

THE FOURTH DUBLIN PLATFORM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

DUBLIN CASTLE, NOVEMBER 2007



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BECAUSE IT IS LIFE WE DEFEND, IT IS WITH **LIFE** WE RESIST

I AM NOT AFRAID OF DYING. I AM AFRAID OF LOSING THE AMAZON.

I WILL KEEP FIGHTING TO **DEFEND** THE AMAZON AND ITS PEOPLE

AS A HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER IN BURMA,
I PASS MY DAILY LIFE LIKE A HUNGRY SOUL
CRYING FOR FREEDOM AND **JUSTICE**

THE CONTINUING HARASSMENT AND
THREATS ON MY LIFE HAVE DEEPLY
AFFECTED ME. THESE THREATS HAVE
SEPARATED ME FROM MY CHILDREN.
THIS PAIN BREAKS MY **HEART**

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DUBLIN CASTLE, NOVEMBER 2007



I DO THIS WORK WITH MY FULL HEART BECAUSE IT IS
WITH OUR HEARTS THAT WE WILL MAKE PROGRESS
HRD, ARGENTINA



WHAT DOES FRONT LINE DO?

Front Line provides practical round-the-clock support to at-risk human rights defenders, and promotes the visibility and recognition of human rights defenders.

- Front Line addresses needs identified by defenders themselves, including protection, networking, training and access to international bodies that can take action on their behalf.
- Front Line runs a small grants programme to provide for the security needs of defenders and mobilises campaigning and lobbying on behalf of defenders at immediate risk. In emergency situations Front Line can facilitate temporary relocation.
- Front Line conducts research and publishes reports on the situation of human rights defenders in specific countries. We also develop resource materials and training packages on behalf of human rights defenders and facilitate networking and exchange between human rights defenders in different parts of the world.
- Front Line promotes awareness of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is working to ensure that the principles and standards set out in the Declaration of Human Rights Defenders are known, respected and adhered to worldwide.
- Front Line's work helps to create a safe space in which human rights defenders can pursue their legitimate work for the human rights of others without the fear of intimidation or arrest.

Front Line was founded in Dublin in 2001 with the specific aim of protecting human rights defenders at risk either temporarily or permanently because of their work. Front Line works to protect the lives of these brave people who fight for human rights in difficult or sometimes impossible situations. **Front Line** defines a human rights defender as a person who works non-violently for any or all of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. **Front Line** has Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. **Front Line** is the winner of the 2007 King Baudouin International Prize for Development.

FRONTLINE TRUSTEES



Denis O'Brien (Chairman) Denis O'Brien is Chairman of the Digicel Group, one of the fastest growing cellular companies in the world. Mr O'Brien is one of Ireland's leading entrepreneurs with extensive investments across several sectors. He founded the Communicorp Group which has a portfolio of media and broadcasting-related companies in Ireland and seven other European countries. Denis was Chairman of the 2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Ireland and is Chairman of the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year. He is on the US Board of Concern Worldwide. In 2000 he established The O'Brien Foundation to assist disadvantaged communities in Ireland and internationally.



Mary Lawlor (Director) Mary Lawlor has been constantly inspired by the work of human rights defenders who put their vision of a civil and just world for all ahead of their own safety. In 2001 she set up Front Line, the International

Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders to provide round the clock practical support and deliver fast and effective action on behalf of human rights defenders at risk.



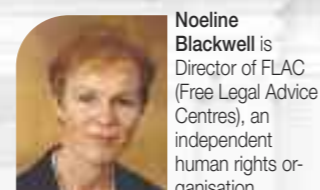
Pierre Sané is Assistant Director-General of UNESCO for the Social and Human Sciences Sector. He was Secretary General of Amnesty International from 1992-2001 and was President of the 1998 Paris Summit for Human Rights Defenders.



Kieran Mulvey is Chief Executive of the Irish Labour Relations Commission and Consultant with the International Labour Organisation and the European Union.



Michel Forst is Secretary General of the French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights. He was Secretary General of the Paris Summit and Director of the French section of Amnesty International.



Noeline Blackwell is Director of FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres), an independent human rights organisation dedicated to the realisation of equal access to justice for all.



David Sykes is Investment Director of Island Capital Ltd and worked in various banks and stock-brokers including Trinity Bank and Dolmen stockbrokers.

Maria Mulcahy was involved with "People in Need" from 1988 - 2000. She was responsible for organising the RTE telethons, which raised €28 million. She was Director of Fundraising for the 2003 Special Olympics World Games.



LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Hanan Ashrawi Founder and Secretary General of the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy.

Robert Badinter President of the OSCE Court of Conciliation and Arbitration and a member of the French Senate. He was previously French Minister for Justice.

Bono Founder member of the Irish rock group U2, and a prominent human rights advocate.

Desmond Tutu Anglican archbishop who rose to worldwide fame during the 1980s as an opponent of apartheid. Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1984.

Adolfo Pérez Equivel Leader of Servicio Paz y Justicia and the 1980 Nobel Peace Prize recipient.

Wangari Muta Maathai Kenyan environmentalist, human rights defender and Nobel Laureate.

Indai Lourdes Sajor Founder and former Executive Director of the Asian Centre for Women's Human Rights.

His Holiness The Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso Temporal and spiritual leader of the Tibetan people and Nobel Laureate.

CONTENTS



"HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ARE PEOPLE WHO MAKE EXTRA-ORDINARY SACRIFICES, OFTEN PUTTING THEIR LIVES AT RISK. THEY ARE USUALLY EITHER ON THE MOVE OR ON THE RUN AND THEY ARE THE PEOPLE WHO CHANGE SOCIETY"
MARY LAWLOR, DIRECTOR OF FRONT LINE



FOREWORD	2
INTRODUCTION	3
KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS	4
POSTSCRIPT	16
PARTICIPANTS & GUESTS	17

FOREWORD

Speaking at the opening of the Fourth Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders, Front Line's Director Mary Lawlor said "It is always difficult for me to try to find words to explain properly what you mean to us in Front Line, how we carry you around like shadows.

I love of the name of Mutabar Tadjibaeva's NGO, "Club of Fiery Hearts". Mutabar was arrested as she was about to come to the last platform in 2005 and remains in prison. To me that's what you are, fiery hearts, filled with passion, compassion and care, displaying the kind of unconditional love that the poet Rilke talks about when he said:



Mutabar Tadjibaeva

"Love consists in this,
that two solitudes protect,
and touch and greet each other."

We drown in your spirit, unworthy in our safe privileged lives, looking on in awe at they way you live with the smell of fear and the uncertainty of life. Nowhere is this spirit – your spirit – more apparent than in the words of Anna Politkovskaya the Russian HRD murdered in October 2006 because she fearlessly spoke out about violence, poverty and injustice in Chechnya.

"So each time I go there people tell me things. They do so in the hope that, if I record what is actually happening, it will lead to change, to peace. Obviously, I am not to blame for what is going on, but the more I think about it, the more I would be betraying these people if I walked away. The only thing to do is to take this to the bitter end, so that no one can say that when things became difficult, I ran away".

