



Dublin Castle, 4-6 November 2015

BOOK OF TESTIMONIES FROM THE 2015 DUBLIN PLATFORM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

fi FRONT LINE
DEFENDERS

BOOK OF TESTIMONIES FROM THE 2015 DUBLIN PLATFORM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

JUSTICE WILL NOT COME FROM ABOVE, FROM THE POWERFUL.
THE DAY-TO-DAY CONSTRUCTION OF HOPE AND OF JUSTICE
IS WHAT INSPIRES US TO CONTINUE IN THIS STRUGGLE...

What does front line defenders do?

Front Line, the International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) established by charitable deed trust. It was founded in Dublin in 2001 with the specific aim of protecting human rights defenders at risk, people who work, non-violently, for any or all of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Front Line Defenders addresses the protection needs identified by defenders themselves.

Front Line Defenders provides rapid and practical support to at-risk human rights defenders including:

- grants to pay for the practical security needs of human rights defenders;
- provision of training and development of resource materials on security and protection, including digital security;
- international advocacy on behalf of human rights defenders at immediate risk;
- rest and respite, including the Front Line Defenders Fellowship;
- opportunities for networking and exchange between human rights defenders, including at the biennial Dublin Platform;
- the annual Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk;
- an emergency 24 hour phone line for human rights defenders operating in Arabic, English, French, Spanish and Russian;
- temporary relocation of human rights defenders in emergency situations.

Front Line Defenders promotes the protection of human rights defenders through its support for the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and other international and regional mechanisms. Front Line Defenders promotes respect for the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. Front Line Defenders has special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, partnership status with the Council of Europe and observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Front Line Defenders received the 2007 King Baudouin International Prize for Development.

TRUSTEES

Denis O'Brien (Chairman) is Chairman of the Digicel Group. He is one of Ireland's leading entrepreneurs with extensive investments across several sectors. Mr. O'Brien was voted Ireland's Entrepreneur of the Year in 1998 in the inaugural running of the worldwide competition organised and sponsored by Ernst & Young. Mr. O'Brien is also a director of a number of private companies which hold some of his other business interests including Quinta do Lago SA and Communicorp Group Limited. In 2000 he established The Iris O'Brien Foundation to assist disadvantaged communities in Ireland and internationally. He is co-founder of Front Line Defenders.



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



Noeline Blackwell is CEO of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre. She is former Director of FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres) and was Vice-President of The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) from 2013 to April 2016.



David Sykes acts as an investment advisor to Island Capital Ltd and previously held positions in banking and stockbroking which included Trinity Bank Ltd and Dolmen Stockbrokers Ltd.



Jim Conway is the founder and Chairman of the Print & Display Group, one of Ireland's largest print companies. He also has a number of other media interests in Ireland and Eastern Europe.



Maria Mulcahy is the CEO of the Iris O'Brien Foundation and the Irish-based Head of Philanthropy for the Digicel Group. She was involved with "People in Need" from 1988 to 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.



Mary Jane N. Real is a founding member and former Coordinator of the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. A lawyer by profession, she was part of establishing the Alternative Law Groups network in the Philippines. She is a long-time advocate of women's rights having worked with women's rights and human rights organisations in Asia Pacific and internationally including as Regional Coordinator of Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development.



Arnold Tsunga is Africa Director of the International Commission of Jurists. He was Executive Secretary of the Law Society of Zimbabwe and Executive Director of Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights. He was a joint winner of the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders in 2006.



ADVISORY COUNCIL

Michel Forst is the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and Secretary General of the French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights. He is a former Board member of Front Line Defenders. He was the UN Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Haiti from 2008 to 2013. He was Secretary General of the Paris Summit of Human Rights Defenders and Director of the French section of Amnesty International.



Hina Jilani is an internationally known human rights lawyer and advocate for human rights defenders. She was the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders from 2000 to 2008. She and her sister Asma Jahangir co-founded the first all female legal practice in Pakistan and she is also one of the founders of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. She is a member of The Elders.



Maina Kiai is the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. A lawyer trained at Nairobi and Harvard Universities, he has spent the last twenty years campaigning for human rights and constitutional reform in Kenya – notably as founder and Executive Director of the NGO Kenya Human Rights Commission, and then as Chairman of Kenya's National Human Rights Commission (2003-2008).



James L. Cavallaro is the Founding Director of the International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic at Stanford Law School, where he is also a professor of law. Prior to joining Stanford, he spent nine years on the faculty at Harvard Law School, where he also served as executive director of the Human Rights Programme. In June of 2013 he was elected to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).



Maryam Elahi is President and CEO of the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut. For more than 25 years, she has served in positions of leadership in the international human rights community as an advocate, teacher, and grant-maker. She was previously the director of the International Women's Program at the Open Society Foundations.



'WALK ON AIR AGAINST YOUR BETTER JUDGEMENT'.

Foreword

Every two years the Front Line Defenders Dublin Platform brings 100 human rights defenders (HRDs) at risk from over 90 countries to Dublin for three days to share experiences, learn from each other, acquire new skills and interact with decision makers from international and intergovernmental organisations.

During these three days, the HRDs in attendance are invited to present their personal testimonies and give voice to their experiences of struggle and survival in the face of constant repression and persecution. For me, it is these testimony sessions that are at the very heart of the Dublin Platform and convey exactly what it means to be a HRD at risk. I still find it both amazing and humbling to be in the same room with so many extraordinary people, from so many different countries and cultures, who have faced so much. These individuals are targeted specifically because they are so effective in their human rights work. Their pursuit demands sometimes unimaginable sacrifice and intense heartache, but herein also lies an insuppressible hope for the future of humanity. They are the drivers of tangible and lasting change, powered by their spirit and relentless determination.

To all those human rights defenders who attended the 2015 Dublin Platform, and previous Dublin Platforms, I want to say to you that I have always felt that you are made of fire and air. Fire because you burn with a passion to right wrongs – and air because you – as our beloved poet Seamus Heaney once said 'walk on air against your better judgement'.

Being at the Dublin Platform and listening to your testimonies invigorates us all and inspires us to do more. This is your Platform – we hear you, we respect you and we value you. We want to learn more about how we can support your security as you carry out your important work. You have a profound understanding of how human rights are woven into daily living. You have been, and continue to be, wounded by your experiences, yet your hearts are still hungry for justice.

You continue to work with an unstoppable energy and you refuse to give up. You refuse to give up because you are rooted in your values and place. You refuse to give up despite the enormous stress and pressure you bear. You refuse to give up even when faced with the most inhuman of physical and psychological attacks.

And so, we will never give up on you.

I HAVE ALWAYS FELT THAT YOU ARE MADE OF FIRE AND AIR. FIRE BECAUSE YOU BURN WITH A PASSION TO RIGHT WRONGS – AND AIR BECAUSE YOU – AS OUR BELOVED POET SEAMUS HEANEY ONCE SAID 'WALK ON AIR AGAINST YOUR BETTER JUDGEMENT'.



Mary Lawlor
Executive Director
Front Line Defenders

111 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FROM 98 COUNTRIES PARTICIPATED IN THE DUBLIN PLATFORM. NOT ALL SOUGHT TO GIVE A TESTIMONY OR TO MAKE PUBLIC THEIR PARTICIPATION. THESE ARE THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS WHO HAVE SHARED THEIR TESTIMONIES.

Albania

Kristi Pinderi
ProLGBT

Angola

Coque Mukuta
Journalist

Armenia

Vahan Ishkhanyan
Journalist and writer, Inkmagir Literary Club

Bangladesh

Adilur Rahman Khan
Odhikar

Bangladesh

Supriti Dhar
Women Chapter

Belarus

Leonid Sudalenko
Legal Initiative, Gomel

Bolivia

Emma Bolshia Bravo Cladera
Instituto de Terapia e Investigación sobre las Secuelas de la Tortura y la Violencia Estatal (ITEI) / Institute of Therapy and Investigation into the Aftermath of Torture and State Violence

Burma / Myanmar

Aung Htet Naing
All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU)

Cambodia

Ny Chakrya
ADHOC – Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association

Colombia

Margarita Hilamo
Governor of the indigenous reservation of Huellas-Caloto, south-western Colombia

Costa Rica

Luis Carlos Buob Concha
Centro por la Justicia y el Derecho Internacional (CEJIL) / Centre for Justice and International Law

Dominican Republic

Rubén Antonio de Jesús
Centro Cultural Dominicano Haitiano (CCDH) / Dominican-Haitian Cultural Centre

Ecuador

Diane Rodríguez
Asociación Silueta X / Association Silhouette X

Egypt

Azza Soliman
The Egyptian Centre for Women's Issues (CEWLA)

Gambia

Bai Emil Touray
Journalist

Greece

George Kounanis
Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Section of Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM)

Guinea

Hélène Koklou Zogbelemou
Humanitaire pour la Protection de la Femme et de l'Enfant (HPFE)

Hungary

Veronika Mora
Ökotárs – Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation

India

Teesta Satalvad
Citizens for Justice and Peace

Italy

Stefano Bucaioni
Omphalos Arcigay Arcilesbica Perugia

Kazakhstan

Bakhytzhan Toregozhina
Social Foundation 'Ar rukh hak'

Kenya

Human Rights Defender (anonymous)

Kuwait

Sulaiman Y Bin Jassim
Independent human rights defender

Kyrgyzstan

Utkir Rustamovich Dzhabbarov
Sprevedivost / Justice

Maldives

Shahindha Ismail
Maldivian Democracy Network

Mali**Mody Samba Touré**

Union Nationale des Travailleurs du Mali (UNTM)
/ National Union of Workers of Mali

Mauritania**Hamady Lehbouss**

IRA-Mauritania

Mexico**Jorge Luis Hernández Castro**

Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas (FRAYBA) / Human Rights Center Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas

Mexico**Juan Carlos Flores Solís**

El Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra y el Agua de Morelos, Puebla y Tlaxcala (FPDTAMPT) / The People's Front in Defence of the Earth and Water of Morelos, Puebla and Tlaxcala

Nicaragua**Lottie Cunningham Wren**

Centro por la Justicia y Derechos Humanos de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua (CEJUDHCAN) / Centre for Justice and Human Rights of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua

Niger**Ali Abdoulaye**

Volontaires pour l'Intégration Educative (NGO VIE) / Volunteers for Educational Integration Kande Ni Bayra

Nigeria**M. Millions** (anonymous)

Independent human rights defender

Pakistan**Sardar Mushtaq Gill**

LEAD

Papua / Indonesia**Gustaf Kawer**

Lawyer

Philippines**Vennel Chenfoo**

Panalipdan Mindanao Youth

Saint Lucia**Kenita Placide**

United and Strong Inc, CariFLAGS and ILGA Women Secretariat

Somaliland**Guleid Ahmed Jama**

Human Rights Centre

Syria**Anwar Al-Bunni**

President of the Syrian Centre for Legal Studies and Research

Thailand**Anchana Heemmina**

Duayjai Group

Tunisia**Lina Ben Mhenni**

Independent human rights defender and blogger

Turkey**Can Atalay**

Social Rights Association

Uganda**Sandra Ntebi**

National LGBT Security Committee

Ukraine**Oleksandra Matviychuk**

Euromaidan SOS Initiative

United States of America**Charlene Carruthers**

Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100)

Venezuela**Andrés Colmenárez**

FUNPAZ

Western Sahara**Brahim Sabbar**

Association Sahraouie des Victimes des Violations Graves des Droits Humains Commises par l'Etat Marocain / Sahrawi Association of Victims of Grave Human Rights Violations Committed by the Moroccan State

Kristi Pinderi ProLGBT



AS I TAKE A LOOK BACK AND COMPARE TODAY'S REALITY WITH THE REALITY OF EVEN FIVE TO SIX YEARS AGO, I CAN'T HELP BUT NOTICE THERE ARE SOME MARKED ACHIEVEMENTS THE LGBTI MOVEMENT HAS REACHED.

When I turned 27 years old, in 2009, my life became meaningless, hopeless and aimless. The inner struggle to hide myself finally came to a head and the burden of questions needing answers became too big to bear. I had tried to be who I was expected to be, what my family, friends and colleagues considered 'normal'.

I cried myself to sleep during the day, battling the crying by drinking in the afternoon, and I started to write my story by night. The relief of writing slowly grew into an understanding of who I was, every day a little bit more, until finally I came to that blissful moment in my life where I recognised myself, and I felt good I was finally who I was meant to be.

I came out to my family, to their sheer shock and disappointment. For the first time ever I then met a kindred soul face-to-face, my now very close friend and confidante Xheni Karaj, who was the only lesbian I knew from Facebook.

We sat down for a cup of coffee as two strangers, and found that we had one major thing in common; we wanted to do something that mattered with our lives. We 'activated' each other that day. Over the next few years we grew to know each other better and to meet other like-minded people. First Erjon and then a few others. We met on a daily basis and we would talk, discuss, party together and enjoy each other's company. We had started our own 'group' without even noticing.

After one of our passionate discussion sessions, we went out and painted sayings like: "I am a boy and I am in love with a boy" and "I am a girl and I am in love with a girl" on the walls of Tirana's main streets. We recorded what we did that night and posted the footage online on Facebook and YouTube. The week after we painted the park benches opposite the Presidential Residence with 'our' rainbow colours.

We also organised assorted gatherings, street actions and underground parties for the gays and lesbians alike that year. At one of these parties that year I met Erjon, who would become my partner. He also came to understand and love himself for who he was, and started to keep a diary in which he wrote his life experiences. He posted these online on a Facebook page which attracted hundreds of gays and lesbians.

As I take a look back and compare today's reality with the reality of even five to six years ago, I can't help but notice there are some marked achievements the LGBTI movement has reached.

Xheni and I came out publicly and now lead the LGBTI movement in Albania. Erjon's 'diary' was the first and remains the only human rights portal in the Albanian language with thousands of unique visitors each day. The footage of our graffiti actions was made into a LGBTI documentary, the first of its kind in Albania, which has also won international recognition and numerous prizes.

Our organisations are finally structured throughout the country and we are able to demand accountability from our politicians on our issues and lobby for legislation amendments. The once underground parties have been transformed into much-needed services for our communities. We opened the first residential centre for at-risk, young homeless LGBTI members in December 2014. It took five years of our combined work for all we have achieved, but it took 20 years for me to understand and accept myself for who I am.

Sooner or later we all have to meet, understand and accept our inner selves. I beg of you, do not postpone that meeting.

Coque Mukuta Journalist

Angola is a country which is rich in oil, but there are no effective measures to combat corruption and bad governance, and this results in most of the Angolan population living in extreme poverty.

On 11 November 2015 we celebrated the 40th anniversary of Angola's independence. Since independence we have had only two presidents. The first was António Agostinho Neto who ruled for approximately four years, and the second, José Eduardo dos Santos, has been in power for over 36 years. When I was born he had already been president for 5 years.

In order to cling to power, this president's guard killed Isaiás Cassule and Alves Camolingue, two activists attempting to organise a demonstration in support of former military personnel in 2012. In 2013 his guards shot Hilbert Ganga, a political activist who disseminated flyers demanding justice for the two above-mentioned murdered activists.

President José Eduardo dos Santos has also created courts to legitimise his actions. For example, the presiding judge of the Constitutional Court is his personal lawyer.

In recent years, many activists, several human rights defenders, street vendors, taxi drivers and strikers have been prosecuted. All of these prosecutions are aimed at suppressing those who speak out against President José Eduardo dos Santos' policies.

Angolan street vendors, known as *zungueiras* have been beaten and detained, journalists have been arrested and private residences of common citizens have been destroyed. Furthermore, activists have been threatened, repressed, imprisoned and killed and, finally, miners have been murdered.

I dedicate my work to issues related to the beating and detention of the *zungueiras*; victims of arbitrary demolitions and land expropriations from disadvantaged citizens; and the repression, arrest and killing of human rights defenders, journalists, and miners.

I am also the victim of severe persecution by the Angolan government. In April and May 2015, my home was raided. I have been in receipt of constant death threats. On the first occasion, individuals entered and stayed at my house from 11pm until 3am the next morning. On the morning of 28 April, I reported the invasion at the Cazenga's police station.

A day later, on 29 April, a similar situation occurred when individuals entered my home around midnight. This time the police arrived quickly and maintained surveillance on the house until the following morning. On 1 May, some individuals entered my residence for the third time at approximately midnight and remained there for over an hour. Nothing was stolen from the house. Their aim was to intimidate and bring panic and anxiety to my life.

On 15 April, as I was returning from a trip to Brazil to promote my new book, I was stopped at the airport in Angola. I had roughly 300 copies of my book with me and I was held at the airport for three hours before being released and being allowed to retrieve my luggage. I am the co-author of the book *Os Meandros das Manifestações em Angola - Volume 1*. The book gives account of the anti-government demonstrations that occurred in Angola in 2011 and early 2012, describing the different occasions when the security forces violently disrupted demonstrations and chased protesters.

On 21 March a group called Organised Youth for the Defence of Angola left a letter at my home threatening me. The letter said 'Koke Mukuta, you better change your neighbourhood, thug' (*Koke Mukuta é melhor mudares de bairro, bandido*) and 'You are not afraid, you should take care' (*Você não tem medo, cuida-se*).

I have been arrested on 11 occasions, all of which are due to my journalistic work covering sensitive, anti-government issues. On 6 January 2013, I was beaten and detained for several hours by the police while undertaking a journalistic job in the outskirts of Luanda. I had been documenting the stories of *zungueiras* who had recently been the targets of brutal actions by the police. On 20 September 2013, I was arrested by the Rapid Intervention Police officers along with several activists including the two well-known journalists Rafael Marques and Alexandre Solombe. We were covering the situation of young demonstrators who had been detained without any charge and subsequently released. The journalists were also detained, then tortured and later released without any charges.

