

THE RAFTO FOUNDATIONS STRATEGY 2026-2029



Support for the defence of Human Rights

The Rafto Foundation for Human Rights works to ensure that human rights are protected, respected, and realized, particularly where they are under pressure. States have a duty to protect and fulfil human rights. Businesses have a responsibility to respect human rights. Human rights must be enshrined in law and safeguarded by independent courts, but their effective implementation also requires engaged citizens and human rights defenders.

At the Rafto Foundation, we believe in people and in the power of individual commitment to make a difference. We aim to support and amplify courageous voices defending human rights, the rule of law, and democracy; and to inspire new generations to stand up for these values.

The work of defending human rights is taking place at a time when democratic values and human rights are under increasing pressure. Human rights once taken for granted are now under attack. Space for civil society is shrinking, funding for civil society is being cut, and human rights defenders are becoming increasingly vulnerable and isolated. Authoritarian forces are not just advancing—they are in power, even in countries previously regarded as established democracies. Disinformation and authoritarian practices pose growing threats to fundamental values in our societies. In this changing landscape, the role of the Rafto Foundation is more important—and more complex—than ever.

The Rafto Foundation has two strategies: the first concerns our support for **human rights defenders**, and the second concerns our **education in democracy and human rights**. The organisation's overall goal is to support these two strategies.

A common thread across the Rafto Foundation is our support for work that promotes human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. We anchor our work in, and contribute to, documentation and research in collaboration with academia and local partners. We promote dialogue and cooperation between civil society, business, authorities, and academia. We build alliances to hold decision-makers accountable and to serve as a vocal public voice for human rights.



STRATEGY 1: SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Impact: The Rafto Foundation shall contribute to the protection and respect for human rights in countries where they are under pressure. We do this by supporting human rights defenders so that they can continue their work. We work to ensure they can effectively overcome obstacles, gain recognition, and be better equipped to influence the systems and decisions that shape human rights both locally and globally.

Background: Human rights defenders are on the front lines and play a fundamental role in protecting human rights and democratic values. They often act as intermediaries between local communities and power structures, holding governments and businesses accountable and mobilising local communities. This is particularly critical at a time when institutional mechanisms for enforcing human rights are faltering. At the same time, human rights defenders are increasingly targeted precisely because they uphold these values. In many places, defenders risk not only harassment and imprisonment, but also exile, violence, or death.

THE RAFTO FOUNDATION SHALL CONTRIBUTE TO THE FOLLOWING OUTCOMES:

Human rights defenders are recognised

- Acknowledge and highlight frontline human rights defenders through the annual, internationally recognised Rafto Prize, and support prize recipients following the award.
- Increase the legitimacy, visibility, and influence of human rights defenders through communications, media support, and access to international platforms to share amplify their message.

Human rights defenders hold decision-makers accountable

- Enable human rights defenders to hold states, international institutions, and businesses accountable when human rights are not promoted, protected, or respected.
- Facilitate human rights defenders' advocacy through political dialogue and participation in international forums.
- Support capacity-building so that human rights defenders can utilise and engage with international human rights mechanisms.
- Foster alliances and strategic partnerships to advance the causes of human rights defenders.



Human rights defenders experience solidarity through networks

- Provide human rights defenders with access to relevant and inclusive networks for mutual support, knowledge sharing, and resilience.

Human rights defenders experience protection

- Ensure human rights defenders can continue their work by providing tailored, effective, and flexible support, including emergency funding.
- Offer tailored courses, tools, and professional support to strengthen resilience against pressure.

Target groups:

- Frontline human rights defenders: Rafto laureates and associated networks (RLs).
- Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs)
- Human rights defenders addressing business-related human rights violations and abuses (BHRDs).





STRATEGY 2: EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Impact: The Rafto Foundation shall contribute to young people's confidence in human rights and democracy. We do this by encouraging belief in the importance of standing up for human rights, motivating citizens to speak out against oppression, and strengthening democratic preparedness. The Rafto Foundation will provide critical perspectives on human rights challenges in Norway and abroad, explore human rights dilemmas, and build trust in democratic institutions. We foster alliances that support equality and demonstrate that recognition of diversity is essential for a democratic society.

Background: We live in a time marked by complexity and uncertainty where we face new challenges. The global order, and attitudes toward human rights are changing. At the same time, new technologies and digital platforms are reshaping how we understand the world and each other. Now, more than ever, it is important to uphold core universal values. A vibrant democracy requires vigilant citizens who stand up for freedom, peace, equality, participation, and diversity. To defend democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, we must understand their value in the context of contemporary developments. The work for human rights requires defenders who are critical thinkers, aware of dilemmas arising from differing worldviews and disinformation, capable of combating polarisation and extremism, and able to support and strengthen those exposed to oppression.

THE RAFTO FOUNDATION SHALL CONTRIBUTE TO THE FOLLOWING OUTCOMES:

Empathy and critical democratic education are promoted

- Encourage critical thinking, explore human rights dilemmas, and foster a nuanced understanding of the world.
- Strengthen young people's capacity for self-reflection and understanding of others' needs and perspectives.

Spaces for engagement and solidarity are created

- Inspire belief in the value of civic engagement by showcasing Rafto Prize winners' work, the strengths of civil society, and amplifying students' own voices.

Inclusive and relevant education is provided

- Offer inclusive teaching and alternative learning environments.
- Maintain an up-to-date educational programme that is attractive to school classes.

Research and development are conducted

- Continuously develop teaching and invite critical reflection on our educational approach.
- Bridge research and practice through collaboration with students, teachers, and academic institutions to adapt education to schools' needs, and provide and share our expertise.



Rafto Foundation is positioned as a centre for peace and human rights

- Create forums to raise awareness and facilitate engagement in democracy and human rights.
- Strengthen democracy and human rights education in schools in Norway in collaboration with other regional peace and human rights centres.
- Develop independent democracy and human rights education and share resources through international collaboration.

Target groups:

- Pupils and teachers in primary and secondary education.
- Student teacher and teacher educators.
- School owners and leaders.
- Citizens and the public.





ORGANISATION

Impact: The Rafto Foundation shall be an engaging, accountable and sustainable organisation with an inclusive working environment.

Background: The organisation shall support and underpin the two core strategies of the Rafto Foundation.

SUB-GOALS – THE ORGANISATION SHALL CONTRIBUTE TO:

Sustainability and organisational learning

- Ensures broad and predictable funding for its human rights work and carries this out in a resource-efficient manner.
- Has solid plans and routines for learning, knowledge development and results-based management.
- Contributes to the sustainability of the Rafto Prize in collaboration with the Rafto Prize Fund.
- Develops and manages the Rafto House as an educational and human rights centre.

Accountability

- Has robust systems and control routines for project support and anti-corruption.
- Makes ethical guidelines and whistleblowing procedures well known both internally and externally.
- Communicates responsibly and counters disinformation.
- Strengthens its digital competence, preparedness, and risk management related to human rights work.

Diversity and inclusion

- Values diversity and creates an engaging and inclusive environment for staff and volunteers.
- Motivates and facilitates voluntary engagement, including through cooperation with the Friends of the Rafto Foundation.