Friends, when you feel that your contribution isn't acknowledged and your expertise ignored, remember, you do this work because it is a vision beyond you, yet of you.



Mary Lawlor,
remembering Anna
Politkovskaya

You do it and you move from the ordinary to the sublime.

You do it because it earths you in the things that matter and teaches you to let go of the things that don't.

You do it because you burn against injustice. You do it because as Aung San suu Kyi from Burma says, "no matter the regime's physical power, in the end they can't stop the people, they can't stop freedom. We shall have out time".

You are golden people who bring light, hope and change to the darkest corners of the world.

Mary Lawlor
Director,
Front Line

The full text of Mary Lawlor's speech is available on the Front Line web site at:
<http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/platform>



Participants at the Dublin Platform, photographed at Dublin Castle

WHAT IS THE DUBLIN PLATFORM?

Every two years Front Line hosts "The Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders". This gathering provides a unique opportunity for at-risk defenders from around the world to come together to exchange experiences, discuss relevant issues and engage with decision makers from governmental and intergovernmental bodies. Each of the Dublin Platforms in 2002, 2003, 2005 and 2007 brought together on average more than 100 human rights defenders from over 70 countries.

The Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders aims to:

- i) Analyse and expose the reality of the repression of human rights defenders and promote their work internationally.
- ii) Prioritise the sharing of experience so that human rights defenders can learn from each other and discuss what strategic lessons can be drawn for the prevention and minimisation of risk.
- iii) Provide an opportunity for participants to relate experiences and make practical recommendations in specific areas and influence thinking at the international level.

INTRODUCTION



It is not possible to capture all the sharing and learning, the energy and emotion, the commitment and inspiration generated by the ninety one human rights defenders who came together from seventy one countries at the Fourth Dublin Platform. In this report we try to draw out some of the key lessons and messages.

All the HRDs who came together in Dublin Castle between the 22nd and 24th November 2007 are at risk because of their work. They face death threats and physical violence, denigration and loss of employment, arrest and harassment, and sometimes torture.

Examples of these threats and attacks were shared in often harrowing testimony. But the focus was also on strengthening mechanisms for protection, engaging the international community, holding perpetrators accountable and providing support to those under attack.

The HRDs were joined by many representatives from international human rights organisations. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Judge Louise Arbour and Mr Dermot Ahern TD, Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, gave keynote speeches on the first morning. The meeting was also addressed by Hina Jilani, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders (by telephone from Pakistan); Reine Alapini Gansou, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights; Daniela Salazar Marín, representing the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; and Guillaume Pfeiffié, Associate Human Rights Officer and assistant to Hina Jilani at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Presentations were made about a new report on women HRDs to be published by Front Line, Urgent Action Fund and Kvinna till Kvinna, as well as Front Line's plans for security training for

human rights defenders. Feedback was also presented on a conference Front Line organised with the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) to establish stronger links between development agencies and human rights defenders. Representatives of key international institutions, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders, and the African Commission on Human Rights presented their work.

The participants also enjoyed musical and dance performances each day, at the conference and in the evenings. Front Line would like to thank Maithiu O Casaide who played the oileann pipes, cellist Hazel Fortune and her string quartet, harpist Fiona Lyons, and a young, energetic group of Irish dancers under the guidance of Rosaleen Goodman. The meeting was particularly privileged to hear Liam O'Maonlai, who sang and played the tin whistle and bodhran at the close of the conference.

As in past meetings, many Human Rights Defenders spoke movingly to the meeting about their personal experiences. At one session of this Platform, for the first time, HRDs also discussed their own state of mind and how they manage the personal stress that many of them face. This report highlights what HRDs said about their work, and the dangers and problems they have to confront. It is not a verbatim record. It aims rather to provide a feel of the meeting – some sense of what the HRDs who participated shared with one another and with others who were present.

Andrew Anderson
Deputy Director
Front Line



KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS

CHANGE WILL COME IN THE END. BECAUSE OF YOUR WORK THE TORTURERS WILL BE MADE REDUNDANT, THE KILLERS WILL BE BROUGHT TO JUSTICE, THE FORENSIC SCIENTISTS WILL NO LONGER BE REQUIRED.

DENIS O'BRIEN, CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF TRUSTEES, FRONT LINE



Denis O'Brien and Mary Lawlor



Louise Arbour

The Platform was opened by Denis O'Brien, Chairman of Front Line's Board of Trustees, who welcomed all the participants and introduced Judge Louise Arbour, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The High Commissioner emphasised the central importance of the work of human rights defenders, listing the many threats and dangers they face because of their work. She pointed out that women human rights defenders are exposed to specific risks, among which are sexual violence and threats from a range of actors including members of their own families. Also exposed are HRDs who challenge traditional structures and religious practices, and HRDs working on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and inter-sex (LGBTI) rights, who suffer from the same violence and harassment as people who belong to those groups. She noted as well that the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders, Hina Jilani, had taken up no less than 140 cases of human rights defenders killed for their work on economic, social and cultural rights.

The High Commissioner highlighted the need to counter restraints on freedom of expression, which have become frequent, and defend the principle of free association. She criticised the fact that human rights defenders are often prevented from registering legally and are harassed financially.

She drew attention to the importance of the mandate of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders and to the work of Hina Jilani, the first holder of this mandate, who will complete her extended term in 2008. Noting that the Representative's work "has served as a protection for thousands", she said that "We must spare no efforts to protect the current mandate".

The High Commissioner underlined the importance of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which lays out key principles affirmed in human rights treaties and other legal documents, and protects the right to undertake human rights activities. Noting that the tenth anniversary of the Declaration falls in 2008 – a year in which the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights also falls – she asked HRDs to give attention to the Declaration in all their reporting.

The High Commissioner went on to speak about the "responsibility to protect", the work of her Office, and the progress made in constructing the Human Rights Council. She suggested that the "responsibility to protect", an emerging principle affirmed by governments in 2005 which asserts that the international community should step in when gross suffering occurs in other countries, offers a large space for human rights action during different phases of humanitarian and human rights crises.

Action is needed to prevent crises from occurring, to respond to suffering and oppression, to rebuild after crises end, and to bring perpetrators to justice. She encouraged HRDs to extend their work into this new and emerging area of international human rights activity.

With respect to the work of her Office, the High Commissioner said that the Office is becoming better equipped to work, in countries, to support and protect HRDs and learn from them. There is an opportunity here for the Office to become more useful, as well as to strengthen its relationships with HRDs.

More generally, the High Commissioner noted the crucial role played by the Special Procedures mandate holders, the need to persuade states to ratify the core human rights treaties if they have not done so, and the progress that has been made in establishing the basic structures of the Human Rights Council. She noted, nevertheless, that this work is not complete and she encouraged HRDs to seize opportunities to influence the Council's development. In particular, the new Universal Periodic Review mechanism has potential to shape the Council's work in important ways. The Office will prepare a report on each country before it is reviewed, and will take account of information it receives from civil society organisations and HRDs. She urged HRDs to participate in this potentially very important procedure.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ireland, Mr Dermot Ahern TD, emphasised that the protection of human rights is a central element of Ireland's foreign policy. Noting that this year Ireland had again co-sponsored the resolution on human rights defenders, tabled by Norway, in the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, he paid tribute to the work of Front Line and the work of the UN Special Representative, Hina Jilani, herself a human rights defender from Pakistan who was at risk of being detained. In this context he called for the release of all human rights defenders detained following the declaration of a State of Emergency in Pakistan on 3 November 2007. Mr Ahern reaffirmed that Ireland supports the renewal of the mandate of the UN Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders.