The country is in a transitional phase, that is to say, either by the force of nature or by its own will, it will need to have a new president. The situation has been very tense, but we all remain vigilant in our peaceful pursuit of change for the good of all Angolans.



THE SITUATION HAS BEEN VERY TENSE, BUT WE ALL MAINTAIN VIGILANT IN OUR PEACEFUL PURSUIT OF CHANGE FOR THE GOOD OF ALL ANGOLANS.

Vahan Ishkhanyan Journalist and writer, Inknagir Literary Club



NOW GAY PEOPLE CONSTITUTE THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUP IN ARMENIA AND THOSE DEFENDING THE RIGHTS OF SEXUAL MINORITIES ARE AT RISK

When the Soviet Union collapsed, we thought that the new country that emerged from the struggle against the Soviets would protect basic human freedoms. We were mistaken.

The mid-1990s were the most brutal years for persecution. In 1995, I was the editor of a newspaper that regularly wrote articles on violence against religious groups and the conscription manhunts, when young men were gathered off the streets and taken to fight on the frontlines. In 1996, the police raided the editorial office of the opposition newspaper where I worked. I went on the run for two weeks and the police searched my mother and my wife's homes. Our office was torched around this time and I was attacked on the street a number of times. At this time, journalists who criticised the authorities would fear walking alone at night.

Gradually, the oppression of human rights activists and journalists decreased. Now gay people constitute the most vulnerable group in Armenia and those defending the rights of sexual minorities are at risk. They face threats when they undertake activities or public events, or they become the targets of the nationalist-religious media. The newspaper *Iravunk*, which enjoys the patronage of the authorities, published a list of names, including my own name, and instructed the public not to interact with these people, not to offer them jobs etc. We went to court to challenge this, but lost the case at every level of the justice system.

Despite this, there is freedom of speech in Armenia. You can write and broadcast what you wish. While channels are constantly monitored by the authorities, alternative internet

channels continue to launch. In fact, the authorities are so secure in their power that they are no longer afraid of free speech. They have come to understand that it is better to control the flood of mass information by launching media broadcasters with wide reach, than prohibiting the less desirable media outlets. You could even publish evidence that an official has killed someone, supporting your claims with evidence, but at the end of the day there will never be any legal consequences for the accused.

There is also another group that remains very poorly protected in Armenia, namely the poor. Thirty-three percent of the Armenian population is poor, and with no means to seek medical attention, many die as the result of illnesses that could be treated. The day after I arrived in Dublin, a childhood friend died because he could not afford treatment.

Furthermore, it is not the case that the resources do not exist in Armenia to care for the health of the people, but the fact that the resources of the country, especially from the mining-industry, are in the hands of a few and the transnational corporations. Seventy percent of exports from Armenia consist of outputs from mining, while the money paid in taxes from mining consists of only three percent of the state budget.

However, the locals, whose land the mining companies buy for close to nothing, do nothing to resist. Environmentalists are waging a struggle of sorts against the exploitation by the mining companies, but this reaction is not strong enough to pose a threat to the authorities. In this sense, I would be interested in learning more about the experience that Latin American countries have in this area.

Adilur Rahman Khan

Odhikar

For 21 years, Odhikar and I have worked tirelessly to advocate human rights, human rights principles and social justice in Bangladesh. We campaigned for the ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; we campaign tirelessly against torture and ill-treatment, against extra-judicial killings and against enforced disappearances; we campaign against acts of violence against women and against minority communities. For our activities, we have been followed, monitored, harassed and threatened by law enforcement agencies for over 15 years and we are now being persecuted and hounded and are on the verge of closing down. Regardless of this, our spirit and our dedication will never cease.

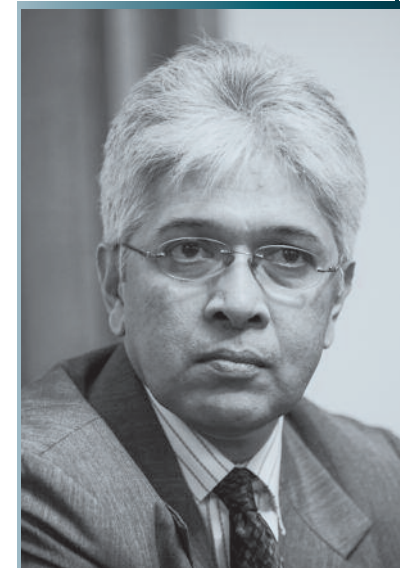
Odhikar was created as an activist organisation, rather than a stereotypical non-government organisation. As a result, the present staff and members are fearless advocates of human rights and dedicated to their work. Our spirit and determination are fierce and indomitable. This was even more evident in the events that occurred between August and November 2013, when I was abducted, persecuted and incarcerated. Odhikar was raided, staff were threatened, and associated human rights defenders were intimidated. Despite the persecution, Odhikar remains steadfast in its struggle for human rights, as do all who are associated with it.

The people of Bangladesh feel disenfranchised since the holding of the farcical elections of January 5, 2014. Out of 300 constituencies, 153 candidates were declared elected even

before the actual voting started; and in the rest of the constituencies it has been reported that only ten to 12 percent of the people voted. This has given rise to a very authoritarian regime. Since January 5, 2014 human rights defenders, including those at Odhikar, are not working in a 'shrinking space'. In reality, there is 'no space for the civil society'.

I was abducted and detained for 62 days for publishing and uploading a fact finding report on extra-judicial killings. My colleague, the Director of Odhikar was sent to jail after his surrender before the Cyber Crime Tribunal for 25 days. Both of us are on bail now. Mahmudur Rahman, Acting Editor of Daily Amar Desh, is in jail for two and half years for writing against corruption and atrocities of the government. His newspaper has been closed down. Three pro-opposition television channels have also been taken off air after reporting on the atrocities of law enforcement agencies. Hundreds of political activists are detained in jails. The government has recently drafted a Bill to 'regulate' the NGOs; and it has started to implement it to harass and curtail the functioning of independent civil society, even before it has been enacted.

Supporting the human rights defenders of Bangladesh is, therefore, supporting the people's aspirations and movement for a democratic Bangladesh. I must add that the Bangladeshi people are brave and resilient; and will fight to uphold their rights.



SINCE JANUARY 5, 2014 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, INCLUDING THOSE AT ODHIKAR, ARE NOT WORKING IN A 'SHRINKING SPACE'. IN REALITY, THERE IS 'NO SPACE FOR THE CIVIL SOCIETY'.

Supriti Dhar Women Chapter



IN THE BACK OF MY MIND I ALWAYS HAVE THIS FEELING THAT I AM BEING WATCHED. I FEEL A SHIVER IN MY SPINE WHEN I CLIMB UP THE DARK STAIRCASE OF MY HOME EVERY NIGHT.

For me, everyday seems like the last day of my life; everyday I wonder what if I am hacked to death today... chopped into pieces. What would happen to my children? I am all they have got. I wonder what crime I have committed. I am not a thief or a *dacoit*, neither have I cheated anyone... so why do I have to live with fear nowadays?

The day before my flight, four people in Bangladesh were brutally attacked by Islamic militants. One was killed and the other three were seriously wounded. Being one of the people to be threatened on grounds of speaking out against the growing intolerance in the country, I spent a sleepless night wondering if this was the last night.

In February 2013 I was one of the founding members of the *Shahbag Movement*. During this movement, an Islamic fundamentalist group, *Hefajat-e-Islam* emerged into the political sphere to demoralise the spirit of *Shahbag Movement*, killing a blogger who was a member of the movement. Since then the words 'blog', 'bloggers' and 'online activists' have become a threat to both the fundamentalists and the government and the party chief of *Hefajat-e-Islam* introduced some very anti-women points in parliament. This was another insult to the women of Bangladesh and I felt the need to create a common platform for women which gave rise to the news blog *Women Chapter*.

Women Chapter is an online portal for women, particularly women journalists. It is a movement towards change, publishing stories that are not only concerned with women's issues, but also social and socio-political issues.

In recent months, due to a series of violent incidents against women, *Women Chapter* has received a lot of attention and people began posting vulgar and obnoxious comments on the portal. While initially, I chose to ignore the comments, I began to receive phone calls and text messages on my mobile phone. I discovered that a Facebook page had posted my photo, email address and phone number along with links to articles from the *Women Chapter* portal. The administrator of the Facebook page asked followers to keep an eye on me and take the 'necessary action'.

In June, I received a phone call insisting that I stop publishing. I was told that I must understand that I am a target and that if I fail to comply with their demands, I might face dire consequences. As a result of these threats I have had to arrange a secret place for my son to live, as one of the death threats included my children.

As a woman journalist, activist and atheist, life has become more vulnerable. Recently one of the Islamic fundamentalist groups called, Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) sent warnings to all the newspapers advising that all female journalists must be sacked.

In the back of my mind I always have this feeling that I am being watched. I feel a shiver in my spine when I climb up the dark staircase of my home every night.

Every moment that I survive, I get ready for the next moment. Every morning I think every day is my last day and I survive only by seconds as no one knows who is next to be killed.

Leonid Sudalenko

Legal Initiative, Gomel

In April 2015 the police carried out searches of my apartment and office and eight computers were confiscated on suspicion of distribution of pornographic materials. The investigation claimed that pornography had been distributed from my email address and from an IP address belonging to Legal Initiative, the organisation I head up.

I am a Belarussian human rights defender. For 15 years I have been defending the victims of human rights violations at both national and international levels, helping individuals to make petitions to the UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC).

I also take part in the 'Human rights defenders against the death penalty' campaign in Belarus. My last case in the UNHCR involved submitting an individual petition for a citizen of Gomel, Alexander Grunov, who had been sentenced to death. This petition was registered, and the UN Committee twice appealed to the Belarussian Government not to sentence my client to death until the petition had been investigated thoroughly. Nonetheless, the death sentence was carried out.

On the request of his mother, Olga Grunova, I prepared numerous requests to the Belarussian authorities to tell her where her son had been buried. When these were refused, I helped Ms Grunova once again to make a petition to the UNHCR in relation to the cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment she had been subjected to.

Soon afterwards I received a message in the post threatening to kill my children and the unknown person asked me whether I would appeal the murder of my own son to the UNHCR? Furthermore, on the day the Russian statesman Boris Nemstov was murdered in

Moscow, unknown people sent a video to my email address of the place of Nemstov's murder, asking "How do you like the video?" I went to the police and asked them to investigate the threats I had received, but my request was refused.

On 24 May, as I was on my way from Vilnius to Belarus, customs officers at the state border carried out a detailed body search and a search of my car and luggage. As a result of this humiliating procedure (I was even asked to take off my trousers), my personal notebook and some printed materials were confiscated without explanation. Similarly on 25 August, when on the train from Vilnius to Belarus customs officers instructed me to alight at the Molodechno station without explanation. When I refused, I was physically dragged from the train and once again subjected to the humiliating ordeal of a body search and a search of my personal belongings. As I had refused to alight, an administrative protocol was drawn up against me and I was faced with punishment in the form of a substantial fine or an administrative arrest.

In the middle of the summer my family and I received a demand from the tax inspectorate to provide declarations of our income and assets for the past ten years, even though in 2012 my whole family, including my son, who at that time was serving in the Belarussian Army, had already provided such declarations.

In this short testimony I wanted to show how systemic harassment and the systematic violation of our rights are continuing in Belarus. We face the criminalisation of our activities on the part of the state and we are subjected to systematic harassment and intimidation, arbitrary detentions, torture and degrading treatment and limitations on our movements.



SOON AFTERWARDS I RECEIVED A MESSAGE IN THE POST THREATENING TO KILL MY CHILDREN AND THE UNKNOWN PERSON ASKED ME WHETHER I WOULD APPEAL THE MURDER OF MY OWN SON TO THE UNHCR.

Emma Bolshia Bravo Cladera

Instituto de Terapia e Investigación sobre las Secuelas de la Tortura y la Violencia Estatal (ITEI)*



THE DISCUSSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS IS CHARACTERISED BY ITS AMBIGUITY; THE CAUSE OF THE POOR MUST BE ADVANCED, BUT VERY OFTEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFEND THE POWERFUL AND NOT THE MARGINALISED.

Torture and state violence in Bolivia are part of the history of the country and continue to be practised by the armed forces and the police with the complicity of judges and public attorneys despite Article 15 of the Constitution stating that nobody should be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

In recent years, cases of torture are on the increase. A report from the state ombudsman reveals that the number of torture cases grew by 100% from 2013 to 2014. Emblematic torture cases were brought to light during the gestation of this report, including that of Juan Bascopé who was tortured by police in the presence of public attorney Gregorio Blanco as well as officials of a government ministry.

While Bolivia has ratified the Convention Against Torture as well as the Optional Protocol to this Treaty (OPCAT), the country does not have a National Prevention Mechanism which complies with the guidelines of the OPCAT.

Similarly, the Bolivian state, on ratifying the UN Convention Against Torture in 1999, took on the obligation to apply reparation measures for affected persons, such as their right to the reinstatement of their situation before torture, financial indemnity for direct financial damage incurred, integral rehabilitation – which includes medical, psychological, social and legal attention, penal processing of those responsible and public revelation of the truth, and ultimately a guarantee of no-repetition, all of which constitute measures for the prevention of torture. Through its non-compliance with this commitment, it owes a great debt to the affected population.

The ITEI, which is principally concerned with providing medical and psychological support to persons affected by torture, has been instrumental in encouraging civil society to create

the “Coalition Against Torture”. This coalition is composed of the following nine organisations: the Institute of Therapy and Investigation into the Aftermath of Torture and State Violence (ITEI), the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights in Bolivia (APDHD), Human Rights Community, Bolivia Chapter of Human Rights, Bolivian Society of Forensic Sciences, Training and Citizen Rights, Caritas Bolivia, Prison Pastoral Care and the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights of La Paz (APDHLP).

The fundamental objectives of this Coalition are:

- to promote and articulate joint actions in favour of compliance with national norms and international instruments for the prevention, investigation and sanction of torture
- to demand compliance by the Pluri-national State of Bolivia with emerging obligations from international treaties against torture, for the prevention of torture, and the protection and rehabilitation of the victims

This is how we can continue our difficult work in difficult conditions with those affected. Today the forces of economic globalisation have appropriated the meaning and the aims of human rights. In this way, the same forces which violate the rights of the poor present themselves as their protectors. The discussion on human rights is characterised by its ambiguity; the cause of the poor must be advanced, but very often human rights defend the powerful and not the marginalised. It is up to us to redeem them and to place them at the service of the marginalised, only then will they be truly universal. Human rights organisations and human rights defenders cannot honourably serve both the market and human rights from the pretext of a neutral position. In this struggle neutrality is not an option.

* Institute of Therapy and Investigation into the Aftermath of Torture and State Violence

Aung Htet Naing

All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU)

Burma has been ruled by a military regime for over five decades and every democratic phenomenon has been destroyed. Similarly the country's education system has been eroded. It is a centralised system and every sector of education is controlled by the military regime. It is prohibited to exercise fundamental human rights. Much discrimination, repression and exclusion exist. As Burma has many ethnic minorities, automatically their right to promote their language is revoked as they do not have the right to access education in their mother tongue. Student unions are not legally recognised.

In 2014, the controversial education law which does not recognise student unions as legal entities was enacted by the parliament. It does not follow the UN's recommendation standards for budget allocation and it does not allow students to participate in political activities. ABFSU has never accepted any repression of the education system and maintains its opposition to the centralised education system. The demand of the ABFSU is for democratic education which can create a democratic society.

We believe that education is a basic fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits. We also believe that we should have the right to enjoy access to good quality education, without discrimination or exclusion. However, asking for a good education is a crime in Burma.

We protested peacefully against the new education bill, marching the long distance from Mandalay to Yangon. After a series of dialogues, the government and the parliament promised to guarantee democratic standards in the new education bill and not to take action against the students who demanded the changes. However, the government has broken its own promise and used excessive force in a brutal crack-down on the student protests and has destroyed everything owned by the students. The police attacked the students like enemies. 127 students were detained.

On this subject, I would like to mention a little more about the role of the EU and how the EU is giving special trainings to the Burmese police force on how to control the riots and violence. The Burmese government used the trainees in the crack-down on the students. The Burmese government used them to create the violence and in the repression of fundamental human rights. The EU has said that these are not police trained by the EU, but the Burmese government has said that they controlled the situation using the EU's trainings.

Now, over 50 students have been left behind bars for over eight months. Nearly one hundred student activists have been charged under unjust laws and there is no legal justice for the students. The judicial system is totally controlled by the government and judges make decisions according to orders from above. We at the ABSFU demand justice for all the victims of state violence!



THE POLICE ATTACKED THE STUDENTS LIKE ENEMIES.

Ny Chakrya

ADHOC - Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association



ACTIVE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN CAMBODIA ARE THREATENED BECAUSE THEIR ACTIVITIES ARE VERY EFFECTIVE AND ARE COUNTER TO THE INTERESTS OF SOME PEOPLE IN POWER AND SOME MAFIA BUSINESSMEN.

My name is Ny Chakrya and I am Head of the Human Rights Section of ADHOC – the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association.

Active human rights defenders in Cambodia are threatened because their activities are very effective and are counter to the interests of some people in power and some Mafia businessmen. These threats to human rights defenders include:

Using the state armed forces to torture –

- On 2 January 2015, the Cambodia Government used the military to crack down on a peaceful demonstration of factory workers. The army arrested 21 people, detained and tortured them and then detained the 21 people in prison.
- On 3 January 2015, approximately 5,000 polices and military officers cracked down on another peaceful demonstration. This time seven factory workers were killed and 15 others were arrested and tortured.

