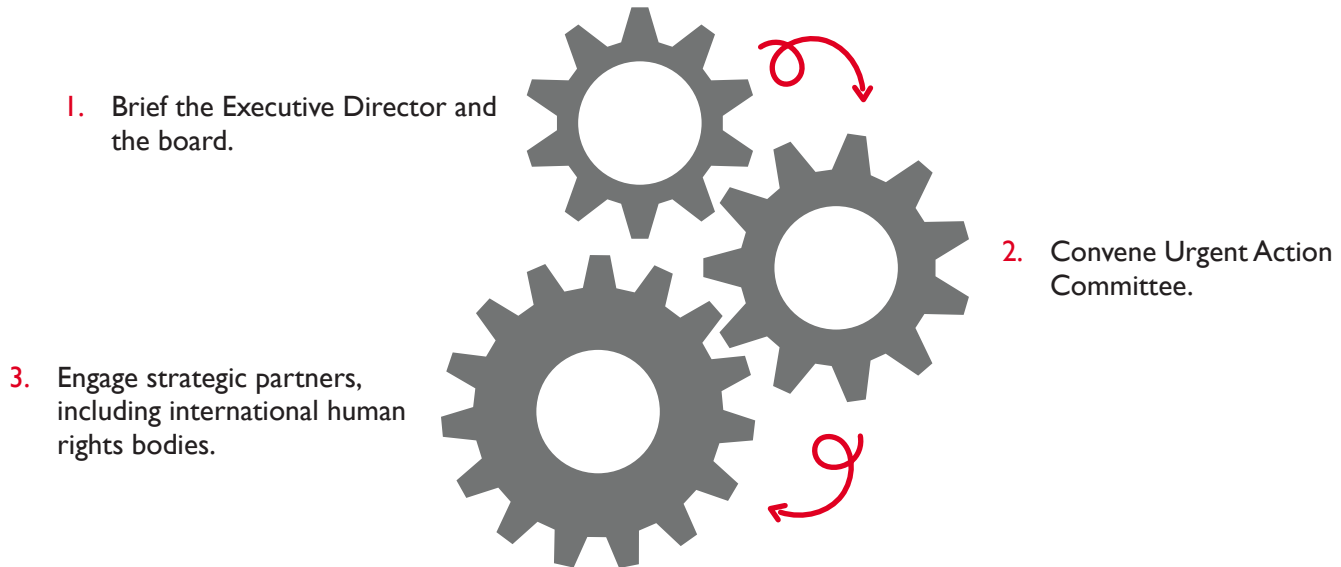
Smooth coordination at KHRC prevents gaps and speeds up holistic responses in the following ways:



2. Escalation protocol

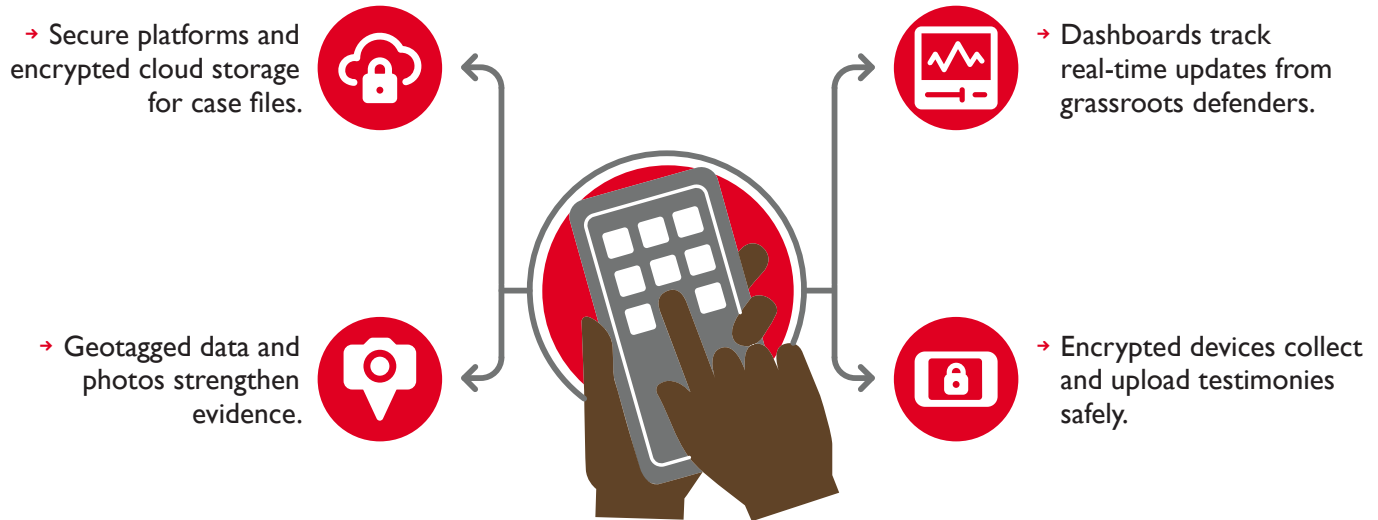
This protocol ensures that sensitive cases get top-level attention quickly. The protocol is triggered by the involvement of powerful perpetrators, threats to victims' safety, or possible international impact.

Steps:



3. Use of technology tools

Tech boosts speed, efficiency, and protection for victims and monitors in the following ways:



Partnerships and external collaboration

I. Strategic partners

KHRC partners with the following, among others, for more decisive, urgent action and response:



→ **Grassroots defenders:**
First to witness and report violations.



→ **Lawyers and bar associations:**
Provide pro-bono legal services.



→ **Medical and psychosocial providers:**
Offer treatment and counselling.



→ **Regional and international bodies:**
Apply pressure and ensure accountability.



→ **Local and international press:**
Amplify the victims' accounts and add pressure for accountability.

2. Referral pathways

Not all cases can be addressed solely by KHRC. When specialized assistance is required, KHRC activates its referral pathways. The following are just examples of such referrals:



- **SGBV survivors:** Safe houses, hospitals, trauma counselling.
- **Torture survivors:** Rehabilitation centres with medical and psychosocial care.
- **Displaced people:** Humanitarian agencies for shelter and food.

3. Joint actions and campaigns

Unity boosts visibility, impact, and safety for all involved, and this is how KHRC achieves this through joint actions with partners:



Documentation and knowledge sharing

1. Keeping records



→ Every urgent action case is documented in KHRC's secure database, capturing details of victims, perpetrators, interventions, and outcomes.



→ Includes testimonies, photos, videos, and official reports.



→ Strict protocols are in place to govern access to the data to protect confidentiality and integrity.

2. Learning and reflection

Continuous learning makes KHRC's urgent action faster and stronger.



→ After-action reviews assess successes and challenges.



→ Staff and partners reflect on strategy, safety, and communication.



→ Lessons update guidelines, strengthening future responses.



Get in touch

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