The Foreign Minister went on to welcome the recent initiative of the Commissioner for Human



Foreign Affairs Minister, Mr Dermot Ahern, TD



Hina Jilani



Bahtiyor Hamroev

Rights of the Council of Europe, Mr Thomas Hammarberg, to highlight protection of HRDs in Europe, and commented on several specific human rights issues, notably the situations in Darfur and in the Middle East.

In closing he reaffirmed the Irish Government's commitment to support the work of human rights defenders, who "call the powerful to account and offer protection to the vulnerable, and remind us of the high standards against which we should measure ourselves".

In questions that followed the keynote speeches, the High Commissioner was asked about the capacity of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to respond to human rights violations in Uzbekistan, the DRC and the Middle East, to slave-like conditions suffered by people of Haitian origin in the Dominican Republic, the problems of Cabinda in Angola, and the situations in Fiji and Iraq.

The High Commissioner was able to answer that OHCHR regional offices are being opened in Uzbekistan and DRC, and that she hopes to make a visit soon to Angola (where the OHCHR already has an office). With respect to the treatment of Haitians in the Dominican Republic, Judge Arbour acknowledged the issue and said that more effective work should be possible from the OHCHR's new office in Panama. On Fiji, she observed that she has expressed concern publicly and privately about the positions taken by Fiji's national human rights commission after the coup in 2006. On Iraq she said that the security situation made it difficult to maintain a presence in the country, especially after the assassination of her predecessor and many UN colleagues when the UN compound in Baghdad was bombed in 2003.

Mr Ahern was asked by a human rights defender from Morocco about the European Union's failure to speak out on some human rights issues, which has disappointed many HRDs. The

Foreign Minister acknowledged that the EU's record is imperfect and that EU Member States as well as Associate States need to engage more actively and at senior level in policy forums like the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

Mary Lawlor, Director of Front Line, then spoke about the key elements of Front Line's work since the last Platform in 2005. She named several HRDs who had been honoured for their work, as well as others who had been arrested and detained, or prevented by their governments from attending this meeting. She remembered also some of the HRDs who had been murdered in the last year because of their human rights work, and named particularly Roger Ivan Cartagena, Environmental Movement of Olancho, Honduras; Hy Vuthy, President of the Free Trade Union of Workers, Cambodia; Isse Abdi Isse, Kisima Peace and Development Organisation, Somalia; Sahar Al-Haidari, journalist and women's human rights defender, Iraq; Ricardo Murillo Monge, Sinaloa Civic Front, Mexico; and Valmir Mota de Oliveira of the Landless Workers Movement, Brazil.

She went on to highlight several emerging areas of Front Line's work around which the agenda of the 2007 Platform had been constructed. These included armed conflict, security laws, non-state actors; attacks on HRDs working on economic, social and cultural rights; the needs of women HRDs and their children; the prevalence of sexual violence against HRDs; the need to address specific and additional threats faced by HRDs who work on LGBTI rights; the personal security of HRDs; and stress and isolation and ways that HRDs can manage them. Quoting Sahar Al-Haidari just months before her murder – "Our psychological state is unbalanced because we live and think in fear and anxiety" – she paid tribute to the courage, endurance and indomitable determination of human rights defenders.



NOELINE BLACKWELL, MACCARLING COBBAN, BAHTIYOR HAMROEV

THREATS TO HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The Platform's first and second panels focused on the threats that HRDs confront, focusing especially on those specifically faced by women HRDs. These discussions gave attention to the diverse contexts in which HRDs are endangered by their work, whether it is on ESC rights, LGBT rights, situations of armed conflict or repressive security legislation. This section of the report draws on those discussions but also on other sessions where threats were discussed, as well as on many testimonies that described HRDs' experiences. The range of threats is wide – from assassination and physical assault, to public defamation and enforced exile, via legal harassment, defamation, and abuse against relatives and family. The analysis below is not exhaustive, and does not describe the threats in terms of their prevalence or seriousness. It focuses rather on forms of threat that appear to be becoming more prevalent, and those that were discussed most frequently during the Platform.



Justine Masika

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

A number of testimonies described physical repression of peaceful protests, in Andijan (Uzbekistan) and elsewhere, and the targeted killings of HRDs. In many other cases, HRDs reported being beaten up or assaulted, or threatened with serious violence. Their sense of acute insecurity was often supplemented by threats against HRDs' relatives or family, including children.

"We fight against impunity – and those who are responsible are usually in power. A group of us NGOs have taken an independent stance on this and as a result some of us have been assassinated. Those who work on monitoring the mining sector are also subject to attack and violence as well. The mines have polluted most of the water sources."

HRD, Democratic Republic of the Congo

"The Movement for Autonomous People against Dams is a popular movement of landless farmers, peasants, communities of African origin, small prospectors and some urban communities. As human rights defenders we have faced attempted assassinations, death threats (even against bishops!), physical assaults using tear gas and rubber bullets. People have been hospitalised, many have been jailed for protesting. Lawyers too have been taken to court for representing the communities. Telephone and communications are monitored. Property has been damaged. Sympathisers are criticised in the media..."

HRD, Brazil

I belong to an environmental group that blocks the movement of machines for logging. We have resisted the repression of three governments, and we are still there

fighting, though many of our people have been frightened by what happened to us. Two have been killed, many of us have been arrested; I am out on bail. A price of 40 thousand dollars was put on my head, but I escaped. I still have to consider my position. If I take no security precautions I will be killed. If I accept security, I will be controlled. I must make a choice, and this is a dilemma."

HRD, Honduras

Several HRDs drew attention to the prevalence of rape and sexual violence and described how they or members of their family had been raped and molested with the aim of intimidating them. In some cases, sexual violence was followed by assassination.

"We have assisted 5800 women. We work with 45 social workers, half of whom have been raped, attacked or killed.

... I don't live with my children [since] I was attacked myself. Six soldiers came to my house and bound me and wanted to rape my children because I denounced a case of sexual abuse by an official."

HRD, Democratic Republic of the Congo

My organisation works with families in distress. We combat impunity and work for victims of violence. I have paid the price for this difficult work. .. My husband was gunned down in front of our children and I was tied up and raped in front of the children and grandchildren. The children themselves were abused sexually. When faced by violence of this kind you have to act and I will go on to the bitter end. This is true and I am not afraid. You have to break the silence that surrounds sexual aggression."

HRD, Central African Republic

"After 50 years in the Dominican Republic my mother has no ID papers. Being a HRD – being a woman, being a mother – has many implications. When the government threatened my children I could no longer concentrate on my work. I was phoned and told 'We have your daughter, we are raping her right now'. There are thousands of children in need. As a woman and a mother, that is what keeps me going. We cannot keep silent about their fate."