The Cambodia Government also uses the lack of an independent court system to threaten human rights defenders –

- In 2014, approximately 100 people were arrested and detained because they led the victims of land disputes to file complaints against powerful people and private companies.
- In 2013, Prime Minister Hun Sen threatened me because I had criticised him about a land dispute.
- In 2015, two people (one investigation judge and one prosecutor in the primary Siem Reap court) filed a complaint against me, because I filed a complaint to the Supreme Council Minister, the Ministry of Justice and the Appeal court. ADHOC investigations had revealed that the arrests of two people, who had been detained as victims of a land dispute, had been illegal.

To finish I would like to thank Front Line Defenders for intervening very quickly in my case with the Cambodia Government and the other international human rights organisations who also intervened.

Margarita Hilamo

Governor of the indigenous reservation of Huellas-Caloto, south-western Colombia

I am an indigenous woman of communal land of the Nasa ethnicity. My region has been battered by the armed conflict for many years and the indigenous movement and its leadership continue to be victims of human rights violation and violations of international humanitarian law, which include threats, harassment, stigmatisation, and political persecution.

From a young age I have participated in the processes of the indigenous movement, holding various offices of indigenous authority, and I have also been the coordinator of the women's programme of the ACIN (Association of Indigenous Chapters of the North of Cauca) at local level for five years. I have also formed part of the governing body of the reservation Huellas-Caloto since 2014, first as captain, and now as governor, exercising the political autonomy granted to us by the Special Indigenous Jurisdiction.

In the context of defending our territory against illegal mining and demanding respect for the territory's sacred lakes, rivers, gorges, marshes, woods, forest reserves and other spaces of mother earth, political decisions have been taken in the defence of our territory. One of those was to organise a protest in which more than 3,000 people from the northern zone participated (April 2014).

At that time I was captain of the reservation and since then I have been directly threatened. I have been harassed at my house, harassed via SMS messages sent by paramilitary groups and also collective threats sent by the FARC. The most recent threat I received was two weeks ago (23 October) by telephone, when I was told that I had 24 hours to leave the issue of corruption in the municipality well enough alone.

In the last two years I have received five threatening telephone calls and 18 text messages; I have been followed; intimidated; suffered extortion on the part of the FARC; and been

accused of being a guerrilla fighter amongst other things. I have denounced all of these incidents to the authorities, but unfortunately there has been no response to date.

Despite my commitment to the community and my love for the indigenous movement, this tense and precarious situation is affecting me greatly, resulting in insomnia. I feel much distrust towards other people. I often feel fearful – fearful about expressing myself and my experiences, fearful of the night, fearful of being alone – and these feelings are even prevalent when I am with my own people - a fact which makes me sad. In Caloto, the capital, I am afraid when entering and leaving the office. This risk has been recognised and because of this I have been assigned a guard by the state programme for human rights defenders at risk, but due to a lack of staff and resources, I continue to travel alone a lot. There are also people who are afraid to be with me because of the threats I have received, which together with my own mistrust brings a considerable sense of isolation.

About six months ago, because of everything that was happening to me, my daughter took the decision to move to Bogota as she could not tolerate the insecurity of the situation any longer. The final straw for her was a threat which indicated that if I did not cease my human rights work I would be collecting my daughter from the morgue. At the time, I blamed myself for not having taken care of her properly and I felt that I was losing an important part of my support, but today I understand her decision. Despite the distance we maintain good contact and she continues to support me from afar, as do my partner and my son, and for this I am very grateful.

I have been able to count on the cultural and spiritual support of the indigenous elders and the plants of our mother earth. This has given me more spiritual strength and balance in my individual and familial harmonies, and given me the strength to keep fighting.



THE FINAL STRAW FOR HER WAS A THREAT WHICH INDICATED THAT IF I DID NOT CEASE MY HUMAN RIGHTS WORK I WOULD BE COLLECTING MY DAUGHTER FROM THE MORGUE.

Luis Carlos Buob Concha Centro por la Justicia y el Derecho Internacional (CEJIL)



WHEN MY COLLEAGUE TRIED TO STOP THEM FROM HITTING ME, ONE OFFICIAL SHOUTED "LET'S GO TO THE BATHROOM AND THEN WE'LL SEE".

I am a lawyer, a human rights defender and a member of the Centro por la Justicia y el Derecho Internacional (CEJIL), a regional not-for-profit organisation whose mission is to contribute to the full enjoyment of human rights by all in the member states of the Organisation of American States (OAS) through the efficient use of the Interamerican system for the protection of human rights.

On 15 May 2015 my colleague, Marta González, and I landed at Augusto C. Sandino airport in Managua, Nicaragua. The trip was to be a run-of-the-mill trip to document cases of violations of human rights, meet with local human rights organisations and facilitate workshops.

Upon our arrival, my colleague was checked in the regular fashion and was permitted entry. In my case, an immigration official asked me about the intention of my visit, to which I responded that I was a human rights defender and that I had various meetings arranged with civil society organisations, including the Nicaraguan Centre for Human Rights. On hearing this, the official took my passport and left me waiting for 20 minutes.

Eventually the same official returned, accompanied by others who informed me that I would not be able to enter the country because of an alleged 'accusation of drugs trafficking'. On hearing this, I requested specific information regarding the accusation, as well as a telephone call to request legal assistance. The officials refused to give me a clear response, only that I 'should leave Nicaragua'. Upon realising that my colleague had arrived with me they promptly cancelled her permission to enter without further explanation.

When I insisted on a clear response, the officials began to physically struggle with me, to the point where they pushed me on to the floor and tried to handcuff me. Part of these incidents were recorded on our mobile phones.

Following this, I was taken by force to a waiting room whilst they shouted at me, "If you don't want violence, then walk". Myself and my colleague were guarded by eight people, including immigration officials, national police and tourist police while we waited to board a return flight.

When the agents realised that our phones had been used to record some of the assault, they confiscated them. When I tried to resist handing over my phone, they tried to handcuff me again, indicating that 'It is not permitted to record immigration officials'. When my colleague tried to stop them from hitting me, one official shouted "Let's go to the bathroom and then we'll see".

Later, we were escorted to the doors of the plane where they proceeded to search me and our belongings, without explanation and in a very detailed, unjustified and invasive manner.

It was not until we arrived back to Costa Rica that our documents and luggage were returned to us. Our mobile phones, however, are still in the possession of the Nicaraguan authorities. My colleague had been able to note down some of the officials' names, but this information was also confiscated and they then removed their name badges from their uniforms.

Since the incident, despite repeated requests for meetings and filing appeals questioning these actions, we have received no response from the Nicaraguan state. Furthermore, we have been effectively prevented from filing appeals given that the Nicaraguan authorities refuse to receive them, both in Managua through our representative, and in the Embassy of Nicaragua in San José, Costa Rica.

Rubén Antonio de Jesús Centro Cultural Dominico Haitiano (CCDH)

At approximately 20:30 on 24 August 2015, Pastor Rudy Martin, my three daughters, and my wife and I were studying the Bible in our home when we suffered a physical attack by unidentified persons. These people threw stones at our residence and my private vehicle and while the vehicle received some damage, thankfully the windows of the residence were protected by the iron bars in place.

On 31 August 2015, I travelled to the National Police Palace to file a complaint regarding what had happened in my province, San Pedro de Macorís, but to date no investigation has been opened.

Before this attack, I had suffered other aggressions, threats and warnings. On one occasion the paintwork of my vehicle was vandalised, on another the locks of the vehicle were broken and once an unknown substance was even planted in the interior of the vehicle.

All of these acts took place in advance of a hearing, which was to take place on 1 September 2015. At this hearing I was supporting claims for damages against officials of the Dominican State for denying identity cards to Dominicans of Haitian descent.

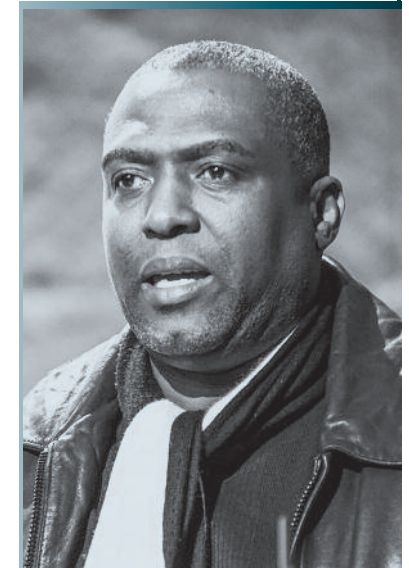
These attacks happened because of the work my colleagues and I do on the issue of nationality. This is an issue that generates huge prejudice in the Dominican Republic.

The prejudice is so strong that the institution to which I belong, the Dominican-Haitian Cultural Centre (CCDH), has suffered the killing of two of its distinguished members and human rights defenders, Antonio Pol Amil and Carlos José Actúan, as a result. The latter was detained and later hanged while in his cell in the National Police Palace in Santo Domingo.

Historically there have been other deaths of anti-prejudice campaigners including, Federico Lafleur, who was killed in an ambush in a laneway in the community of Olivares in the province of San Pedro de Macorís in 1987. He too was killed because of their human rights work for the Dominican-Haitian people.

These brothers and companions in our struggle have lost their lives at the hands of unscrupulous persons who were working at the behest of dark sectors of Dominican society.

These murders remain unsolved and so it is for our former colleagues that we take advantage of an international platform such as this one organised by Front Line Defenders. We want to elevate our voices and bring these facts to light. These facts which are in the past but which also inform the present with respect to the issue of nationality in the Dominican Republic.



THE PREJUDICE IS SO STRONG THAT THE INSTITUTION TO WHICH I BELONG HAS SUFFERED THE KILLING OF TWO OF ITS DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Diane Rodríguez

Asociación Silueta X / Association Silhouette X



IN 2014, FOUR ARMED INDIVIDUALS
CAME LOOKING FOR ME AT OUR
OFFICES WITH THE INTENTION OF
KILLING ME.

My name is Diane Rodríguez, and I am part of an activist's collective called Association Silhouette X. My previous name was Luis Benedicto. I am a transexual woman who struggles for the rights of the LGBT community, with an emphasis on intersex and trans people.

To be LGBT, and especially to be transexual, is not easy in Ecuador. At 16 years of age, during a discussion with my mother, I came out of the closet and confessed to her that I was LGBT. It was a catastrophe for her. Afterwards my step-father threw me out of the house. I spent a couple of months on the streets and staying in friends' houses. I was hungry for the first while, until I discovered sex work and I learned to survive. On one occasion my mother found me and I returned to my house under strict conditions that didn't allow me to be happy like any other transexual adolescent.

After much suffering and various attempts by different religious institutions to "dehomosexualise" me, I graduated and began working. I was fired from every job I had because I had such a feminine appearance. I sued one of the companies and that would become one of the events which convinced me to fight for human rights - not only for me but for the rest of the LGBT community. Even though I had to hide my activism when I returned to my home at the age of 18 and despite the fact that when at 23 years I sued the hotel, I did not win, these were experiences which allowed me to grow as an activist.

I have set various other precedents for the LGBT community in Ecuador including: suing the civil registrar in order to change my name from masculine to feminine; being the first

openly LGBT candidate to run in a popular election (2013); leading the first and consequent meetings with the executive power of Ecuador to create a public policy agreement in favour of the LGBT community; suing one of the biggest television channels in Ecuador for making fun of the LGBT community in one of their comedy programmes; creating one of the first psycho-medical centres for LGBT people specialising in transexuality; collecting data on 82 murders from 1990 through 2013; leading a project for de-facto union between homosexual people; launching the first forum for children who are possibly transexual; driving the Ecuadorian Federation of LGBT organisations which brings together more than 60 community-based collectives in the country; and sharing the pregnancy of my boyfriend Fernando Machado publicly, which has generated debate on the diverse make-up of families.

In 2012, I was kidnapped because of my work as a human rights defender. I was traumatised, but within two months I recovered to continue the LGBT struggle. In 2014, four armed individuals came looking for me at our offices with the intention of killing me.

In addition I received messages from people describing how they would mutilate me. This did not stop me however. I have continued with the activist struggle for LGBT rights, though I have taken security measures. Even if I do not enjoy those rights, I continue so that other generations can live without discrimination and violence.

Azza Soliman

The Egyptian Centre for Women's Issues (CEWLA)

On 23 January, 2015 I was having lunch with my family and friends in Reesh Restaurant when I heard a demonstration on the street outside. I came out to watch and found Messrs. Helmi Shaarawi, Talaat Fahmy, Elham Al-Mirghani and others from the Popular Alliance in attendance. We smiled and said "Hi" to each other. There was approximately 30 people carrying flowers and I started taking photographs. Suddenly, police sirens wailed and police approached the crowd. Some were masked and armed with long black rifles. My son Nadeem said "Please let's go because they will attack us" and I replied that if it is only with tear gas, then we would be fine, but before I finish my sentence, the police started shooting bullets and tear gas canisters. Everybody started running and the policemen were like locusts running all over Talaat Harb Street chasing the people. I saw someone falling and she was bleeding while the person with her was screaming loudly for an ambulance as a masked, armed officer was approaching them. The girl was rushed into an ambulance by her friends.

I started writing down what happened and I learned that the injured girl had died and that Talaat Fahmi had been arrested along with some others.

Lawyer Ahmed Ragheb asked me if I would be willing to testify and I told him that I would. Together with the lawyers and other witnesses from the Popular Alliance Party, we went to Abdeen Public Prosecution.

An hour later we met with the Prosecutor and he took our ID cards. After a five hour wait, I went inside along with two lawyers to testify.

I explained that:

- I was only there accidentally as I was having food in a local restaurant
- the protest was peaceful with a maximum of 30 protesters carrying flowers and banners
- in terms of numbers, the police force response was hugely disproportionate to the number of protesters
- policemen appeared masked and armed which reflected their intention against the protest
- police shot live ammunition and tear gases within minutes of the protesters beginning

a peaceful chant ... *"live free with social justice"*

- the brutal attack and chasing of protesters was an act of war
- the police killed one of the protesters, Ms. Shayma Al-Sabbagh

After giving this testimony, the lawyers and I were shocked to learn that the prosecution was now considering me an accused, and not a witness. They started interrogating me and stating that I had been arrested in the Prosecution building. They began writing my details age, clothing, height, weight..etc. Of course we objected and told them that this was not legal and that I was only a voluntary witness, but the prosecutor continued with this illegal charade.

They kept directing questions and charges at us, and repeating allegations from the police report about "unauthorised protesters" who were "throwing stones, resisting police forces and beating them, and using fire crackers while police was only using water to disperse them..."

I told the Prosecutor that the police report was a lie, and I repeated my true observations about police violations and aggressions. How could a voluntary witness who happened to be at the scene become an 'accused' person?

This is something that only happens in authoritarian police states, such as Egypt.

After publishing my testimony, a smear campaign was launched against me for being a 'false witness' wanting to discredit the police.

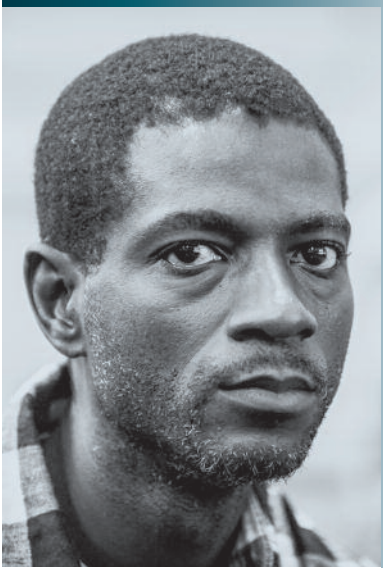
In March 2015 I was formally charged with participating in an illegal demonstration that disturbed the public security. There were multiple charges, including one which is punishable by two to five years in prison.

I was acquitted in the first discernible court, but the Prosecution appealed, and on 26 September, I was acquitted again.



AFTER GIVING THIS TESTIMONY, THE LAWYERS AND I WERE SHOCKED TO LEARN THAT THE PROSECUTION WAS NOW CONSIDERING ME AN ACCUSED, AND NOT A WITNESS.

Bai Emil Touray Journalist



HOWEVER WE SOON REALISED THAT HE NOT ONLY WANTED TO INTERFERE WITH THE PAPER'S EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE AND PROFESSIONALISM. BUT ALSO WANTED TO USE THE JOURNALISTS AS PROPAGANDA TOOLS FOR THE RULING PARTY.

In June 2009, myself and six other journalists were arrested by personnel of the National Intelligence Agency who kept us in incommunicado detention for three days before we were arraigned before a magistrate's court in Kanifing, approximately 12 kilometres from the capital, Banjul. We were arrested after the Gambian leader, President Yahya Jammeh, ordered state security agents to arrest and prosecute us in retaliation for the Gambia Press Union issuing a statement criticising the president's comments on murdered Gambian editor, whom he had accused of being a womaniser.

We were remanded for an additional four days by the magistrate's court at the remand wing of the Central Prison which is located approximately two miles from the capital. We were eventually granted bail by the magistrate's court after spending seven days behind bars (three days under National Intelligence Agency detention and four days in prison).

We were re-arraigned at the High Court of the Gambia nine days after we were granted bail by the magistrate's court. On 1 July 2009 we were remanded in prison custody by the High Court after the Director of Public Prosecutions proffered charges of sedition, criminal defamation and conspiracy to commit felony against us. These were the same charges brought against us at the magistrate's court. We were granted bail by the High Court after spending four nights behind bars.

Even though the European Union and the State Department urged the authorities in Banjul to drop the charges against us, they were reluctant to do so. After two months of trial, we were convicted and sentenced to a mandatory jail term of two years. We were released by Presidential Pardon after spending 27 days in jail.

In February 2011 I joined the Daily Observer Newspaper Company as a news reporter and by June of the same year, 12 of us had tendered our letters of resignation to the management of the paper. This was in reaction to the paper's managing director, Buba Baldeh, who at that time doubled as the ruling party's national mobiliser, being dissatisfied with the coverage of opposition party activities by the paper and instructing the editorial team to desist from publishing political meetings or rallies of the opposition in the paper.