HRD, Dominican Republic

In a number of cases, individuals under threat of violence were also disappeared – in some cases killed, but in others held out of sight for a period, for interrogation, causing distress to their families who did not know where they were.

"I have suffered harassment, my eyes were covered, I was disappeared and my mother thought I was dead. My papers were taken, which meant I could not travel. I was beaten up for calling for the release of Sahraoui detainees. Then my salary was frozen when I determined to celebrate International Women's Day."

HRD, Western Sahara



Andre Tamayo Cortes

Women Human Rights Defenders

Two panels discussed the experience of women HRDs. One of these examined issues raised in the research report *Being Women Human Rights Defenders: Security Matters in Activism*, which Front Line is publishing together with the Urgent Action Fund and Kvinna till Kvinna. Introducing the report, Vahida Nainar, the report's author, spoke about the ways in which women HRDs are differently affected and differently endangered compared with male HRDs.

First of all, they are at special risk because they challenge dominant social systems and norms, and tackle issues specific to women – gender violence, patriarchal values, sexual and reproductive health. Much of this work is not necessarily recognised as human rights work, and this too creates risks because it is invisible. In addition, many women do their human rights work on top of many other responsibilities – care of their children and families, for example. They frequently lack resources – though resources are a problem for most human rights defenders; and they can access fewer protective mechanisms and frameworks – though these are inadequate for all other HRDs too.

Women HRDs are at particular risk because they are targeted by state institutions but also by private actors, including family members; and because they are targeted for what they are as well as for what they do. The research suggested that women HRDs are particularly exposed to risk when they campaign for legal redress (especially in relation to social norms) and sexual rights, whether the focus is on sexual identity or reproductive health.

Finally, women suffer specific kinds of violation and attack. They are threatened with rape, and raped; their children, notably their daughters, risk sexual attack or mutilation. Women are also slandered sexually, harming their reputation.

What can women do? One consistent demand women make is to remove all weapons from around them. They ask for an enabling environment that respects the culture of women.

The research also suggested other helpful strategies. It is vital to be impartial; in situations of conflict, for example, to work fairly with victims from all sides.

Collective action is powerful: when women work together, they increase their strength and safety.

Sharing leadership also reduces the risk to individuals, since leaders are often the first targets of attack.

Networking and alliance building increase safety: allies abroad can make a group more visible, disseminate information about abuses, and lobby their governments to intervene diplomatically.

In some circumstances, however, it is wiser to be less visible: some groups protect themselves by releasing information through other organisations, or by working closely with men. Finally donors can play a positive role by supporting women HRDs effectively.



"More than 460 women have been murdered in recent years in Guatemala. Our offices were searched, we have been threatened several times. Women abused during the years of war are seeking justice, often years after the event; and those who seek justice often face fresh abuse. We make use of many symbols in our work. When our premises were searched we held a night vigil – we lit candles, we danced – to stop them coming to our offices again. We need to read the signs: we get followed, we receive threats, we receive messages written in blood. Those who persecute us also use symbols."

HRD, Guatemala

LEGAL AND ECONOMIC HARASSMENT AND INTIMIDATION

The property of HRDs is often damaged. Offices are broken into and damaged, equipment destroyed, homes vandalised or daubed with threatening graffiti, vehicles sabotaged. Damage to property impedes HRDs from doing their work, and also reinforces the atmosphere of physical violence, and insecurity, in which many are forced to operate.

"After Andijan our work [with prisoners] became very difficult. We were harassed by a group of women. They said we were traitors. They destroyed my flat in front of a British diplomat who was visiting me, beat my children – all under the eyes of the police. Later my sons (at university) were arrested on fabricated charges; my brother too. This is the way HRDs are treated in our society."

HRD, Uzbekistan

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Inter-sex (LGBTI) rights

Immediately before the platform, Front Line organised a workshop on the specific risks and challenges faced by HRDs who work on LGBTI rights. Some of those who participated in the workshop reported back on its findings when they spoke. Above all, however, they reflected on the experiences they had shared. The aims of the workshop were:

- to provide a forum to share experiences and learning on what are the specific threats faced by defenders of LGBTI rights and what can be the most effective measures and strategies to confront those threats.
- to draw out the experience and expertise of the participants so that their contributions can be used by Front Line and others to develop further capacity building on this issue.

The issue of security was raised during the second session and participants were invited to consider what security meant to them as individuals. For many the ongoing battle with homophobia is a source of both mental and emotional stress, whilst living under constant pressure affects physical well-being as well as personal relationships. Some participants mentioned that feelings of guilt about taking much needed rest often leads to overworking and thus physical and mental health problems. The issue of donors was also discussed in this session, with participants expressing frustration about the fact that financial support provided for individual projects often fails to take into consideration the time and input required on behalf of defenders to do the actual work. Dissatisfaction was also expressed at the attitude of some donors towards human rights defenders who have suffered from extreme acts of repression/violence. They are often deemed more attractive by donors encouraging some defenders to base their bids for funding on their misfortune. Participants noted that this can create internal tensions in organisations and among LGBTI groups.

In addition to the need for state protection as well as technical and economic support, the group concurred that there was also a need to gain the support of the community through raising awareness of LGBTI issues. This was considered particularly important in societies where LGBTI activities are deemed as western and therefore wrong. The group also highlighted the importance of focusing on personal well-being and establishing a work/life balance. The need to consider personal safety and not just that of the communities defenders work to protect was also considered important, as was the need to assess the level of vulnerability and the capacity to respond to certain risks and threats.

They emphasised first of all that LGBT Defenders are standing up for fundamental rights and values that all HRDs share.

“As a human being and a gay man, and on behalf of lesbians too, we have been warriors for human rights since our birth. We have been fighting for our way of life and our integrity from the beginning of our lives, in our own families. We do this because we do not want our hearts to be broken. We are defenders of human rights and will be all our lives.”

HRD, Honduras

At the same time, LGBTI Defenders suffer many of the specific forms of aggression and harassment that women HRDs suffer, because they too challenge dominant social norms, and are attacked for who they are as well as for what they do. Many of their claims, like those of women's organisations, are not necessarily recognised as human rights work. In addition, homosexuality remains illegal in many countries and LGBTI advocates are therefore particularly vulnerable to prosecution and police harassment. In common with women HRDs, the fact

that they campaign for legal rights and focus on sexual identity and sexual rights puts them in extra danger. LGBTI advocates are also targeted by a wide range of actors: they face state harassment, but also hostility from private actors – not least their families and community – and are vulnerable to attack by media. They face even more extreme stigmatisation and social exclusion than most other groups.

“It is very difficult to talk about the rights of gays and lesbians. But if people write about our work and denounce us, we should remember that this means we are being effective, that the authorities are afraid of us.”

HRD, Armenia

“We work with young people in Ghana, where old people claim all the rights to opinion – especially on matters of sexual identity. Gays and lesbians are often beaten. Those who come to our offices are monitored by plainclothes police. Last year, when I talked about gay and lesbian rights, the media came after us, harassed us, forced us to close our office for a month to calm the situation. My travel documents were stolen from our office vehicle. We were supported by the international gay and lesbian organisations and Front Line, enabling me finally to leave the country. Unfortunately we did not receive support from our colleagues in other human rights organisations. International organisations supported us to some extent but they were not able to stand up officially on our behalf. We were isolated. Homosexuality is still a crime in Ghana.”

HRD, Ghana

This isolation is worsened by the fact that those working on LGBTI rights are often shunned or ignored or left unsupported by human rights organisations that work on other issues, even though LGBTI advocates consider they belong to the same movement. This point was raised on several occasions. HRDs working on LGBTI issues appealed to other HRDs to recognise their work, consider them colleagues, and support them in their struggle.

“It is time to unite, put our differences aside – because we have different issues but our cause is the same. Our struggle is for equal treatment and justice for all. Let us therefore unite because, if we do not, we will not succeed.”

HRD, Jamaica



Senator David Norris and Donny Reyes

Many HRDs were impeded in their use of communications or their ability to travel. Telephone and internet access were blocked, and movement monitored or made more difficult.

We are always being accused of playing politics, of being manipulated, of acting like opposition politicians. Moreover, there are no communications. The internet does not work for us – nor will our mobiles and telephones. We become unprotected! What can we do, then, even with the strongest will in the world?”

HRD, Central African Republic

HRDs described an array of legal and other obstacles that impede them from carrying out their work. Some have been refused legal recognition and thereby prevented from operating legally. Others have been subject to persistent investigation, accused of accepting grants and funds from abroad without authority, or falsely accused of fraud or corruption.

A number were taken to court to intimidate them, even though no sensible case could be made, and some were sentenced and imprisoned on false charges.

“When I was tried, I found that eight witnesses who were to have spoken on my behalf had all died. They all died of natural causes, aged between 22 and 25 years. This was implausible.”

HRD, Kyrgistan

“Because of my work on slavery in Niger I was accused of embezzling six million Euro. The NGO from which I was supposed to be embezzling this money, however, did not exist.”

HRD, Niger

In some cases, such legal and economic harassment has prevented HRDs from carrying out their professions, as lawyers for example. This further complicates their lives, economically and socially, and reduces the protection that HRDs can give to people whose rights are at risk. In other cases, HRDs reported being forced out of their jobs, as journalists or civil servants for example, making it difficult for them to support themselves and their families.

“I was a public official, fired for speaking out in the European Parliament. Because the state is a major employer it can intimidate by offering or withdrawing opportunities and resources.”

HRD, Angola



Wan Yan Hai

“I was appalled by our legal system. We lost custody of the children. We lost our house. My brother was imprisoned, he was tortured, lost his teeth – and when I became a human rights activist I lost my job in television... Three times I was taken into a mental hospital after I had been detained and tortured. I was injected with psychotropic drugs, tied to the bed... But I continue and continue to receive support.”

HRD, Uzbekistan.

“I was fired from my government employment because of my work on HIV-AIDS. Many rural farmers were infected with AIDS by infected plasma. We assisted the farmers to

organise. I was then detained by police for releasing ‘classified documents’ on the plasma scandal. I was held for four weeks and tortured (damaging both my legs). Later we learned that many haemophiliacs had been infected. When they organised I was again suspected. Also people who received blood transfusions had been infected and made claims. Two years ago we organised a conference and programme to provide compensation for those infected with HIV following transfusions. Because of this I was again arrested (unofficially) and interrogated.”

HRD, China

CO-OPTION

Governments find other ways to weaken and undermine human rights criticism. Co-option is a common strategy. Participants reported that some human rights defenders have been bribed to change their behaviour. Others have been offered influential positions in government or other institutions. In some instances, when HRDs take such positions, they find they are not permitted to act or speak freely.

“In Togo, independent human rights activists are given money – they are corrupted into silence.”

HRD, Togo

“In my country, the strongest human rights leaders are also named to high posts. We encouraged one [colleague] to accept – but, once in post, she was not able to act independently. Yet if you refuse such posts, you suffer politically!”

HRD, Central African Republic

EXILE AND EXCLUSION

In a number of instances, HRDs reported that, when they refused to cease their work, they were forced to go abroad, because of violence, legal harassment or threats against their families. Driven into exile, in some cases HRDs have then been denied their right to return. For some governments it appears to be an emerging strategy to force domestic critics abroad: because no explicit repression occurs, such governments avoid international criticism and at the same time undermine domestic human rights work.

“I was imprisoned without charge after writing a letter to the IMF asking them to impose conditions on aid. I was called an enemy of the Republic. I was told I would be arrested for fraud and detained for 6-8 months and involved in a Kafka-esque set of procedures. A bank was to be a witness against me but declared it had no evidence. The US Ambassador took up my case and was reassured by an Adviser that I would be sentenced to a one year suspended sentence – before the trial concluded! Finally I was allowed out and given every opportunity to leave the country. After I left, my name was vilified and I was accused of fleeing



Christain Mounzeo

abroad. Eventually I decided to return and was asked by the border police why I wanted to do so. "Because I live here," I said. "I have a house here." I was charged with slandering the President and prevented from travelling for six months. No charge; simply a refusal to let me travel. I was eventually told that I would be freed if I recognised the sovereignty of the state. My question now is: Will I be arrested again if I go home. All this has made me ill, but I was not aware of it until the question of stress was discussed at this conference."

HRD, Congo Brazzaville.

MORAL HARASSMENT AND SLANDER

Adding to these pressures, many HRDs described how they have been isolated socially and professionally. Many were slandered by government officials or the local media (some at government instigation). They were accused of being traitors to their country, of being corrupt, of being immoral. HRDs forced abroad were slandered in the same way, in their absence.

"In 2005 I published a book that examined sharia court judgements. In 2006 the Ministry threatened to prosecute my Committee because it was not legally registered. In 2006 I received a direct threat from the Minister of the Royal Court... Since then I have been under constant surveillance and been followed everywhere. Members of my family have also suffered... The Court banned any reporting of our activity and I had to use the internet. Security forces then penetrated internet circles to defame my reputation..."

HRD, Bahrain

In Latin America there are campaigns to destroy our reputations. Governments pay the media to write such reports. So we receive threats, to us, our families, our children; our homes are attacked. How are we going to address these campaigns of denigration?"

HRD, Argentina

"We have little space to operate and that space is narrowing. Nor can we get access to written or spoken media. We are constantly accused of treason, of being in the pockets of other governments, of being terrorists or Taliban..."

HRD, Yemen



Mary Sandasi

In a number of cases, the combination of harassment and social intimidation, exacerbated by shortages of funding and other resources, creates divisions between human rights organisations that further weaken their ability to do their protection work or be heard. As one speaker put it, "Rivalry between HRDs and human rights organisations is exploited by governments. This is a point of weakness that we must discuss even if it is difficult."