Dissatisfied with his stance, we tried to convince him to change his opinion. However we soon realised that he not only wanted to interfere with the paper's editorial independence and professionalism, but also wanted to use the journalists as propaganda tools for the ruling party. As such, we tendered our resignation letters to the management.

George Kounanis

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Section of Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM)

“Every time I leave my house, the ‘war mode’ is turned on”. This quote describes precisely the state of mind in which I grew up. This is exactly what led me to the active fight for the protection of human rights in my home country of Greece, all across the European Union (EU) and of course, the world as a whole. My fight is to ensure that children, teenagers and adults alike will no longer feel insecure for being and expressing who they really are, and to create a safe haven so that no one will ever feel threatened by another human being.

The EU may have made leaps towards respecting and protecting human rights, but many of the member states still have a long way to go before being on the same level. The Greek state and society are illustrative of this. A long tradition of virtually institutionalised homophobia, racism, patriarchy, sexism, transphobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, bigotry and theocracy have made us feel like there is still a considerable mountain to climb.

Things change however, and human rights defenders come to the front line more and more.

Now let me share a personal story that brought me to the forefront of the defence of human rights in Greece. On 26 July 2014, at approximately 22:40 in downtown Athens (close to the Acropolis), my fiancé at the time and I were victims of a homophobic attack by some police officers while walking hand-in-hand. The issue received massive public attention and was brought to the parliament. The administration handled the incident incredibly awkwardly and the police had to be pushed by the justice system to do their job properly.

The case has been filed indefinitely and we have no idea when the State Prosecutor is going to push forward the prosecution of the police officers. All the while we are facing the threat of a counter lawsuit.

Homophobic and transphobic attacks like this happen almost daily (from bullying at school to institutionalised attacks by some officials), and while my case was one of the very few filed as an official lawsuit with personal data, there are many other cases (anonymous and otherwise) that I am helping record in various capacities so that we can lobby the state administration and bring about positive change.

Even though Greek society is rapidly progressing towards respect and tolerance, the State is going both backwards and forwards. Bullying at school still needs to be tackled; psychological, verbal and physical violence in many families and on the streets has not been properly dealt with; the neo-Nazi party is securing its presence; and institutionalised violence by some media figures, parts of the judicial sector, and some police officers and MPs is still abundant. Furthermore, the ultra-orthodox, extreme, right-wing party *Anexartiti Elines* has once again joined the coalition, which makes us wonder to what extent the ‘leftist’ majority will satisfy our demands. These demands are for a separation of Church and State, the end of conscription, marriage and civil union equality, securing self-declarative gender recognition, and overall justice. As long as inequality and violence continues to be prevalent, even if the incidents are lower than in previous years, our job will be to continue challenging and demanding action at every level – local, the State, our Union and the world.



MY FIGHT IS TO ENSURE THAT CHILDREN, TEENAGERS AND ADULTS ALIKE WILL NO LONGER FEEL INSECURE FOR BEING AND EXPRESSING WHO THEY REALLY ARE...

Hélène Koklou Zogbelemou Humanitaire pour la Protection de la Femme et de l'Enfant (HPFE)



AS A RESULT OF PEER PRESSURE AND IGNORANCE SURROUNDING THE HARSH AND CRUEL REALITY, ALMOST EVERY YOUNG GIRL UNDERGOES CIRCUMCISION.

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains very widespread in the Republic of Guinea. Violent acts are tolerated and cultural and religious arguments are regularly cited in their favour, or as justification. 82.2% of families from the region encourage these practices.

According to the national report from the Guinean Ministry for Social Affairs and for the Advancement of Women and Children, published in 2013, the rate of rape of young girls is at 21%, marital violence at 88%, child marriage at 75% and according to socio-demographic investigations in 2012, the practice of female circumcision went from 96% in 2005 to 97.1% in 2012.

In the Guinea Forest Region, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a practice that is widely supported by women themselves and, as a result of peer pressure and ignorance surrounding the harsh and cruel reality, almost every young girl undergoes circumcision. Dialogue around FGM is coded and restricted to those who practice it. The girl's education and the preservation of cultural values are the two reasons most often cited in support of FGM.

A project emerged "Génération sans excision" (No Circumcision Generation) and led to the setting up an association called "L'Association des Filles Unies pour l'Eradication de l'Excision, AFUEE" (Association of Girls United in the Eradication of Circumcision) made up of 100 young girls.

As a victim of genital mutilation myself, I have been engaged in the fight against GBV since 2009. After reflecting deeply on the reasons why FGM continues to be practised, the

association undertook the promotion of non-circumcision by non-circumcised girls, in other words, breaking with the usual approach. This involves tackling the taboo around FGM using a new technique: involving those young girls who are directly concerned. The strategy is not only to inform the girl about what actually happens in the initiation camps, but also to teach them to be proud of being uncircumcised and to join the fight against the practice.

Taking into account the concerns of the traditionally conservative members of the community, and those who practice circumcision, the association set up initiation camps that did not involve circumcision. Traditionally, in addition to practising FGM, circumcision camps were also places of education and learning of cultural values (song, pottery, weaving, thread-spinning, dance, sewing etc.). Today, these values have been lost and the camps only practice circumcision.

The strategy is to convert these circumcision camps back into learning camps (initiation camps that do not involve circumcision). This means that those women previously carrying out circumcision will become community education leaders and will be less reluctant to stop practising circumcision, whilst still preserving cultural values. The first activities carried out gained the support of those practising circumcision, with the project named "initiation sans excision" (Initiation without circumcision).

Camps that are converted in this way can serve as spaces for regular exchanges between women on the problems linked to educating young girls and the development of Income-Generating Activities (IGAs) that promote the empowerment of women.

Veronika Mora

Ökotárs – Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation

In April 2014, just two days after the general election which brought the repeated victory of the right-conservative government of Fidesz, the head of the Prime Minister's Office announced that he would initiate the re-negotiation of how funding is provided by EEA (European Economic Area) countries – Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein – to Hungarian NGOs. This signalled the beginning of a series of unprecedented governmental attacks and the harassment of independent civil society groups, especially those engaged in human rights, anti-corruption, women's rights and LGBT rights.

My foundation, as the head of the grant-making consortium which managed the EEA/Norwegian NGO Programme in Hungary found itself in the centre of the conflict, which began with a media smear campaign orchestrated by the government. High ranking officials, such as deputy state secretaries accused us of being politically biased, oppositional "cheating nobodies", but this was soon followed by official inspections.

In late May the Prime Minister's Office announced publicly that the so-called Governmental Control Office (GCO) would audit the use of the EEA/Norwegian funding. According to lawyers, this is something they clearly had no jurisdiction over. It was also quite telling of the whole process that we always learnt about these moves from government-friendly media before any official notifications were issued. Although they never answered our repeated requests to clarify the legal basis of the audit, we were forced to cooperate, due to the GCO's wide ranging sanctioning powers. Additionally, we discovered that documents not previously in the public domain, but handed over to the GCO during the course of the audit somehow found their way to the government-friendly media – and were always featured in a damning context.

By August 2014, the administrative processes had turned into criminal accusations – again, made first in the media. These accusations ranged from fraud to mismanagement and unlicensed financial activity, and we soon learned that a criminal investigation had indeed been launched. The situation quickly escalated.

On the morning of 8 September 2014, the National Bureau of Investigation invaded our office with a team of approximately 20 police officers. They searched for documents relating to the management and the grantees of the EEA/Norwegian NGO Programme, and later visited the office of our accountant, our IT provider and partners, and also the homes of some staff members (where archived documents were kept).

The raid lasted the entire day and during this time colleagues were forbidden from communicating with the outside world by any means. The police confiscated written documents and laptops during the raid. We filed a complaint against the search and the court eventually ruled it to have been unlawful in January 2015, on the grounds that there was no suspicion upon which such a search could be conducted.

The GCO published its "report" in late October 2015. This 40 page document repeats all the earlier accusations, although it omits any factual data to support them – there are no names, amounts or any other form of tangible information. At the same time, government-friendly media leaked internal e-mail exchanges and other private matters of the foundations. Thus the media campaign continued – and while it has decreased in intensity, it has not stopped.



THIS SIGNALLED THE BEGINNING OF A SERIES OF UNPRECEDENTED GOVERNMENTAL ATTACKS AND THE HARASSMENT OF INDEPENDENT CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS, ESPECIALLY THOSE ENGAGED IN HUMAN RIGHTS, ANTI-CORRUPTION, WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND LGBT RIGHTS.

Teesta Satalvad

Citizens for Justice and Peace



THERE ARE CURRENTLY TWO FALSE CASES AGAINST BOTH MY HUSBAND AND ME FOR ALLEGED EMBEZZLEMENT.

As a human rights defender I continue to be victimised by the state, both by the central government of India and the government of Gujarat, largely due to my work related to justice for the survivors of the 2002 Gujarat genocidal pogrom.

The kinds of victimisation include personal victimisation and the victimisation of my family. There are currently two false cases against both my husband and me for alleged embezzlement. A purely civil dispute has been criminalised and they are trying to impose a custodial interrogation.

State and central agencies under the current supremacist dispensation are at the heart of this victimisation. Accompanied by this physical attack by the state is a large, well-orchestrated vilification campaign in the public domain by proto-fascist outfits closely associated with the current regime. However, overwhelming public support from individuals, movements, organisations and across the Indian political class has been our strength.

In addition to these cases, there have been five other false cases filed against me, all concerned with the tutoring of witnesses, and allegedly digging up graves to facilitate justice for the survivors of 2002. In three of the five cases, the Supreme Court has stayed the investigation. In one of the cases, completely extraneously, a Tweet I sent by mistake last August, a Tweet which I apologised for, has been used against me.

The Gujarat police that has been aggressive towards me and my organisation because of the justice work we have undertaken for the survivors, launched two criminal complaints and succeeded in getting my passport impounded. It is a very, very difficult time for human rights defenders in India.

There is an extremely right-wing, supremacist ideology-run government at the centre. The same government that ruled Gujarat since 2002 and a government that would like to push for a majority religio-communal ideology coupled with a highly corporate agenda.

Our organisation, by providing hands on legal aid to the survivors of 2002 has followed cases from the Trial Courts to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court has monitored major trials and this collective scrutiny that includes witness protection has ensured the conviction of 126 persons to life imprisonment. This is a first in criminal justice jurisprudence in India, especially with relation to targeted crimes against the minorities.

We look to the international community for continued support and we thank Front Line Defenders for raising our case time and again.

Stefano Bucaioni

Omphalos Arcigay Arcilesbica Perugia

Being a founding country of the European Union is not enough to automatically ensure human rights for everyone. Italy is a perfect and unfortunate example of that, especially when it comes to LGBTI rights.

While the historical legacy of Italian legislation is characterised by negation rather than repression of homosexuality, same-sex relations, as well as homophobia and transphobia, remain invisible to state regulation. Generally speaking, the Italian legal system lacks any anti-discrimination policy for LGBTI people and there is no recognition of same-sex partnerships.

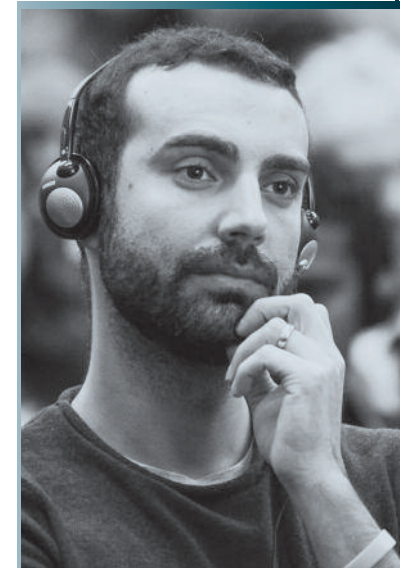
For a few years I lived in the United Kingdom and there I married my husband. We then decided to come back to Italy and we were faced by one of the big paradoxes of being an EU citizen. As a couple in the UK, France, Spain or many other European countries we are recognised as a married couple with full and equal rights. In Italy however, my husband becomes just a friend and we have no rights at all as a couple.

In Italy there is no overview of the extent of crimes against LGBTIs. However, violence against gay organisations and community sites seems to be on the rise. Italian anti-LGBTI organisations and hate groups are importing methods and models to fight the request of equal rights from all over Europe and the country is now experiencing a rise in openly homophobic campaigns and public demonstrations led by religious fanatics and far-right groups.

In this complex context, Italian LGBTI organisations and human rights activists are mobilising for the legal recognition of same-sex partnerships and against homophobia and discrimination.

Our activities include peaceful and non-violent actions and demonstrations. For example, last year I was among the six lesbian and gay activists formally charged with a public order offence following a police investigation into a protest held in my home town. Our offence was to have engaged in what they have called a “long and passionate kiss” in front of an anti-LGBTI demonstration. Yes, I have to admit it, I was kissing my husband in a public space, like many other same-sex couples. We have been charged with breach of the peace following a police report which described one of the kisses as disgusting for young children and disturbing for the anti-LGBTI protest. Those charges would be laughable if they did not reflect exactly the anti-gay sentiment that we are fighting.

The European Union is doing a lot of good work on human rights and I think it is the right choice to prioritise those areas of the world where human rights defenders are most at risk. However, as European, we need to keep the human rights level high within Europe itself and constantly work to make sure all the European countries are on the same page. We need to be aware that even in countries where human rights are advanced and many advances have been achieved, there is always the risk of going back and if this happens it is not only bad for Europe, but it is also bad for the countries abroad where Europe works to advance human rights.



AS A COUPLE IN THE UK, FRANCE, SPAIN OR MANY OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES WE ARE RECOGNISED AS A MARRIED COUPLE WITH FULL AND EQUAL RIGHTS. IN ITALY HOWEVER, MY HUSBAND BECOMES JUST A FRIEND AND WE HAVE NO RIGHTS AT ALL AS A COUPLE.

Bakhytzhan Toregozhina Social Foundation 'Ar rukh hak'



THE CIVIL ACTIVIST BLOGGERS ERMEK NARYMBAEV AND SERIKJAN MAMBETALIN HAVE BEEN ARRESTED ON THE CHARGE OF 'INCITING NATIONAL DISCORD' SIMPLY FOR SHARING AN ARTICLE ON FACEBOOK.

Today, all over the post-Soviet region, civil society everywhere is experiencing pressure and destruction. The authorities initiate restrictive legislation and repressive measures against the organisations and individuals who are brave enough to criticise government policy and defend human rights, justice and the rule of law. As a human rights defender (HRD) working in Kazakhstan, I am troubled by the worrying situation which has evolved recently against independent media and political opponents, HRDs and civil activists.

From this platform here in Dublin, I want to say the names of political prisoners. It is very important for them to know that they are being talked about, that they have not been forgotten. The opposition leader Vladimir Kozlov, sentenced to extended prison terms because of unjust judicial proceedings on politically motivated charges. The dissident poet Aron Atabek. The HRD Vadim Kuramshin. The former head of *KazAtomProm*, Mukhtar Djakishev. Mukhtar Abljazov is under arrest in France. For many years he financed legal opposition in Kazakhstan and himself was an opposition politician. We are troubled by the fact that the French government decided to extradite him to Russia because it did not think there was any political element in his case. I can testify that the political element in Mukhtar Abljazov's case makes up 98%, and with his arrest the political opposition has ceased to exist in Kazakhstan. The opposition field has been completely cleared.

All opposition political parties have been liquidated. The civil activist bloggers Ermek Narymbaev and Serikjan Mambetalin have been arrested on the charge of 'inciting national discord' simply for sharing an article on Facebook. Criminal cases have been taken against the HRD Elena Semenova and civil activist Bolatbek Bljalov. As the result of a court decision,

the prominent independent newspapers *Pravdivaja Gazeta*, *Kazakhstan Pravda*, *Nakanue.kz* and the magazine *Adam* have been shut down and charged enormous fines. Popular internet resources are blocked without any explanation.

There is an ongoing court case against the oldest newspaper *Jas Alash* which they also want to shut down. By order of the court, the social network *Live Journal* has been shut down in Kazakhstan and there is a serious danger that the social networks Facebook, Youtube and Twitter might be blocked very soon as the government thinks that these social networks are destructive and they refuse to cooperate with Kazakh secret services.

It is clear that the real reason for this repression is that the internet has become the newest platform for the population to express its opinion. A new bill affecting NGOs has been initiated by a pro-government organisation and this constitutes a threat to the whole of independent civil society.

Society believes that these repressive measures are connected to the governments desire to destroy active civil society. Therefore the authorities attempt to inhibit any expressions of protest. There are active limitations on political and civil rights and freedoms, the freedom to receive and distribute information, the freedom to gather peacefully and to express a critical opinion. We continue to actively carry out legal proceedings and monitoring of all political affairs but I should emphasise that in Kazakhstan there is no fair, independent process of law. Corruption in all areas of power has become the main problem in our society.

Human Rights Defender

On 19 November 2015 after our meeting ended at 5:30pm I boarded a *matatu* (public mini-bus), and set off on my journey home. All seemed well, no cause for alarm.

At my stop the *matatu* pulled to the side at my request. Immediately, two well-dressed men also alighted. I heard one of them say the name of the stop over the phone and the other approached me quickly and whispered to me to cooperate with them.

In an instance a car pulled up and by the time I tried to read the number plate, I was ordered to get inside. I was pushed between a woman and a man who were already sitting in the car and the car took off over the flyover bridge and back onto the highway. They drove so fast and I was in a panic, knowing I was dead. My life was over. I would be killed and dumped in the forest.

By this time they had already taken possession of my laptop and the woman was holding my phone.

One of the men spoke on the phone and told the listener that the 'prayers' could proceed. The woman told me to relax. They had instructions not to hurt me. We were going for a peaceful ceremony and it would only be successful if I participated.