"Even human rights defenders sometimes refuse to associate themselves with LGBTI claims. Please – stand by us" [Applause]
HRD, Zimbabwe

STRESS AND ISOLATION

Some HRDs are at risk simply because they are physically isolated. In rural areas for example, it is more difficult to send information out – and easier for officials and armed groups to commit crimes with impunity.

We have great difficulties to communicate: the distances are great. I am here because I have some national links, and [an international human rights activist] met me. But there is violence, many rapes that are not known, because people cannot communicate. And the security of HRDs cannot be protected either..."

HRD South America?)

But HRDs also become socially isolated, condemned in the media, sometimes rejected by their own communities, and often criticised within their own families for the positions they take or the risks they create for those around them.

"When we talk about violations of human rights, we know they are perpetrated by the political authorities – but also society as a whole is involved. For us, who are trying to claim rights for gays and lesbians, or women, we need to consider how we can influence the attitudes of the public"

HRD, Morocco

In some societies, the sense of isolation is extreme, because HRDs are not recognised yet face all the physical dangers, threats to life, and social exclusion described above.

"We are invisible. Like a high wire act in the circus, we must tread extremely carefully. Our country is in a state of terror. You do not know where the threat will come from. You have to sleep in different places every night. You have no choice but to take a different route to work every day."

HRD, Algeria

"We opened a special hole in my house to allow us to get out, and that is how I escaped a staged attack earlier this year. For the last four years I have never slept for more than four hours on any night when I am in Iraq."

HRD, Iraq

Faced by the dangers their work attracts, some HRDs said they isolate themselves in order to protect others around them.

"I work in a small radio station. I have seen death twice. My problem was that I interviewed people – so I became the centre of investigation myself, putting my colleagues, children, my family at risk. I was like a contaminating element. It was deeply stressful. I have women in my family, children. My wife wants me to stop. But what if this is what I want to do? I am only 33. And everyone who takes you anywhere falls under suspicion. It becomes better to work on your own."

HRD, Togo



Djimi El Ghalia

Social isolation of this kind is psychologically exhausting.

"I am sometimes no longer sure whether I am right, because people are always telling us that we are wrong – that we are traitors. I know of course that I am not wrong. But it is helpful to be able to talk here to others about their experiences, their sense of isolation, their sense of being, perhaps, crazy."

HRD, Russia

RECOGNISING AND LIVING WITH STRESS

"How do you deal with the stress of your job? For all of us this is one of our main challenges. First I use music, then I love dancing. These are two ways of saying to the merchants of death that the essence of dignity is happiness."

HRD, Colombia

"I do not want to be so afraid that I cannot think about the future."

HRD, Thailand

"I never have time for myself. I am always working."

Front Line's programme for training HRDs in personal security

Anne Rimmer, Front Line's Training Coordinator, explained the organisation's plan to concentrate on the expressed needs of HRDs, and on training trainers. Front Line will focus specifically on the needs of women HRDs and LGBTI HRDs; documentation of violations; and assistance to HRDs working in intolerant environments (where registration obstacles and financial harassment are common).

Wojtek Bogusz, Front Line's IT Security Coordinator, presented the "NGO in a Box" (<http://security.ngoinabox.org>), a programme developed by Front Line and Tactical Technology, and announced that an advanced version will be available in 2008. He emphasised that, as digital technology continues to progress, HRDs will be confronted with many new risks as well as opportunities to strengthen their work. Following this, Gabriel Bombambo, Front Line's IT Support Consultant in DRC, described the work Front Line has been doing in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, where hundreds of HRDs have been trained in computer and digital skills despite huge technical obstacles – including lack of machines, low technical literacy, vulnerability to viruses, and expensive and unreliable internet access.



Wojtek Bogusz, Head of IT and Security, and Gabriel Bombambo, DRC



From left: Otto Saki, Au Broquill, Micheal Forst and Jane Barry

Previous platforms did not directly address the issue of stress, although the 2003 and 2005 Platforms examined the need for HRDs to give proper attention to their security and discussed why they often do not do so because they find it difficult to consider their own needs, or are unwilling to admit to themselves that they are at risk or because they feel that they can control the risks they face. From this perspective, the discussion on managing stress at this year's Platform simply took Front Line's work on personal security a step further.

This would only be part of the truth, however. Many of the testimonies at this year's Platform not only emphasised the social and political isolation that HRDs experience – their solitude, as voices of conscience that are perpetually being contested politically and personally – but also the acute sense of strain and guilt that many HRDs feel when their activity implicates and puts at risk the lives and safety of colleagues and those whom they love most. HRDs are drawn by conscience and vocation to do the work they do, but by doing that work they knowingly put in danger the people who are closest to them – not least their children, who cannot take responsibility for such decisions.

"What is difficult is that suddenly you realise that you face a real threat and that this will have an impact on your children and your spouse. But you don't want to talk about your fear because you don't want to involve other people in your situation. How to cope with this?"

HRD, Argentina

HOW TO SUBMIT INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINTS TO THESE ORGANISATIONS

THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS

Anyone may bring a complaint to the attention of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights alleging that a State party to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights has violated one or more of the rights contained therein.

Communications meant for the African Commission are usually directed to the Secretariat of the Commission which is based in Banjul, The Gambia. Once a communication is received, it is registered under a file number in the Commission's Official Register of Communications kept at the Secretariat of the Commission. The Secretariat acknowledges receipt of the author's letter of complaint. If more information is required, the author will be informed accordingly.

Full instructions on procedures for lodging a complaint can be found by logging onto: http://www.achpr.org/english/_info/communications_procedure_en.html or if further information is required contacting:

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
P O Box 673, Banjul, The Gambia
Tel: 220 392962
Fax: 220 390764

THE OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The Special Representative takes up, with the States concerned, individual cases of human rights violations committed against defenders. Information on such cases is received through a variety of sources including State authorities, NGOs, United Nations agencies, the media and individual defenders.

Contact details for sending submissions and for further correspondence:

The Special Representative's staff will acknowledge the receipt of a submission if this is requested. They can be contacted at any time for further discussion.

E-mail contact details: urgent-action@ohchr.org

The text of the e-mail should refer to the human rights defenders mandate.

Fax: +41 22 917 9006 (Geneva, Switzerland)

Telephone: +41 22 917 1234.

This is the number for the United Nations telephone operator in Geneva, Switzerland. Callers should ask to speak with staff at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights dealing with the special procedures of the Commission on Human Rights, and specifically with staff supporting the mandate of the Special Representative on the situation of human rights defenders.

THE INTER AMERICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The Commission can consider petitions from individuals who claim their rights have been violated by the state and they have been unable to find justice in their own country. The Commission brings together the petitioner and the state to 'explore' a friendly settlement'. If such an outcome is not possible, the Commission may recommend specific measures, or may report the case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, as long as the state has accepted the Court's authority to do so (see Article 64).