When I saw the car take a turn towards the forest, I broke down and started to cry. I sobbed so much that I almost blacked out. The woman kept insisting that they were not allowed to hurt me at all.

We reached the tree and another group of 10 men were waiting for us with a white goat. An old man started praying immediately when we got out of the car and this was very scary.

One man from the group asked me if I had any more issues with the people using the forest and I quickly said no. I was made to repeat ten times that on behalf of my community I had no problem with them. The goat became my witness and that as the goat was going to die, if I did anything more against them, I would die like the goat and they would not be to blame.

The sacrifice could not take place in the presence of women, so the woman and I returned

to the car. I cannot tell you how long it took. Afterwards the men returned to the car and we drove to a distant place on a very rough road. The woman covered me with her shawl so I could not see.

The car finally stopped and a very elderly woman led me to a windowless hut. There was absolutely no talking. The woman only thanked me for being cooperative. She said that there would be a final ritual the following night at midnight and we would stay in the hut until then. I was very scared and felt like causing a scene, but I was very afraid of death and I could smell danger.

Finally in total darkness, a man came for us and led us back to the ceremony. I was asked if I had any issues with the businesses in the forest and I quickly said no. I was made to promise to keep quiet forever and I did. The people gathered there were then asked if they were now content and they said yes.

Then I left in the car, again covered by the woman's shawl. We were on the road for a long time and finally, the car stopped, I was pushed out and the car drove off. I was still scared and fatigued and I stood there wondering where I was. A man passed and I naively told him I didn't know where I was, that I was not a prostitute and that I needed help. He offered to go and get me a taxi. I still had my money and my documents. They kept my phone and my laptop.

Very cold, hungry, scared and traumatised, I was safely dropped to my friend's house. I immediately called my first born son and communicated with Front Line Defenders briefly. I was tongue-tied and couldn't talk.

Before my release, I was given conditions for survival. To keep the experience a secret and not to tell the police. Nothing negative should be said about the current beneficiaries from the forest resources. Stay away from the region for 3 months and lastly, a death warrant if the incident is leaked.

Though shattered, traumatised and in pain, fear and panic, I am encouraged by one thing. My assailants left me alive, and now I have an opportunity to recount my experience, though keeping the names and places secret for my security.



I WAS PUSHED BETWEEN A WOMAN AND A MAN WHO WERE ALREADY SITTING IN THE CAR AND THE CAR TOOK OFF OVER THE FLYOVER BRIDGE AND BACK ONTO THE HIGHWAY.

Sulaiman Y Bin Jassim

Independent human rights defender



WE ARE PASSING THROUGH A SILENT PHASE FOR BOTH HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORS AND FREEDOM DEFENDERS, AND A TIME WHEN KUWAIT IS EXPERIENCING A DARK ERA WITH RESPECT TO FREEDOMS.

Thank you for granting me the opportunity to provide my testimony on the situation of human rights defenders in Kuwait, though it is painful to testify. We are passing through a silent phase for both human rights monitors and freedom defenders, and a time when Kuwait is experiencing a dark era with respect to freedoms.

Major opposition figures today linger in prisons and some of them have had their, and their families,' citizenship revoked. At the same time, many of the dissidents are tied up with court procedures on charges of criticising government policies. Furthermore, it is sad to see others alienated through both optional or forced exile.

I am not criticising the silence of our monitors and human rights defenders, but simply describing the facts on the ground. Human rights defenders in Kuwait have been subjected to smear campaigns, accused of disloyalty to their homeland and subjected to violence, prosecutions and imprisonment.

The following is an account of my personal experience. On the evening of April 17, 2013 an anti-government protest took place and three colleagues from the National Committee for Monitoring Violations and I attended. At the end of the protest, I was standing in an open, quiet area, when suddenly members of the Special Forces surrounding me from all directions. I expected to be arrested, so I surrendered. However, they started shooting rubber bullets at me and I was shot three times - on my arm, shoulder and lower back.

I began to run to avoid more rubber bullets. I entered a lawn of a nearby house and suddenly a masked man dressed in a Special Forces uniform, who had his name tag removed, appeared in front of me. I told him "I surrender". He grabbed me at my neck and started choking me to the point where I was having difficulty breathing. It was a combination of the choke hold, the running and the strong tear gas used. I told him that I was choking and he replied that he will kill me now while he continued to tighten his grip around my neck. He pushed his baton against my neck and pushed me forward until we reached his colleague, who in turn punched me several times on my nose, face and head.

He then asked his colleague to drag me backward and he started punching me on the chest

and abdomen until I almost vomited. Together they started kicking me at my waist and hips from both sides, and then hauled me up and bundled me into their car in a very degrading manner.

While I was in the car, they were directing questions at me, slapping and cursing me every time I answered any questions. They found a number of used tear gas canisters and rubber bullets in my pocket, that I had taken for documentation purpose, and this resulted in even more beating and verbal abuse.

Later on, I was dragged from the car and handed over to the police who took me and other protesters to the Criminal Investigation Building. Here we spent three days in a filthy room that lacked any basic prison cell standards.

After more than a year, the case against me was brought to court. I was put on trial, though no direct charges were brought against me and I was not permitted to receive a copy of my case file until seven weeks after the court proceedings. I was not allowed to cross-examine the only witness against me and I was prevented from presenting any defence. After this trial, that lacked almost all semblance of a fair process, I was sentenced to one month imprisonment without suspension. The next day, I was jailed. I spent three days in jail and I was then acquitted and released by a Court of Appeal's decision.

I, and other human rights defenders in Kuwait, are constantly exposed to politically motivated prosecutions, but I assure you that we are looking forward to a bright future. In this future all people's rights are respected, and in particular the rights of the oppressed stateless people (Bedoon) and the expatriates who are looking for a decent life. Then, the citizens' will and right to manage their own country and the country's resources will also be respected.

In conclusion, I must say that my testimony may not be the strongest among those of my other brothers and sisters from different human rights fields in various parts of the world, but, I fear that for this testimony I could be prosecuted and detained by the authorities who cannot take criticism.

Utkir Rustamovich Dzhabbarov

Sprevedivost / Justice

The human rights organisation *Justice* was founded in 1994 on the initiative of a group of citizens who were trying to prevent police officers from abusing the power they have over citizens. A small group of activists, united by a common idea and by a heightened sense of justice, began their work in association with the NGO *Slavic Diaspora*.

The organisation's subsequent work on defending human rights in the Jalal-Abad region attracted the attention of other active citizens who, because of their own inner convictions, were defending people from abuse by the authorities.

The organisation was legally registered in 1995. Beginning in 1999, the organisation began working in the field of defending the right to freedom from torture and other forms of harsh treatment. With the support of the *Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights* (based in Warsaw) we began a monitoring programme of how human rights are observed in closed institutions. This was the first attempt at work of this kind in the country. When the programme coordinators managed to visit closed institutions, other human rights organisations in the country also joined in the fight against torture in their regions. As a result of this work, Kyrgyzstan signed the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and subsequently the Optional Protocol. Furthermore, a national preventative mechanism in Kyrgyzstan has been established and *Justice* contributes to this.

The organisation actively defended basic rights and freedoms during the investigation into the clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and the minority Uzbek population in Southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010. The authorities criticised *Justice* for its work in defending the rights of the Uzbeks. Both *Justice* and the UN treaty bodies repeatedly admonished the state in relation to the disproportionate number of Uzbeks who were brought to account for their role in mass disturbances. When the Kyrgyz authorities submitted reports to the UN treaty bodies, they received recommendations regarding the obstacles minorities face when attempting to access justice.

Our colleague, human rights defender Azimjan Askarov, a member of the human rights network *Justice* and the Director of the association *Vozdukh/Air*, was convicted of participating in the mass disturbances and of killing a police officer during the clash and received a life sentence. This conviction was an act of revenge for his active defence of the rights of vulnerable groups in his region.

At this time defamatory information about *Justice* was disseminated, indicating that the organisation only defends Uzbeks. The OSCE High Commissioner for national minorities awarded *Justice* the award of the first High Commissioner Max van der Stoep for its work defending human rights during the investigations into the events of June 2010. As a direct result of this work, members of the organisation received various threats about reprisals. In 2011 there was an attempted physical attack, but thanks to the prompt response of the international community, the clampdown was suspended.

Thanks to support from Front Line Defenders *Justice* now has a security plan which every member is compelled to stick to. The security services continue to send journalists to the association in an attempt to discredit the organisation and its work within the society. They have also sent various "clients" to the organisation with the intention of unmasking the workers as liars. Films have been distributed on television and on the internet demonising the country's HRDs, including those in our organisation. For example 'Trojan Horses' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epQgLHM-AJ4> and 'Trojan Attari' in Kyrgyz <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1sgAfMazZ8o>. The authorities' behaviour is in line with a policy of discrediting human rights organisations at a time when there are attempts to adopt a law restricting 'foreign agents'.

Recently the organisation has completed a two-year UN Refugee Agency project with the support of the UN Peacebuilding Commission with the aim of strengthening trust and confidence between people, communities and the authorities.



THIS CONVICTION WAS AN ACT OF REVENGE FOR HIS ACTIVE DEFENCE OF THE RIGHTS OF VULNERABLE GROUPS IN HIS REGION.

Shahindha Ismail Maldivian Democracy Network



THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY FROM THE MID-NINETIES TO 2008 SAW MANY POLITICIANS, JOURNALISTS, WRITERS AND ACTIVISTS HARASSED, JAILED, TORTURED AND FORCED TO SELF-EXILE.

The Maldives has had a history of eliminating political dissent and democratic activism through various methods. The country had authoritarian rule for 30 years which ended in 2008 following a mass movement for human rights and freedoms, which led to the writing of a new and democratic Constitution that enshrined most of the fundamental rights prescribed by the ICCPR (*International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*). The struggle for democracy from the mid-nineties to 2008 saw many politicians, journalists, writers and activists harassed, jailed, tortured and forced to self-exile. The country saw its first democratic presidential elections in 2008 and a new president was sworn in on the 11th November 2008.

Three years later, in February 2012 a joint police and military coup d'état toppled the government and the country has been in chaos ever since. One of the core problems in the Maldives is the judiciary – corrupt, uneducated judges at all three levels of the courts who are highly influenced by the executive, and appointed for life through an amendment of legislation by a parliament with a majority of the current ruling party, the Progressive Party of the Maldives (PPM).

Human rights defenders have operated at high risk through these changes. The most recent being the near fatal stab to the head of lawyer Mahfooz Saeed and the disappearance of journalist and blogger Ahmed Rilwan since 8 August 2014. Several bloggers, journalists and human rights activists who have been campaigning to expedite investigations on the disappearance have been openly threatened on social media and via phone messages. These threats include threats of death, disappearance, violent harm, rape and threats to their families.

Other individuals operating on social media have been abducted, beaten, forced to disclose information about other persons and threatened to be killed. They have been followed and harassed on social media. Journalist 'Asward' Ibrahim was beaten with iron rods on a busy road soon after he broadcast a report on the judiciary. He barely survived and was blinded in one eye. Aishath Velezinee, judicial accountability activist, was stabbed on the road when she exposed the judicial oversight body. The Raajje TV station was torched, several lawyers harassed and threatened and hundreds of protesters continually face police brutality and arbitrary detention.

I have personally been threatened with disappearance, death, rape and severe physical violence.

I have been threatened with harm to my daughter and, along with colleagues, I have been followed on the roads. The offices of the organisation I work with, the Maldivian Democracy Network, have been vandalised several times, equipment and the premises damaged and attempts have been made to destroy or steal information.

Other human rights defender organisations, along with ours, have been constantly threatened of dissolution or de-registration by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The government has now enforced a regulation that imposes several monitoring requirements which obstructs independent operation of our programmes, and also authorises the Registrar of Associations (a politically appointed position) to take action, including the de-registration of NGOs.

Mody Samba Touré

UNTM – Union Nationale des Travailleurs du Mali / National Union of Workers of Mali

I am a teacher, human rights defender and the Secretary-General of the Regional Trade Union of the Kidal region. The Regional Union of Workers of Kidal is a subsidiary of the National Union of Workers of Mali (UNTM). The UNTM is a network of human rights defenders made up of approximately 30 organisations.

In the lead up to 1991, the UNTM played a crucial role in the freedom movement and the fight against the dictatorship of Moussa Traoré (President of Mali from 1968 to 1991) and helped to bring democracy to Mali.

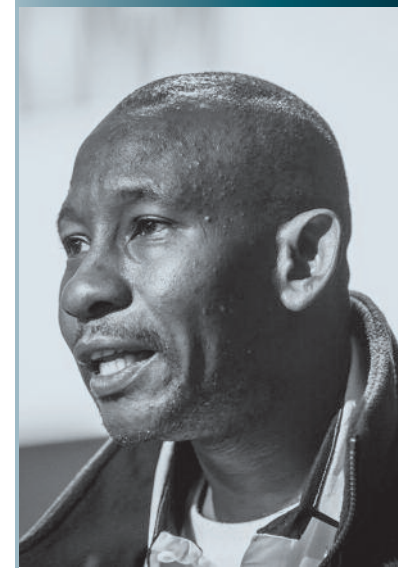
In 2012, an insurrection resulted in the forced departure of the democratically elected President Amadou Toumani Touré. Together with other organisations, the UNTM opposed this coup. We fought against the outrageous human rights violations perpetrated across the various communities by participating in demonstrations and many other initiatives.

As a founding member of the human rights network RDDH (Le Réseau des Défenseurs des

Droits Humains du Mali / The Network of Human Rights Defenders of Mali), our organisation has led field investigations into gross human rights violations in Northern Mali. I have personally documented cases of human rights violations in my capacity as a RDDH representative in the region of Kidal. As a result, I also became a target for opponents of human rights defenders. This is the reason I was attacked, shot and badly injured by people who made me their scapegoat when Prime Minister Moussa Mara visited in 2014.

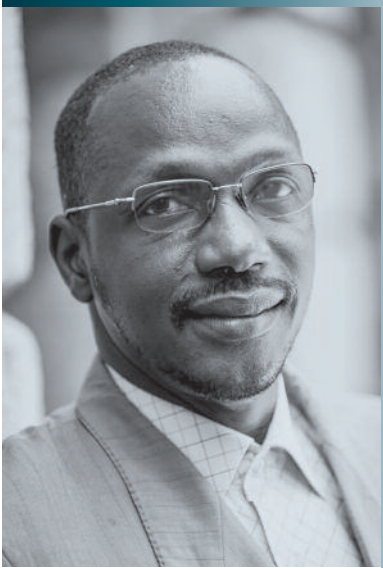
Thanks to the support of various national and international organisations, and with particular thanks to the efforts of *Freedom House*, I was subsequently admitted to the hospital in Goa, and later transferred to Bamako.

To date I have not yet completely recovered and my spirit has suffered from having to live far away and from being separated from my family in Kidal. Yet, despite this hardship, I believe this is the right avenue to greet all and launch another appeal for human rights in Mali.



THIS IS THE REASON I WAS ATTACKED, SHOT AND BADLY INJURED BY PEOPLE WHO MADE ME THEIR SCAPEGOAT WHEN PRIME MINISTER MOUSSA MARA VISITED IN 2014.

Hamady Lehbouss IRA-Mauritania



IN 2013, THE WALK FREE FOUNDATION
GAVE MY COUNTRY THE INFAMOUS
TITLE OF BEING NUMBER ONE IN
TERMS OF THE PREVALENCE OF
SLAVERY.

I come here from Mauritania, a country where more than half of the four million inhabitants are held in slavery, (they are known as Abeed meaning 'slave'), or suffer its consequences, such as the *Haratin* people. In 2013, the Walk Free Foundation gave my country the infamous title of being number one in terms of the prevalence of slavery.

But if this reality, of which I myself am the first to be ashamed, is now known of the world over, this is because we, the Mauritanian people, are numerous in denouncing it, in combating it and refusing to hide it. I am ashamed that my country is labelled as the last bastion of slavery but I am proud to fight against this ignominy and I ask you to join us in denouncing it.

I am here today representing the Initiative pour La Résurgence du Mouvement Abolitionniste (IRA-Mauritania) / The Initiative for the Resurgence for the Abolitionist Movement. Launched in 2008 to combat slavery in its most abject of forms, according to which you are for example born a slave, while elsewhere 'men are born free and equal in rights'. I am referring to descent-based slavery, where people are born into a 'slave class'. The IRA-Mauritania's aim is to see the application of the law that has just been passed, which criminalises slavery and slave practices. Set up in order to apply this law, the IRA-Mauritania is held outside the law. The IRA-Mauritania has been refused administrative recognition and this is still the case today. The Mauritanian state maintains the illegitimate status of the IRA-Mauritania in

order to stop its progress and to stop you, people of good faith, organisations, institutions and groups motivated by peace and justice, from helping us.

But, more alarmingly than the administrative ban, the Mauritanian government under pressure from obscurantist groups, has set itself the aim of wiping out, physically, the IRA-Mauritania and its leaders. In lashing out at the IRA-Mauritania and its leaders, it aims to intimidate all the human rights activists and beyond that, all actions of civil society.

For a year now, the President of IRA-Mauritania, Biram Dah Abeid, winner of the 2013 UN Human Rights Prize and his Vice President Brahim Bilal Ramdhan have been languishing the Aleg prison, 250km from their home. They are suffering from health problems that everyone is well aware of, and despite doctors having reiterated their medical opinions, the Mauritanian administration refuses to provide them with the necessary care. The administration's will to see them wither away slowly is manifest.

In Mauritania, religious obscurantism based on an incorrect and self-serving interpretation of Islam assists those who uphold slavery, and who hold in their hands all the mechanisms of the administration. The influence of this adulterated Islam that is instrumentalised by radicals, merges with ignorance and poverty to keep 60% of the Mauritanian population living in slavery whilst the government in power continues to deny the reality.