Petitions addressed to the IACHR must be in writing and must contain the following information:

- The name, nationality and signature of the person or persons making the denunciation or, in cases where the petitioner is a non governmental entity, the name and signature of its legal representative(s) • Whether the petitioner wishes that his or her identity be withheld from the State

- The address for receiving correspondence from the IACHR and, if available, a telephone number, facsimile number, and e-mail address

- An account of the act or situation that is denounced, specifying the place and date of the alleged violations • If possible, the name of the victim and of any public authority who has taken cognisance of the fact or situation alleged

For a model petition, see:

https://www.cidh.oas.org/cidh_apps/instructions.asp?gc_language=E

Although the submission should be written, the IACHR has previously admitted complaints presented by other means (e.g., by telephone).

Where to send a complaint:

**Executive Secretariat
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
1889 F Street NW
Washington, DC 20006
UNITED STATES
Fax: 1-202-458-3992
e-mail: cidhoea@oas.org**

For more detailed information about rules for making a complaint to the Commission, procedure for determination of a complaint and proceedings to the Court, follow the link to the excellent Litigating Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Legal Practitioners Dossier released by the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) on p.158 <http://www.cohre.org/store/attachments/COHRE%20Legal%20Practitioners%20Dossier.pdf>

Of course, it is those who commit violence and crimes against the colleagues and friends and relatives of HRDs who are truly responsible. Nevertheless, HRDs face painful moral dilemmas: indeed, this is precisely why indirect intimidation and abuse of relatives of HRDs take place so frequently, and often brutally. The aim is to paralyse the HRD with fear - not fear for him or herself, but for those to whom he or she feels the deepest responsibility.

The 2007 Platform therefore devoted a session to naming and discussing the problem of stress. The session was introduced by Jane Barry, who wrote the report "What's the Point of Revolution if We Can't Dance?" for Urgent Action Fund (UAF). She emphasised the intensely personal nature of human rights defence, alongside its more obvious and public aspect. Many HRDs come to the work they do because they have personally experienced violence, discrimination or homophobia. This work is also personal because of the support that others give - community, family, colleagues, friends. HRDs also put their bodies and their reputations at risk by the actions they take; this too is personal. Yet precisely because these are such personal matters, they are not discussed. Those who oppose human rights understand this very well: it is why they attack the bodies of HRDs, their reputations and those they love.

"As a student activist and then a lawyer, I have seen many things. I have seen my clients tortured. What can we do? We lawyers are reluctant to talk about stress. We think it shows weakness. But stress emerges in other ways - in drinking, or smoking, also you may cease to think clearly, may lose your energy. We therefore need to confront these things."

HRD, Zimbabwe

Jane Barry suggested that HRDs should allow themselves to become more aware of the importance of the private dimension of human rights work, if only in order to sustain their ability to do it. This implies giving attention not only to reducing the risk of external attack (the subject of Front Line's programme on security) but to a wider range of more personal needs. Overwork and exhaustion is an obvious issue for many HRDs, already recognised though less often managed. HRDs also need to consider how they can come to terms with grief and loss ("the thoughts that keep them awake, that seep into their dreams"); nourish the quality of their important relationships; think about their personal and spiritual needs (not only the needs of those they defend); relax and have fun and enjoy sex; recognise and learn how to live with fear, rather than deny it.

"We are so energetic all day that at the end of the day we fail to focus on our own needs as Defenders. Deep inside us we are empty, because we are refusing to give attention to ourselves. I think I have to reflect on my own situation, because it is painful to think of being killed, of leaving your family, leaving your children. I am tempted never to look back. We do need to move on, but the only comfort zone in the last resort is in ourselves, in our own minds."

HRD, Philippines

Thinking about such matters can also be paralysing, of course, and Jane Barry emphasised that despite the enormous pressures and insecurity that many HRDs face, they keep going. This too needs to be understood. People develop personal and group strategies for coping. Some dance, some take strength from their religious faith, some make sure that their loved ones are in safety, some find a source of courage in the support their communities provide.

This session was very well received by participants, who welcomed an opportunity to think

about these very personal issues. There was a lively discussion, and the participants asked Front Line to develop further work in this area.

"There are two stresses, One is in your head. The other is in your heart. If you face stress, turn to God for help. He will help you. When we ask friends, friends cannot cope with it. But God will help you."

HRD, Uzbekistan.

"We are worth a lot. We need to take care of ourselves because who will do the work if we are not here?"

HRD, Azerbaijan

Many HRDs in particular said how valuable and reaffirming it was to share their experiences with others.

"What happens is that we do not give ourselves time to think about our own safety. But all of us are bringing our family into this situation. How do we manage this and organise our own security? We should identify who is threatening us, and what the threats are: this would help us to think clearly. Song and dance helps. But we need time to think - and to share with others."

HRD, Middle East.

"Much of what we share is negative experience. But we have positive experiences to share too. What is clear is that each one of us should remember our successes. We should remember what worked."

HRD, Egypt

"We know that we women have been excluded and discriminated against in our society and that when we seek to break out of this we are seen to be a threat and we are attacked. One of my sisters was raped and we are still very threatened. We have been living in terror. We need protection - yet the police who were appointed to do this are the same ones who threatened us. Yet, when I look around this room I see that we are not the only ones - we are not alone. After this meeting I see that others are suffering and some suffering more than us, and this is a source of great strength to us"

HRD, Guatemala



Elena Urlaeva



Akifa Aliyeva

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY



Alapini Gansou

“You are the eyes and ears of the system on the ground.”
Ms Daniela Salazar Marín.

“We need you to help us to think creatively about the most appropriate forms of protection.”
Ms Daniela Salazar Marín.

The Platform devoted a session to discussion of the work of UN and regional human rights organisations. It included presentations by Ms Reine Alapini-Gansou, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders for the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, who described her work on behalf of human rights defenders in Africa; and Ms Daniela Salazar Marín, a lawyer working for the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, who assessed the Commission's mandate and activities. Earlier, Mr Guillaume Pfeiffié described the work of the UN Special Representative of

the Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders.

Madame Alapini Gansou set out the focus of her work. This can be summarised as the activities she carried out within the context of her mandate which among other things consists in seeking, receiving, examining and acting on information relative to the situation of human rights defenders in Africa; but which also consists in collaborating and establishing a dialogue with Member States.

Towards this end she received information from reliable sources relating to a large number of allegations relating to the abuse of the Defenders. In some cases she had conveyed, letters to



Daniela Salazar Marín

the Governments concerned to engage in dialogue with them, and in others she issued Press Releases.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) is one of two bodies in the Inter-American system for the promotion and protection of human rights. The Commission has its headquarters in Washington, D.C. The other human rights body is the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which is located in San José, Costa Rica.

The IACHR is an autonomous organ of the Organization of American States (OAS). Its mandate is found in the OAS Charter and the American Convention on Human Rights. The IACHR represents all of the member States of the OAS. It has seven members who act independently, without representing any particular country. The members of the IACHR are elected by the General Assembly of the OAS.

Among other activities the Commission receives, analyses and investigates individual petitions which allege human rights violations, pursuant to Articles 44 to 51 of the Convention. It also observes the general human rights situation in the Member States and publishes special reports regarding the situation in a specific State, when it considers it appropriate. Michel Pfeiffié set out the mandate and role of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on the situation

Developing ties with international development agencies

Jean Bossuyt, of the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), reported on the conference that the ECDPM co-organised with Front Line in October 2007 to discuss how development agencies might do more to protect and support human rights defenders. Held in Brussels, the meeting attracted a representative group of bilateral and international donors, and created interest in a longer discussion of the links that might be developed.