Jorge Luis Hernández Castro

Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas (FRAYBA)*

In Mexico we are experiencing a systemic and systematic crisis in human rights. The facts and figures on grave human rights violations confirm this. At least 26,000 disappeared persons, a number which tragically increases month on month; close to 150,000 murders with impunity; an increase in torture; and an increase in forced displacement in different parts of the national territory. The criminalisation and killing of journalists and human rights defenders is a daily occurrence in the country. Community defenders who are defending their territory are threatened, imprisoned, killed or disappeared.

In response to this context, both in Mexico and in Chiapas, innumerable protest movements, social action movements, resistance groups, collectives, trade unions, organisations and communities have sprung up to show their discontent for the policies of the State. The criminalisation of social protest distinguishes itself not just as a mechanism of control employed by the State but also as a mechanism to punish expressions of citizenship through action, as well as any demands for human rights.

In this context the work of human rights defenders becomes uncomfortable and frustrating, as those in power use all the tools at their disposal to injure, kill, detain, delegitimise and

criminalise the work of those of us who dedicate ourselves to defending hope.

Despite the great risk which comes with the defence of human rights in Mexico and despite the actions of the State to discredit our work, we human rights defenders believe that our work is politically important as well as being a lifelong, personal and communitarian commitment, and that defending hope, history, justice and truth are worth it.

The Frayba Centre works strategically to strengthen networks and partnerships at both a national and international level with: victims' movements, survivors, women, indigenous and campesino communities, student movements, trade unions, migrants and LGBTI collectives.

We believe that justice will not come from above, from the powerful. The day-to-day construction of hope and of justice is what inspires us to continue in this struggle.

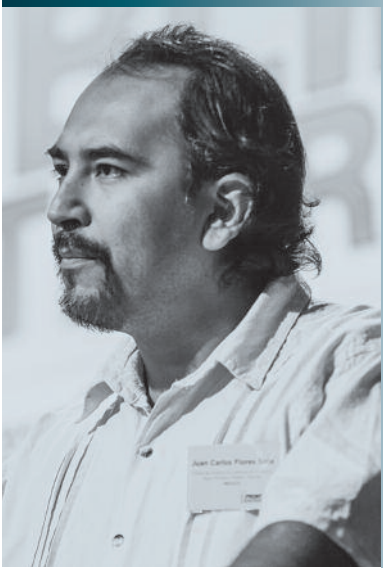
* Human Rights Center Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas



THE WORK OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS BECOMES UNCOMFORTABLE AND FRUSTRATING. AS THOSE IN POWER USE ALL THE TOOLS AT THEIR DISPOSAL TO INJURE. KILL. DETAIN. DELEGITIMISE AND CRIMINALISE THE WORK OF THOSE OF US WHO DEDICATE OURSELVES TO DEFENDING HOPE.

Juan Carlos Flores Solís

El Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra y el Agua de Morelos, Puebla y Tlaxcala (FPDTAMPT)*



DESPITE WINNING MY FREEDOM THROUGH CONSTITUTIONAL PETITIONS, THE JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES DELAYED MY RELEASE FOR FIVE ADDITIONAL MONTHS USING LEGAL TOOLS WHICH ARE NOW UTILISED AS COMMON PRACTICE AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IMPRISONED IN MEXICO.

I am a member of The People's Front in Defence of the Earth and Water of Morelos, Puebla and Tlaxcala (FPDTAMPT) which is dedicated to the defence of the rights of communities faced with threats from transnational companies and the government wanting to dispossess communities of their common heritage.

At the moment we are resisting the imposition of an electric plant known as Proyecto Integral Morelos (PIM) / Morelos Integrated Project which is threatening more than 100 communities in the states of Morelos, Puebla and Tlaxcala. The proposed gas pipeline would cut through the risk-zone of the Popocatepetl volcano, one of the most active and dangerous volcanoes in the world, not to mention the consumption of the communities' water supplies and the generation of acid rain which will be caused by the two thermoelectric centres included in the project. Additionally, there is a proposal to generate an industrialisation project which would result in the exhausting of the farm lands of the indigenous peoples.

In 2012, we as the FPDTAMPT began a public campaign to increase awareness on the known consequences of the project and to unite the affected communities. This process resulted in my persecution and defamation in the media and on social networks, the torture of our colleague Jaime Domínguez Pérez, and my imprisonment on 7 April 2014. For ten months I was crowded into a cell measuring 6m² alongside 19 other detainees, all accused of the crimes of rebellion, extortion, dispossession and attacking hydraulic works.

Despite winning my freedom through constitutional petitions, the judicial authorities delayed my release for five additional months using legal tools which are now utilised as common practice against human rights defenders imprisoned in Mexico. At the time of my imprisonment more than a dozen arrest warrants were issued. There were stand-offs between police and inhabitants from Amilcingo, Morelos, in which colleagues were shot by state police. Two of our community radio stations were closed by the federal police in Santa Maria Zacatepec and San Bernardino Tlaxcalaningo, Puebla. All of these actions, in addition to using the Mexican Army to impose the pipeline works on the Nahua indigenous communities in the region of the volcano.

Right now I am once again facing judicial harassment for having requested information from the National Defence Secretariat on why it is protecting a foreign company install a scientifically-proven risky project in zones where there is volcanic risk. The crimes for which I am accused of today are false imprisonment with aggravating factors including depriving a public official of liberty and membership of a gang. Additionally, the company which constructed the gas pipeline, Bonatti SPA, has accused me of violent robbery and obstruction of public works. The evidence for the nine crimes of which I stand accused is based on testimonies of the workers in the construction companies and officials from the federal and state governments, all of whom are interested in the completion of the PIM and all of whom have allowed themselves to be used to fabricate these accusations.

* The People's Front in Defence of the Earth and Water of Morelos, Puebla and Tlaxcala

Lottie Cunningham Wren

Centro por la Justicia y Derechos Humanos de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua (CEJUDHCAN)*

We, the indigenous populations and Afro-descendants of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, have struggled for years for the recognition and title deeds to our territories.

Our rights have been recognised under national laws and some of our communities have obtained the legal titles to the territories. These efforts were made in order to comply with the directive of the Inter American Court of Human Rights in the case of the *Mayangna (Sumo) Awas Tingni community vs the State of Nicaragua*. The process of demarcation and titling consists of five steps for the recognition of the land rights of indigenous communities and Afro-descendants. The fifth step in this programme is called 'sanitation', which consists of the clarification of the rights of the indigenous communities in the face of 'third parties' or 'settlers', who are non-indigenous persons and who live on the territories.

Over the years, 'settlers' have illegally invaded the territories, accompanied by silence, inaction and, in some cases, the complicity of the Nicaraguan authorities. They have destroyed forests, damaged the environment and the traditional ways of life. This situation has created tensions and conflicts between the indigenous and Afro populations and the settlers. As leaders and human rights defenders, we have denounced the illegal invasions for many years to various authorities but these authorities have been negligent in attending to the complaints.

Presently the level of conflict has reached alarming proportions in more than 50 communities. Since 2014, my organisation CEJUDHCAN has documented at least 60 attacks by settlers with firearms against indigenous people and 24 indigenous people have died whilst defending their territories. The attacks have included kidnappings and the destruction of property. Entire communities have been forcibly displaced. The violence has

been indiscriminate: affecting women, children and indigenous leaders, as well as human rights defenders. This situation led the Inter American Commission for Human Rights to order protective measures for four communities of Wangki Twi-Tasba Raya.

In recent months the violence against leaders has intensified. On at least one occasion, the Nicaraguan army directly attacked a vehicle in which three indigenous leaders, including the vice-president of the *Wangki Twi-Tasba Raya* community, were travelling. Settlers also attacked the communal house at *Sukatpin, Twi Waupasa*, during a meeting of indigenous leaders, killing one leader and injuring another. The violence has reached various indigenous communities in the territories and all are at a high level of risk. At the same time, the authorities criminalise and intimidate leaders who are defending the rights of their communities, removing them from their traditional office and, through popular election seeking to position groups allied to the authorities in the decision-making spaces.

As human rights defenders, we are at permanent risk as we continue to carry out our work. This assertion is based not only on the general violence in the region but also on concrete threats, defamation and harassment. We have received calls and text messages, threatening to kill us and our families. More seriously, two young leaders who act as volunteers within CEJUDHCAN were attacked and wounded with firearms. Unfortunately, the Nicaraguan authorities do not show an interest in nor take measures to protect us, which increases our vulnerability. We human rights defenders know that the situation in our communities needs, more than ever, our attention and constant work, and we are committed to our work; however, we are being forced to carry out our work in a constant state of danger and alarm.

* Centre for Justice and Human Rights of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua



THE VIOLENCE HAS BEEN
INDISCRIMINATE: AFFECTING WOMEN,
CHILDREN AND INDIGENOUS LEADERS. AS
WELL AS HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS.

Ali Abdoulaye Volontaires pour l'Intégration Educative (NGO VIE)*



THIS SIMPLE ANNOUNCEMENT IN THE MEDIA LED TO ME BEING DETAINED ARBITRARILY FOR 38 DAYS BY THE STATE GENERAL SECURITY SERVICE.

The NGO VIE Kande Ni Bayra (Volunteers for Educational Integration) in Niger runs alternative educational programmes for the most disadvantaged communities in one of the poorest countries in the world. Young people, who, because of their age can no longer enrol in school are provided with instruction until they catch up with their peers.

Women and men are taught to read and write, and participate in a network of exchanges in which they develop the skills for analytical thinking and expression, allowing them to deal with their concerns.

The group predominantly works with UN agencies (FAO, UNFPA and UNICEF) and cooperation agencies.

In Niger today, any denunciation that calls upon the responsibility of the regime is systematically labelled as a destabilising act plotted by the opposition. This serves to silence civil society including the unions.

I fell into the sights of the regime, or shall we say of certain officious persons making use of their position, when I announced that the famine was taking its toll on the performance of children at school. I backed up the announcement with examples of cases reported by the teachers including for example that of a child whose father told him at lunchtime to get a particular kind of clay from the bottom of the well, in order to soothe his hunger whilst the family searched for something else for him to eat.

This simple announcement in the media led to me being detained arbitrarily for 38 days by the State General Security Service.

The regional governor presented the situation as an insult orchestrated by opponents of the regime. He organised false depictions in the media followed by a destructive smear campaign to traumatise my relatives and colleagues. One civil society organisation was even pushed into disseminating the false version at an international level.

Front Line Defenders wrote directly to the President of the Republic and this was relayed by the local media and very actively on the internet. Their intervention helped to calm the situation considerably.

Despite this, the persecution continued. My wife and I were subjected to a series of hearings by the judicial police and humiliating tests at the official maternity facilities, in order to prove that our twins, who had been born at these facilities in Niger, were not babies that had been bought in Nigeria.

Faced with this harassment, I resisted by adopting the stance cited by HASSAN II, which says, 'do not waste your time putting forward arguments in good faith to those who are of bad faith'.

In spite of maintaining our version of events, 17 months later, the Interior Minister lifted the suspension and five days later handed down a new, more serious sanction, for 'actions compromising the public order' because we had written that he did not deserve to be thanked after all the harm he had caused.

* Volunteers for Educational Integration Kande Ni Bayra

M. Millions (anonymous) Independent human rights defender

Following the post-election violence in Nigeria in 2011, I started working as a human rights defender (HRD). During the protests, authorities arrested, detained and tortured the youths demonstrating against the election results. The extent of the violations by the government led me to personally visit and interview the victims. I reported the violations on seven radio stations and in truth, I did not know how or where I should report, but I believed that through the media, somehow my voice and the voices of the victims could be heard.

At present in Nigeria, the status of a HRD is one of vulnerability with varying degrees of threat from both state actors and non-state actors. Numerous videos released by the militant Islamic group *Boko Haram* have revealed its hatred for HRDs. HRDs also face harassment, arbitrary detention, defamation campaigns and torture at the hands of government security agencies who portray the work of HRDs as 'terrorist sympathisers'.

I have been harassed by security agencies, particularly the joint task force that monitors borders and check points. On two occasions, I was stopped and asked to open my laptop. They opened all my documents, collected my ID card and searched my bag. When they found nothing incriminating, one of them accused me of being a sympathiser of *Boko Haram*, and looking to destabilise the government. He said that we HRDs lied to the world about the government and that we are loyal to foreign organisations like Amnesty International. He also told me they are watching me.

Two of my colleagues were also detained without charge, abused and tortured in a Nigerian police station. At the time I shared a report on their assault with *Front Line Defenders* and

thank God for their commitments to HRDs as within 24 hours, a statement had been issued to the Nigerian authorities. My colleagues were later released with an apology from the police authorities and all the damage to their phones and laptop covered.

Many Nigerians have never been taught their basic human rights and the government takes advantage of the lack of awareness that permeates Nigerian society to violate rights with impunity and to stigmatise HRDs.

Educating the next generation of Nigerian HRDs is a critical step, but it has to be supported by infrastructure, technology and the legitimisation of civil society organisations (CSOs). The government agencies view HRDs and CSOs as local entities, denying them access to Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps and detention centres. These are often the sites of the most grave human rights violations and it is therefore critical that monitors and defenders are permitted access. Building legitimacy for our work globally is key to facilitating increased access and the ability to continue fighting for human rights.

If government security forces are allowed to perpetrate human rights abuses with impunity under the guise of 'counter terrorism', Nigerians will continue to suffer regardless of attacks by *Boko Haram*. We need international organisations and media outlets to work with HRDs to tell the stories of those persecuted by the government – not just the stories of violence and terror inflicted by groups like *Boko Haram*. The more the government violations are publicised, the better those of us on the ground can advocate for victims and build a stronger, more stable country, free from all forms of terror.



MANY NIGERIANS HAVE NEVER BEEN TAUGHT THEIR BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE GOVERNMENT TAKES ADVANTAGE OF THE LACK OF AWARENESS THAT PERMEATES NIGERIAN SOCIETY TO VIOLATE RIGHTS WITH IMPUNITY AND TO STIGMATISE HRDS.

Sardar Mushtaq Gill

LEAD



I AM OFTEN ANXIOUS AND TERRIFIED WHEN I RECEIVE A PHONE CALL FROM MY FAMILY: AT ONCE I THINK THAT THE CALL IS ABOUT SOMETHING BAD THAT HAS HAPPENED.

The day I pledged to work to end human rights violations and defend the victims of such violations for peaceful Pakistan was in May 2005. I was at home and heard some noise on the street which was crowded by a charged Muslim mob who wanted to kill a neighbour accused of blasphemy. I intervened and tried to rescue him from the mob. In return I was also beaten but thankfully I was successful in saving the accused professor's life.

In 2007, I received a letter threatening me 'to convert to Islam or die' because I dared to shelter Martha Bibi, a woman who was accused of blasphemy in January 2007. In 2013, I received an email with a death threat from Tehrik Namos Rasalat.

In June 2013, I was held at gunpoint by three armed men on the highway who threatened me with dire consequences because of my work and in particular my work defending Christian women who were beaten and disrobed.

In July 2013 six members of the extremist group *Ahle Sunnat Wal Jammāt* came looking for me at my home and they even searched my relatives' homes for me. They also published a banner against me.

In November 2013, some unknown men fired a shot on the street outside my home as an act of intimidation but at that moment I was not at home. I remained, along with my family, in hiding at the time.

In August 2014, my home was shot at by three men whilst I was entering the house and

my younger brother stood outside with two friends. A neighbour was injured in the attack and the shooters remain unidentified.

On 1 April 2015 at 12:45pm threats were made against my brother, Pervaiz Gill, and on the same day my brother suffered a bullet wound to his lower back and was rushed to hospital in Lahore for treatment.

On 19 October 2015 at 10:50am I received a warning call threatening me to stop highlighting issues concerning the religious discrimination of Christians and the blasphemy laws, calling me 'anti-Islamic and anti-government'.

On 28 October 2015 Aslam Masih, a volunteer field co-ordinator with LEAD was shot and both his legs were injured due to his affiliation with the work of LEAD.

It is becoming more and more difficult for me to trust anyone. I can not even trust my own relatives.

I am often anxious and terrified when I receive a phone call from my family; at once I think that the call is about something bad that has happened. While the threat is invisible, it is combined with a feeling of powerlessness, and often leads to bouts of extreme fear.

In spite of the threats to my life, the work will continue because, as a defenceless defender, I have Front Line Defenders.

Gustaf Kawer Lawyer

I am a lawyer from Papua. In 2002 I began my human rights work when I joined *Legal Aid Papua* in 2002. Later, in 2008, I joined the *Civil Society Coalition for the Enactment of Law and Human Rights*, a coalition that consists of NGO activists, lawyers and church activists in Papua. I am a Litigation Coordinator with the Coalition, working with both national and international NGOs.

Our advocacy for Papuans is related to the demands of the people in Papua who wish to separate from Indonesia as a result of mass human rights violations and discrimination. The main issue of Papua dates back to the integration history of Papua to Indonesia in July 1969 – a process that is believed to have been undemocratic and not in accordance with International Law.

The Coalition has handled many cases of violence towards Papuans, including three big cases: 1. human rights violence in Abepura, Wasior and Wamena, 2. a case of 90 political prisoners whose right to freedom of expression was violated by the State, and 3. six cases of violence conducted by police and military.

As a result of the work of the Coalition, people's access to pursue justice which was not available to them beforehand is now available. There is also documentation on the violations and there is a network of victims established.

In doing advocacy work, I have personally faced a lot of challenges, both physical and psychological, including but not limited to;

- Stigma – my advocacy work is considered as part of the fight to support the movement to separate from Indonesia.
- Threats and intimidation – my family and I have received many threats, both directly and indirectly. My activities are monitored by intelligence and the vehicle I use was

stolen. I received intimidation threats during a trial process and I was denied the right to defend my client as I was considered to be disturbing the legal process.

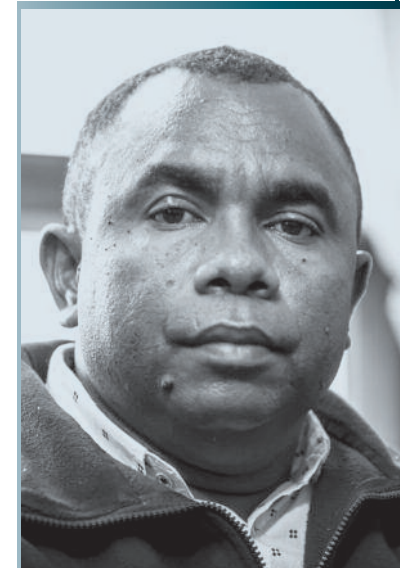
- Criminalisation – I was reported to the police twice with the accusation of opposing the ruler while I was defending my client. Due to this accusation and to avoid prison, I temporarily relocated from Papua to a safer place and only returned to Papua when the accusation was withdrawn.

To improve the safety of human rights defenders in Papua there is a need for the following;

- Oversight of the violations of human rights committed by the state.
- The establishment of local, national and international networks which work continuously to advocate for HRDs who are at risk and in dangerous situations.
- Support is needed for HRDs and their families when they are doing their job (safe housing, safe communication, insurance to cover healthcare, including provisions for mental health).
- Proactive steps for temporary relocation for HRDs in danger to an area or even another state need to be considered. Temporary relocation for the family who are also in the dangerous situation should also be available.
- There should be an emergency fund made available to families and HRDs in times of escalated risk.

Reviewing all the human rights cases mentioned above, I believe the advocacy for civil society, as well as protection for the HRDs, are the two essential elements.

Protection for HRDs can be done by pushing regulation, establishing advocacy networks for HRDs, as well as increasing the protection afforded the families and HRDs when they are in dangerous situations.



I RECEIVED INTIMIDATION THREATS DURING A TRIAL PROCESS AND I WAS DENIED THE RIGHT TO DEFEND MY CLIENT AS I WAS CONSIDERED TO BE DISTURBING THE LEGAL PROCESS.

Vennel Chenfoo Panalipdan Mindanao Youth



SURVEILLANCE OF OUR OFFICE AND MY HOME HAS BECOME COMMONPLACE. UNIDENTIFIED MEN ASK FOR MY WHEREABOUTS. I RECEIVE THREATENING MESSAGES FROM UNKNOWN NUMBERS AND ON MY SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS.

Just recently I journeyed 1,000km with 700 Indigenous leaders and advocates in a protest caravan that aimed to bring our issues from the southern part of the Philippines to the seat of our government, which has long been neglecting us. I represented Panalipdan Mindanao Youth (Defend Mindanao Youth). We advocate for environmental protection and peoples' land rights. We fight against the plunder of our environment – the plunder by large-scale, foreign-owned mining operations, logging companies, mega dams and the expansion of monocrop plantations.

As a youth leader, I am not spared from the risks and threats that human rights defenders in our country are subjected to. Surveillance of our office and my home has become commonplace. Unidentified men ask for my whereabouts. I receive threatening messages from unknown numbers and on my social media accounts. Clearly they are trying to silence me.

However, more than the personal risks that I face, I am more concerned about the safety and well-being of the Indigenous communities who are located in remote areas. I have worked with them, lived with them, marched on the streets with them. I have seen how they have fought so hard to keep the piece of land that has been passed to their care by their forefathers – the land that is their life. My experience pales in comparison to their struggles.

At least 144 extrajudicial killings of activists and human rights defenders have been recorded since our current president, Benigno Aquino III, assumed office. Out of this number, 71 were Indigenous leaders... and the number is growing.

Just this September, an executive director of a school for Indigenous children was brutally murdered by a state-backed paramilitary group. His hands were tied behind his back and his throat was slit open. He was slaughtered like a wild boar. After killing him, his assailants gathered the community members. Two of the community leaders were then gunned down in front of the community – in front of relatives, in front of children. Everyone was then threatened that if they did not leave the community, they would suffer the same fate.

The community had long been resisting the plunder of their environment. Instead of accepting the promise of money from mining companies that will supposedly improve their economic situation, the community supported the establishment of the alternative learning school. They sent their children there, believing that education would be their way to a better future – education that is crafted from their culture, from their traditions, from their connection with their ancestral land. They wanted to educate the future generation so that they can decide their own form of development. And for this they are being killed.

But despite the killings, they have not backed down. So neither will I.

Let our gathering here today be a sign of solidarity against those who have oppressed us. Let us all remember those who gave up their lives so that others may live. Let them serve as inspiration for all of us to keep our firm resolve to continue no matter what.

Kenita Placide

United and Strong Inc, CariFLAGS and ILGA Women Secretariat

Hello colleagues and friends. I serve as the Eastern Caribbean Coordinator of the Caribbean Forum for Liberation and Acceptance of Genders and Sexualities, the ILGA Women's Secretariat Representative and the Executive Director of United and Strong Inc, a human rights LGBT organisation dedicated to representing the voice of the voiceless, working to secure equality, access and justice for vulnerable communities.

Today I pay tribute to the late Dr. Robert Carr as one of those whose life he impacted. Dr. Carr had a clear vision for what was needed – a regional, civil society network of advocates and service providers from the most vulnerable populations, able to drive lobbying and advocacy for appropriate policy, legislative and service delivery changes; a vision for which he took the lead in actioning.

For over 23 years I have volunteered in various capacities and just over 5 years ago I took the lead in LGBTQI community building and mobilising. I am deeply invested in the capacity building and empowerment of people, particularly LGBTQI people, who are often denied access based on negative perceptions.

As a black non-conforming feminist, the last of my mother's 5 girls and last of my father's 2 girls, it took me many years to be able to ask for help and to seek answers for the deepest loss in my life – that of my father to suicide. To me, every day is a struggle to live and to continue finding the positive things in life to call worthwhile. I stand before you all as a survivor of depression, several suicide attempts and my dark imagination and thoughts. I stand before you despite facing threats to my community, my advocacy and my life. The struggle is not over. My passion and commitment to social justice has made me what some may call aggressive or combative, but what others call determined and brave.

I have been very lucky in aligning myself with positive people who bring out the best in me. From family to lovers, friends, colleagues and working partners, I have been well supported, despite the negatives that sometimes come from similar sources. Today, being here has allowed me to open yet another circle and I am fortunate to be accepted into the family of Front Line Defenders.

My heart however remains with my baby, my adopted child, United and Strong Inc. Founded in 2000 and registered in November 2005, United and Strong Inc. is a human rights NGO that seeks to achieve recognition of the human rights of marginalised groups on Saint Lucia with a focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) people. In a country that still criminalises same sex intimacy and where discrimination against LGBTQI persons remains high, the organisation has struggled to thrive. From the fear of opening an office, to finally opening an office and then having it burnt flat. To rebuilding, then having your new space vandalised, then burglarised, to being colourfully decorated for our fifteenth anniversary while I stand safely before you here today.

We have challenged social norms and pushed through media advocacy, policy advocacy, documentation, capacity building, training and sensitisation nationally. We have also extended our work to regional partners. Among our flagship events are local and regional human rights sensitisation projects with police, sensitisation on LGBTQI issues and terminology with health workers and the Caribbean Women and Sexuality Diversity Conference (CWSDC). I recognise as an embodied female, my passion for the work also challenges patriarchy and the dominance of male-led LGBTQI organisations in the Caribbean region, especially with a growing cohort of females empowered to lead. The vision remains however, a united and strong front line of LGBTQI human rights defenders, standing shoulder to shoulder to stem the tide that erodes our freedoms.

The late Dr Robert Carr championed the vision, reaching out to colleagues in Jamaica, Trinidad, Saint Lucia and beyond to start the regional conversation. I see myself as a champion of this era, carrying the touch, soon to be passed on.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony, to listen to the experiences of others, to learn more during the clinics, to network, reunite and build new family, during this Eighth Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders. I promise to stand with you, as you have with me, in the promotion of education, acceptance and love for all human beings.



MY PASSION AND COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE HAS MADE ME WHAT SOME MAY CALL AGGRESSIVE OR COMBATIVE. BUT WHAT OTHERS CALL DETERMINED AND BRAVE.

Guleid Ahmed Jama Human Rights Centre



THE ABSENCE OF INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION LIMITS THE OPPORTUNITIES WHEREBY SOMALILANDERS CAN INVOKE THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS.

I am a citizen of a country called Somaliland which is located in the Horn of Africa. Somaliland declared independence from the Somali Republic on 18 May 1991, annulling the union between Somaliland and Somalia which was formed in July 1960 when the formed Somali Republic gained independence from Britain and Italy, respectively. Since then, Somaliland has been a stable, but unrecognised country. Before its declaration of independence, Somaliland was under harsh military rule for 21 years (from 1969 to 1991). The absence of international recognition limits the opportunities whereby Somalilanders can invoke the regional and international human rights mechanisms. Somaliland is not, for example, part of any treaty.

Although a new constitution with a bill of rights was approved by referendum in 2001, the dominance of a culture of military control and authoritarianism is still prevalent. State institutions have not been reformed to become compatible with the demands of the constitution. Thus, oppressive institutions that do not respect human rights remain in place. Restrictive and oppressive laws are applied to human rights defenders. Human rights defenders, journalists and whistle blowers are arrested, beaten and prosecuted. Media houses critical of the government are shut down. In the last two years, for example, four newspapers have been closed – namely *Haatuf*, *Hubaal*, *Somalilandimes* and the *Independent*. *Haatuf* continues to be closed down illegally. Prominent journalists have been arrested and prosecuted. The judiciary branch and law enforcement agencies are not

independent from the government. This affords the authorities excessive powers which they abuse and use arbitrarily. The harassment, detention and beating of journalists and human rights defenders continues unabated. It is unacceptable as well as illegal and should be brought to an end.

Human rights defenders have also faced harassment and/or arbitrary arrest by the authorities. I was arrested in April 2015 after I gave a radio interview where I raised concerns about legal due process in death penalty cases. I was charged with instigating disobedience of the law, subversive or anti-national propaganda, and publication or circulation of false and exaggerated or tendentious news capable of disturbing public order. I was released on bail one month later.

The work of human rights is on the one hand risky, hard and painful, and on the other hand life-saving and empowering. Because we are challenging the most powerful people in any country, human rights defenders around the world are targeted and persecuted. Gathering together at this invaluable Dublin Platform gives us energy, hope and commitment. It shows that we have brothers and sisters who, despite being separated by borders, oceans and cultural differences, still have the same goal. We are all headed in the one direction. It is one of the rare moments we feel that we are connected to broader groups of people with same vision and commitment.

Anwar Al-Bunni

President of the Syrian Centre for Legal Studies and Research

My personal experience, with five years imprisonment from May 2006 to May 2011, and the experience of my small family who collectively have suffered over 70 years of incarceration during the reign of the Assads (father and son) from 1977, may no longer be as significant in view of the horror of the atrocities and abuses that we have documented in the recent 5 years and continue to document.

Testimonies detailing what the Syrian people have suffered, and continue to suffer. Testimonies of arrests; deaths under torture; destruction of homes with women, children and civilians inside by barrel bombs and fighter jets; the use of chemical weapons; the use of starvation as a weapon against civilians in order to impose a siege on specific towns and areas. All this and more have become a significant concern of Syrian activists who are still subjected to the worst abuses by all sides in Syria.

Khalil Maatouk, along with dozens of other lawyers, remain detained by the Syrian regime with no news as to their whereabouts or health. Open software designer Bassel Khartabil and thousands of doctors, human rights defenders, civil society figures and entire families with their children are being held in the regime's prisons. Lawyers Razan Zaitouneh and Nazem Hamadi, along with their colleagues, remain abducted over a year after they were taken by an armed group in Duma. Lawyer Abdullah Al-Khalil was kidnapped over two years ago by an Islamic armed group. There has been no news of their whereabouts or health.

The conditions for those with the regime's prison system is unimaginable. For years the detainees are denied contact with the outside world. They are tortured badly, sometimes to the point of death. They are deprived of medical assistance. They are being deliberately starved. Large number of them are crammed in narrow prison cells so that they are forced

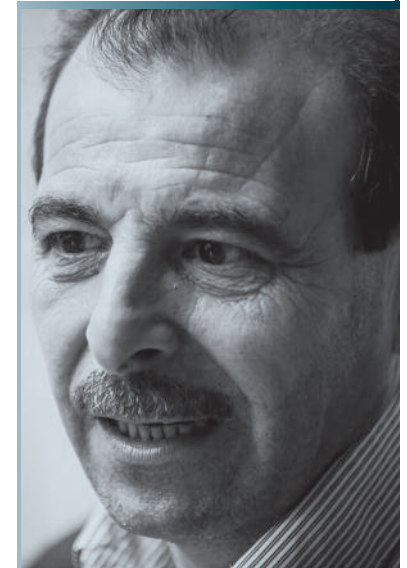
to stand for hours without a chance to sit down. These conditions combined have led to the death of more than 50,000 prisoners in regime's custody to date.

Furthermore, detainees have also been executed by guards when there is a threat, or when the regime is pulling out of an area. This extermination was documented in the city of Idleb where detainees were shot in their cells before the guards fled the prison. There have also been reports of medical staff at military hospitals executing detainees by lethal injection.

As human rights defenders it is not the repression, imprisonment and torture that we have suffered that counts, but what we have seen and documented. The crimes against humanity, the war crimes committed and still being committed while the world looks on.

Our experience has revealed to the world that the human rights voice is weak and frayed when it comes to second countries and their economic and political interests. This fact has led to an increased distrust in the work of human rights organisations and a questioning of their usefulness.

We need to create new mechanisms for human rights organisations, so that they are not limited to documenting, and issuing appeals and statements. They need to have the capacity to further influence change, bring respect for human rights principles, hold violators responsible and restore confidence in the work of human rights organisations. For this we have created the Syrian Court for the Prevention of Impunity, which I hope will evolve to include all the areas that are lacking fair and impartial judiciaries and where impunity currently prevails.



THIS EXTERMINATION WAS DOCUMENTED IN THE CITY OF IDLEB WHERE DETAINEES WERE SHOT IN THEIR CELLS BEFORE THE GUARDS FLED THE PRISON.

Anchana Heemmina Duayjai Group



THE FOURTH TIME WE WERE THREATENED AFTER WE COMPLAINED ABOUT THE MILITARY'S EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE. IN RESPONSE THEY SENT THREE CARS OF ARMED SOLDIERS TO INTIMIDATE US FOUR OR FIVE TIMES.

Deep southern Thailand is a conflict area where armed groups of ethnic Malay Muslims have waged an extended struggle for freedom from Thai rule. The area covers the present-day southernmost Thai provinces of Pattani (Patani), Yala, Narathiwat and four districts in Songkhla province.

Over 6,000 people died and more than 10,000 were injured between 2004 and 2014 in an ethnic separatist insurgency. The insurgency has been taken over by hard-line jihadis who target both the Thai Buddhist minority and local moderate Muslims or Muslims who support the government.

Duayjai Group, based in Songkhla province, was established on 23 January 2010 by my sister Pattama and me, Anchana Heemmina, after Pattama's husband was imprisoned (later acquitted) on national security-related charges. After that, Pattama and I began to meet other families of detainees in the region. Duayjai Group found that people in villages were suffering from loopholes in the judicial process such as language differences (people in the deep south use Malay while the official language is Thai), lack of knowledge of the justice system and judicial process, etc. Many of the detainees were later proven to be innocent and acquitted.

The overall aim of Duayjai Group is to stop the vicious, violent cycle that is caused by the government's injustice. My team and I work with detainees and their families to increase their access to justice despite differences in nationality, religion, language and knowledge. We work against torture under the Martial Law which allows detention for more than 30 days without charge. We also work on protecting youths from being exploited by both the military and the insurgency and ensure that they are protected by the law. This is because

under the Martial Law, Malay Muslim youths can be detained in a regular prison despite the international code that protects them. Some detained youths we have worked with have had their rights violated during detention. For example, some have been imprisoned alone with the lights constantly on and some have been imprisoned in a stable.

The officials first threatened us (that we would be sued for defamation) when we released a statement on torture in 2011. The second time we were threatened was when we represented a number of villagers protesting against military corruption. On this occasion some families were visited and threatened by officials at their homes. The third time, the military forced us to retract our Facebook post demanding compensation from the authorities and threatened to sue us. The fourth time we were threatened after we complained about the military's excessive use of force. In response they sent three cars of armed soldiers to intimidate us four or five times.

The military has repeatedly contacted us through other NGOs to pressure us to stop reporting human rights issues in conferences. We have been asked to stop reporting on sensitive issues such as the murder of monks and women which cannot be easily defined as ordinary crimes or insurgency-related crimes.

Most recently, on 5 November 2015, after releasing an article on military threats, a smear campaign was launched against us.

Regardless of how many times our work has been threatened, it will never discourage me from working to protecting others who face similar threats and to promote peace.

Lina Ben Mhenni

Independent human rights defender and blogger

We all agree that human rights are universally applicable, and should be non-negotiable, unlimited and inviolable.

We all readily make sacrifices in order to defend international human rights. We are prepared to fight so that torture and all other cruel, inhumane and degrading activities eventually come to an end.

We have all certainly experienced different types of abuse, be it directly or indirectly. We all claim that it is useful and absolutely necessary to uncover the truth, to avoid repeating history and to draw lessons from the past.

We all think that it is crucial the perpetrators of those crimes are judged and held accountable for their crimes.

I have on many different occasions personally suffered cruel, inhuman and degrading behaviour that has physically and mentally scarred me.

In addition to that, I received an official death threat and have lived with 'police surveillance' for over two years at this point.

However, this has not prevented me from feeling irritable and uncomfortable every time I get the impression that I am being treated like a victim.