Jean Bossuyt noted that development agencies have mainstreamed human rights in their policies, but many gaps remain. The development and human rights communities are still unfamiliar with each other; there is still some resistance in development circles to human rights, which is seen to be “political”. Development agencies have few links with HRDs on the ground and the lack of clear command chains in development decision-making makes it hard for development agencies to apply accountability principles.

Yet, development agencies have vast resources and considerable influence. It would greatly strengthen the protection of HRDs if development agencies were to work with them and help in their protection. Jean Bossuyt recommended that HRDs should take the initiative to build contacts with development agencies, starting with small and local contacts. HRDs should be consulted about development decisions; accountability and monitoring mechanisms for development programmes should be improved, taking more account of human rights; and the EU should publicise and implement its policies in support of HRDs.

In discussion it was broadly agreed that Front Line's initiative, to make links with development agencies, should be followed up and supported. In responding to questions, Jean Bossuyt agreed that a key issue is the model of development. What kind of societies do we seek to create? Donor agencies have recognised the limits of their power to control, and have become interested in the values of human rights – but distrust remains, and there is much to be done, at different levels, before human rights come to be integrated adequately into development policies, either by donors or recipient governments.

of human rights defenders. In its year 2000 session, the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) asked the Secretary-General to appoint a Special Representative on human rights defenders. The Commission's intention was to give support to implementation of the Declaration on human rights defenders and also to gather information on the actual situation of human rights defenders around the world.

The Special Representative's mandate (see resolution E/CN.4/RES/2000/61 of 26 April 2000) stipulates that the Special Representative's main roles are to: seek, receive, examine and respond to information on the situation and the rights of anyone, acting individually or in association with others, to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms; establish cooperation and conduct dialogue with governments and other interested actors on the promotion and effective implementation of the Declaration and recommend effective strategies better to protect human rights defenders and follow up on these recommendations.

In discussing the role of international human rights organisations, the participants noted with some frustration that effective and rapid action is rare and that international mechanisms are relatively weak.



Aucan Huilcaman Paillama

“International pressure is vital – and not only at election time”
HRD, Belarus

“It is not HRDs who should supply answers to the Inter-American Commission or the UN. They should be supporting us.”
HRD, Venezuela

“The trouble is that human rights do not have teeth; the same is true of the UN. They have no means to force compliance. The international community has a duty to do more.”
HRD, Palestine

“Each international organisation has its own priorities. These rarely match local priorities. This can create irritation, even bad human rights consequences.”
HRD, Egypt.

“My country has ratified about every convention but enforces none of them. Democracy is an illusion in our country.”
HRD, Congo Brazzaville

“When eight journalists were arrested in Andijan, we sent news out within one to three hours. International organisations are too slow. They may take three days. The authorities arrest individuals on Friday evenings and Saturdays knowing that international organisations do not work over weekends.”
HRD, Uzbekistan



Arik Ascherman

“How can we provide protection at local level? We have systems and mechanisms but regional ones are often old and are not adapted to current needs. We may need to update them. There are Special Rapporteurs – but there need to be additional instruments.”

HRD, Chile

“Unfortunately, there are many international statements and resolutions from the Inter-American Commission and the United Nations [about my country] but the government does not pay attention to them. We have to have stronger measures to sanction non-compliance, otherwise these abuses will repeat again and again.”

HRD, Colombia

At the same time, HRDs stressed how vitally important international action and advocacy is for their security. Several described personal experiences of being assisted or protected by organisations abroad, sometimes in essential ways that saved lives. Participants repeatedly confirmed how important international support and solidarity are to them. They emphasised the value of trial monitoring, the reports of the UN Special Rapporteurs, and the essential importance of linking the work of international institutions with the work of local HRDs.

“Because of the help of Front Line and the Inter-American Commission, we are still alive.”

HRD, Guatemala

“My conclusion after 20 years is that without international support we will not really succeed. International organisations work from the top, we work from the bottom, and we have to meet, to work together.”

HRD Uzbekistan

“When we stand for the rights of other people we cannot afford to be weak. I need independent financing and continuous international pressure on local authorities on behalf of HRDs – and international law that will really hold governments to account for what they do.”

HRD, Ingushetia

POSTSCRIPT

A high point of the Platform occurred when Hina Jilani joined the conference by telephone from Pakistan. She addressed the meeting, not as the UN Secretary General's Special Representative on the situation of human rights defenders, but as a human rights defender speaking to other human rights defenders at a moment when she was at risk of arrest and when many other Pakistani HRDs had been arrested and perhaps tortured. "Please send a strong message," she declared, "to my own and other governments, that we cannot afford to allow governments to violate human rights standards or to overthrow democracy. We cannot afford more Zimbabwe, Belarus or Burmas. The right to peaceful protest has been challenged and must be defended."

She added that "the support of the human rights defenders gathered in Dublin is a source of great strength and encouragement for us" – echoing a sentiment that thousands of human rights defenders have expressed about her own work during her term as UN Special Representative, which ends in 2008.

2008 will therefore mark two important moments, both of which were highlighted by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights during her keynote speech which opened the conference. First, 2008 will mark the tenth anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. This anniversary will generate vital opportunities to deepen awareness about and respect for the Declaration. Moreover, in the same year, a new Special Representative will be named and appointed. HRDs have a vital interest in ensuring that the Representative's mandate is protected and that the new appointment is a strong one.

Secondly, 2008 will mark the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – the single most important expression of the values of human rights defenders. Here too lies a great opportunity to reaffirm and amplify the principles of respect and human relationship and dignity that human rights upholds.

There is work to do.

"I have slept well here in Dublin, when often at home I do not sleep – because I have shared the experiences of others, and others have shared mine."

HRD, Zimbabwe

"We say to one another 'We are still alive and we will continue'."

HRD, Kyrgistan



Hina Jilani

PARTICIPANTS DUBLIN PLATFORM 2007 – HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND INTERNATIONAL GUESTS

AFRICA

ANGOLA

Agostinho Chicaia
Civic Association of Cabinda – Mpalabanda

BURUND

Gabriel Rufyiri
Observatoire de Lutte contre la Corruption et les Malversations Economique 'OLUCOME'

CAMEROON

Peter Essoka
Trauma Centre Cameroon

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Sayo-Nzale
OCODEFAD

CONGO BRAZZAVILLE

Christian Mounzeo
Rencontre Pour la Paix et Les Droits de L'Homme (RPDH)

DJIBOUTI

Jean-Paul Noel Abdi
Ligue Djiboutienne des Droits Humains (LDDH)

DRC

Christian Hemedi
Association pour la Renaissance des Droits Humains au Congo (ARC)

DRC

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The Next Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders will take place in Autumn 2009.

Front Line would welcome any input for the agenda.

The reports from the working groups that took place in this year’s Fourth Dublin Platform will be made available on the Front Line web site.

www.frontlinedefenders.org