It is true that when an individual is alone, isolated and attacked from all sides, at the mercy of state representatives who mistreat and bully them at their whim that it seems completely normal that they should be perceived and treated like the 'victim'.

However, is it not also the case that many of those who suffer abuse from government agents do not consider themselves victims under any circumstance and absolutely do not want to be referred to as such?

In fact many of the individuals targeted by abuse have voluntarily, deliberately and

conscientiously chosen to stand up to and consequently suffer these gross human rights violations.

Many of these individuals have in fact made the choice to express and mobilise themselves and to fight for their values, their principles and rights. They end up paying the price in sacrifices, and sometimes even die in order to defend their beliefs.

Let us therefore discuss the best strategies that will help us to more efficiently defend international human rights. Let us carve out appropriate avenues for protecting human rights defenders, but let us also give credit where credit is due; May we grant activists the credit they deserve by recognising their courage, altruism and heroism. Let us together find new ways of referring to them.

Let us stress that humanity needs and will always need people like that, both men and women alike. People who are prepared to make sacrifices in order to defend their intrinsic human rights and who in doing so, tackle the injustices of this world!

Let us denounce inhumane and criminal practices. However, let us not forget that there are men and women who are prepared to voluntarily expose themselves to these cruelties with the intention of putting an end to it all!

Let us fight against torture and violence with all our might. However, let us publicly honour those that have been subjected to violence, and those that are prepared to face and those who will face violent crimes by describing them as heroes rather than victims.

Let me finally stress that this also applies to individuals that have not been subjected to torture as a result of their opinions or human rights activities. This also applies to individuals that are tortured for having committed or for purportedly having committed offences and common crimes, and to those suffering arbitrary and coincidental abuses for supposed infractions. I have on many occasions encountered people that have difficulties accepting that they are pitied and treated with benevolence. What they expect of us instead is our support, our advice and our encouragement.



MAY WE GRANT ACTIVISTS THE CREDIT THEY DESERVE BY RECOGNISING THEIR COURAGE, ALTRUISM AND HEROISM.

Can Atalay Social Rights Association



WITH THE RECENT AMENDMENTS IN LAW, CITIZENS' RIGHTS ARE NO LONGER A CONCERN BUT RATHER THE OBLIGATIONS OF CITIZENS WHILE THE PUBLIC AGENCIES ARE EQUIPPED WITH ABSOLUTE POWERS OF DISCRETION.

In the history of the country, Turkey is at one of its most critical junctures.

While the 'Kurdish Rebellion' has reached an era of maturity after almost forty years, it seems that the younger generations of the Kurdish population have advanced in their human rights struggle in the political arena. They have become a strong social and political movement, garnering almost 15% of the votes in the June 2015 general elections. Now, Kurdish citizens are demanding their collective rights not only from the mountains but from Ankara, in the parliament.

Meanwhile, the government has taken every opportunity to apply neoliberal policies while mistreating human rights. With the recent amendments in law, citizens' rights are no longer a concern but rather the obligations of citizens while the public agencies are equipped with absolute powers of discretion. This is not only because of one man who sees red and whose ultimate goal is to be the president of a 'one-man Sunni-Muslim nation' regime in Turkey and the Middle East. It is the ideology that creates and nurtures such conditions. It is the systematic, constant violations of this authoritarian neoliberal ideology and fortified state apparatus against our rights and freedoms.

It is very likely that for the first time in the history of the Republic, citizens of Turkey are

feeling that protection and improvement of their rights are only possible with their direct intervention and involvement in the decision-making procedures. Even for us, it is hard to believe that the current government could condone the recent attacks such as the Ankara massacre on 10 October 2015 while they still maintain their careless attempts of so-called 'bringing a new order to Middle East', aligned with the gangster jihadists.

Indeed, every misdeed cannot be named as fascism. However, the government's alignment with the gangster jihadists; taking control of the state apparatus as a one man party to shape the society from top to bottom; mobilisation of the traditional right-wing crowds; these all starkly depict what we are facing now: ordinary fascism.

Currently, the people of Turkey understand the importance of democratic rights, separation of powers, right to vote and secularism. It is clear that this bitter and bloody cycle needs to be altered by reforms, by socialisation and by ecologisation of the struggle for human rights.

Within this deep-seated destruction; not of words but of deeds, we need to cease this depredation of urban and environmental commons, set forth unified reforms on rights to education and health and to eradicate the barriers to an organised labour force. Otherwise, it seems, it is not going to be possible for us to downgrade this authoritarian regime.

Sandra Ntebi

National LGBT Security Committee

My name is Sandra Ntebi and I am a Ugandan citizen from the capital city Kampala. I work at the school of Law Makerere University as a part time researcher and full time LGBT activist as well as human rights defender. I have been part of this movement in Uganda for as long as its birth and I am among the few who are still strong enough to fight for our rights despite the environment and the society in which we are living.

In Uganda it is illegal to stand for gay rights. It is a taboo subject and said to be unnatural. Though I have both parents, neither of them supports me directly. I have been independent since I left university, struggling with jobs here and there because of my sexuality and being out and loud. I have engaged in different relationships but most people think that I am too into LGBT activism and fear that they might also be outed.

Despite the laws, I still cannot say that Uganda is the worst place to be gay. However, security starts with you. I have no permanent place of residence for fear of being attacked. Even still, moving from one place to another is also taboo and causes insecurity. I must therefore live an expensive life, as I continuously move from one place to another. Furthermore, I cannot use public means of transport for fear of being attacked.

On 25 October, as I was preparing for my trip to Dublin there was an attack by a mob. Luckily, I escaped, though my car was damaged. I cannot say a lot about this now, but I will share more when given the chance while in Dublin.



I HAVE ENGAGED IN DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS BUT MOST PEOPLE THINK THAT I AM TOO INTO LGBT ACTIVISM AND FEAR THAT THEY MIGHT ALSO BE OUTED.

Oleksandra Matviychuk Euromaidan SOS Initiative



MURDER. ABDUCTION. TORTURE.
SEXUAL VIOLENCE. THE USE OF THE
CIVILIAN POPULATION AS 'HUMAN
SHIELDS'. POLITICALLY MOTIVATED
PROSECUTIONS IN OCCUPIED
TERRITORIES – ALL OF THIS HAS
BECOME OUR DAILY REALITY.

I am representing the civil initiative *Euromaidan SOS* that was created in response to the brutal actions by authorities while dispersing a peaceful student protest in November 2013. At that time we united to provide free legal aid to the students. We didn't expect hundreds and hundreds of people who had been arrested, beaten, subjected to torture, accused on trumped-up criminal charges across Ukraine and the relatives of missing and killed protesters to pass through our doors. It only became possible when thousands of ordinary people and several hundred lawyers worked around the clock and joined our initiative.

We were compelled to change the methods of our activities in February 2014. From the 18 – 20 February there were many messages to our hotline saying that unarmed protesters were being shot on the Maidan (central square in the capital, Kiev). Our volunteers went to the temples, mortuaries and the other places that the victims were being brought. We wanted to write down the names of those who had been killed by Victor Yanukovych's regime as we didn't know what could happen to us tomorrow.

We were reoriented on documenting crimes and we continue to be engaged in this activity after the *Revolution of Dignity*. After collapse of the authoritarian regime and in order to stop democratic transformations in Ukraine, Russia occupied the Crimea and unleashed hybrid war in Donbas. Officially more than eight thousand people, seven thousand of whom were peaceful civilians, have lost their lives. Tens of thousands have been wounded and approximately two million have been forced to leave their homes.

Murder, abduction, torture, sexual violence, the use of the civilian population as 'human shields', politically motivated prosecutions in occupied territories – all of this has become our daily reality. In parallel, we also have to fight to implement reforms within the spheres of the police, the courts and the prosecutor's offices in order to prevent the Ukrainian authorities from shooting unarmed protesters.

In this regard, I would like to share these lessons that have been learnt due to these events:

1. In many countries around the world human rights activists do not work in the sphere of human rights protection. Human rights activists fight every day for human rights. Often it seems almost hopeless. However, we should do our work honestly. The results of our efforts can sometimes be achieved unexpectedly.
2. When people achieve the recognition of human rights and freedoms from authorities, often in practice it means only the one thing. Civil society needs to be reinforced to monitor the freedom of association, the right to a fair trial, civil society oversight of police etc. Therefore, these human rights activists have simply won new tasks for themselves.
3. Destiny never sends us difficulties that we cannot overcome. We do not choose the time when we come to this world nor the country we are born into. However, we always have a choice – to be decent people or to be scoundrels.

Charlene Carruthers Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100)

The conditions of Black people in America are as diverse as the conditions of the African diaspora. The tie that binds us is the reality that our bodies are constantly at risk of being violated by state supported actors and systems. Black people who are poor, women, LGBTQ and gender non-conforming, currently or formerly incarcerated, undocumented and/or differently-abled are among those who are particularly vulnerable.

To be Black in America is connected to what it means to be Black in Palestine, in Cuba, and in France. Our stories are not the same, yet they are deeply connected. Just last week I, along with over 66 young activists, participated in a mass civil disobedience to shut down the International Association of Chiefs of Police Conference in Chicago. We called on local governments to de-fund the police and invest in the futures of Black people in the United States.

Over 14,000 law enforcement agents, police chiefs and supports from around the world convened to share best practices, which for us translates into how they can strengthen repressive and violent tactics worldwide. They convened in a place where the Chicago Police Department receives 40% of the city's budget, this amounts to about \$4 million a day spent on things that do not keep us safe.

According to the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, a Black person is killed by a police officer, security officer or self-appointed vigilante every 28 hours in the United States of America.

Two years ago, the city of Chicago closed over 50 public schools in one of the nation's largest public school systems, primarily impacting Black students. I grew up on the Southside of Chicago and attended public schools that prepared me to be the leader I am today. Too many of our children today do not have that same opportunity and investment in their futures. Instead, local, state and federal governments are investing in policing, hyper-surveillance and mass incarceration.

America is full of young, Black human rights defenders. Far too many Black people are only able to fight this battle through the fact that they have chosen to survive. Their work goes unnoticed and unvalued. They are the young Black people who set stores and gas stations on fire; they are people who demand to receive a fair wage for their hard work; they are the ones who refuse to die in prison cells, lose all dignity in welfare offices, and do not give up in the wake of their child or partner being gunned down in the streets by a neighbour or by a police officer.

I am one of many who recognise that our survival was never guaranteed and that we have to take up the long-fight to not only win our liberation, but to also build institutions to protect and secure it.

Our work continues because we want to live in a world where Black people are not automatically deemed less than full human beings. We want to live in a world where our lives are protected, valued and one where we are encouraged and allowed to flourish. Black community organising is necessary because this reality is unacceptable and we believe that there is a different and better way forward.



A BLACK PERSON IS KILLED BY A POLICE OFFICER, SECURITY OFFICER, OR SELF-APPOINTED VIGILANTE EVERY 28 HOURS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Andrés Colmenárez FUNPAZ



THE DEFAMATION CAMPAIGNS BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AGAINST DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA, WHICH ARE ECHOED IN THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF PUBLIC MEDIA, HAVE BEEN SYSTEMATIC AND TARGET VARIOUS GROUPS DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS.

For more than ten years the work of human rights defenders has been a high-risk occupation in Venezuela, due to actions carried out by the national government since the epoch of Hugo Chávez as president. However, since Nicolás Maduro came to power these risks and threats have only increased so that, as of October 2015, the IACHR had granted ten sets of precautionary protection measures to defenders. Despite these measures however, and the exhortations of the different UN human rights committees, the state is not complying with its constitutional and international obligations to guarantee the protection of defenders and a secure environment for their work.

As a consequence, the practices of stigmatisation, intimidation and reprisals which are carried out by or permitted by government officials, whilst abusing their authority and the media, are dehumanising and causing damage to the credibility of defenders. They are violating their right to mental and moral integrity, and generating a climate of hostility against them which hinders the legitimate development of their work, inhibits victims from denouncing crimes and seeking assistance, as well as exposing them to the violence and insecurity which exists in the country.

Those responsible for all of these attacks on defenders, through action or omission, form part of the National Executive, the Legislative Power, the State Attorney's Office, the Ombudsman and the Supreme Court.

The organisations which are constantly singled out and criminalised in Venezuela include COFAVIC, PROVEA, Espacio Público, Venezuelan Prison Observatory, A Window To Liberty,

CODEVIDA, FUNPAZ, Human Rights Observatory of The University of The Andes, Transparency Venezuela, Penal Forum Venezuela, Un Mundo Sin Mordaza (A World Without Gagging), MOVICOIN and The LGBTI Network of Venezuela. In other states in the country, defenders from Aragua, Barinas and Lara report having been victims of vigilance, persecution and death threats, by both state security forces and armed civilians.

Similarly, the case of Víctor Martínez, in Lara State, has been repeatedly denounced: his son Mijail, also a human rights defender, was assassinated in 2011, and he himself has been the victim of three assassination attempts.

The defamation campaigns by government officials against defenders in Venezuela, which are echoed in the national system of public media, have been systematic and target various groups defending human rights. The negative labels of "escuálidos"*, "corrupt", "unpatriotic", and "lackeys of the empire", have been frequently used in these campaigns, and also directed in some cases at representatives of the universal and inter-American systems of human rights.

Non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations are championing the struggle for human rights in Venezuela, all the while remembering that silencing the voice of a defender is silencing the voice of the victim.

* Literally translates from Spanish to English as 'skinny' or 'emaciated'. This negative label was used during the Chávez administration to describe members of the political opposition.

Brahim Sabbar

Association Sahraouie des Victimes des Violations Graves des Droits Humains Commises par l'Etat Marocain*

In the midst of the grave violations perpetrated by the Moroccan State in the years following Spain's withdrawal from Western Sahara I was abducted in 1981 from the city of Dakhla. Then 21 years old, I was detained along side 100s of other disappeared Sahrawis at a secret dungeon location without trial for over ten years. We were tortured, abused, beaten on the soles of the feet, strangled with cloths saturated in urine, hanged by our arms and legs, insulted, sleep deprived and subjected to the electrocution of the sensitive parts of the body. These beating and torture were part of their collective punishment policy. We suffered from malnutrition, lack of medical treatment, there were no sanitary facilities. I remember I once knocked on the cell door asking for help as a comrade was dying, and the guard shouted at me in a threatening tone "Don't knock again unless he is dead!"

In that hidden dungeon, there were more than 300 abducted Sahrawis. Approximately ¼ of the detainees were female. The youngest of the male detainees was 15 years of age, and the youngest of the females, 14 years. There were also older men and women... they had entire families held up there too.

A 1990 Amnesty International report revealed the location and secrets of this dungeon village and talked about hundreds of abducted and missing Sahrawis being held alive despite the Moroccan King's repeated denial. A UN sponsored peace agreement in mid-1991 between Morocco and the Polisario Front expedited the release process for this group, as well as another group being held in Laayoune.

270 of us came out alive, some of whom had been cut off from the outside world for 16 years. We left behind those comrades who had died from torture, malnutrition and lack of treatment.

I had spent ten years and a few months in enforced disappearance without trial. My family thought I had been disappeared and tortured to death as was common in Dakhla at that time. When reunited with them, my mother could not talk because of the severity of the shock and my father seemed far older than his age. I could not distinguish some of my brothers - whom I left when they were very young, they only knew my name and did not recognise me. I had returned from the grave.

Upon my release, I did not feel that I was free. I found myself in a huge prison under constant surveillance by the secret service. Everyone was living in fear. After a tough debate, we

decided to do something to stop this suffering so as not to allow the repeat of such a tragedy. In 1993, two years after our release, Moroccan authorities resumed abducting those who had been released and we came to the conclusion that we should travel and establish communications with Moroccan civil society to expose the regime's atrocities. Moroccan civil society organisations however would not engage with us initially. Only Al-Nashrah (the Bulletin) the Socialist Youth Union newspaper published details of our sufferings without raising the political aspect of the issue.

In 2000 I was arrested in Rabat for taking part in a demonstration that was organised by the Moroccan Association for Human Rights to demand the trial of the perpetrators responsible for abductions. Alongside 36 others, I was sentenced to three months in prison and a fine. A year after the trial, I was retried and acquitted. In 2002, we established a preparatory committee for the victims of serious human rights violations and in 2005 we held a general assembly for our association 'ASVDH', despite a ban by the Moroccan government. Later that year the society headquarters was raided and contents were confiscated.

I was barred from obtaining a passport from 2000 to 2010, and this continued until I started an open hunger strike sit-in. In 2005 and 2006 I was detained many times. Once after an interview with a Moroccan newspaper, where I clearly expressed my views and again after I refused to change my statement in a police report about witnessing comrades being tortured. Instead, they changed my testimony and sentenced me to three and a half years for allegedly assaulting five policemen. I was also accused of inciting riots and affiliation to an unauthorised association. I spent two years in Al-Akhal prison in the occupied Laayoune, eventually securing release for a health condition.

In 2009 during a ceremony for freed prisoners, the Royal Moroccan Gendarmerie physically assaulted me and threatened me with death. In 2010 I organised a visit to the Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria and on my return I was beaten receiving a deep head injury, resulting in a coma.

With persistence, I continue my struggle side by side with my comrades. We struggle for the respect of human rights and to help the victims, support of their demands, and demand a just peace for the Sahrawi people – whose land has been usurped. We struggle for peace to reign in the world and for mankind to enjoy freedom.



I WAS BARRED FROM OBTAINING A PASSPORT FROM 2000 TO 2010. AND THIS CONTINUED UNTIL I STARTED AN OPEN HUNGER STRIKE SIT-IN.

* Sahrawi Association of Victims of Grave Human Rights Violations Committed by the Moroccan State



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JUSTICE WILL NOT COME FROM ABOVE...

BOOK OF TESTIMONIES FROM THE 2015 DUBLIN PLATFORM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

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