

**f Front Line**  
PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

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PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK

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**BOOK OF TESTIMONIES**  
THE FIFTH DUBLIN PLATFORM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

## WHAT DOES FRONT LINE DO?

Front Line 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 aims to address the protection needs identified by defenders themselves.

Front Line seeks to provide rapid and practical support to at-risk human rights defenders, including through:

- international advocacy on behalf of human rights defenders at immediate risk;
- grants to pay for the practical security needs of human rights defenders;
- training and resource materials on security and protection, including digital security;
- rest and respite, including the Front Line Fellowship;
- opportunities for networking and exchange between human rights defenders, including at the biennial Dublin Platform;
- the annual Front Line 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.

In emergency situations, Front Line can facilitate temporary relocation of human rights defenders.

Front Line promotes strengthened international and regional measures to protect human rights defenders including through support for the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. Front Line seeks to promote respect for the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

Front Line has Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

Front Line has Observer Status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Front Line received the 2007 King Baudouin Prize for International Development.



## FRONTLINE TRUSTEES



**Denis O'Brien** (Chairman)  
Denis O'Brien is Chairman of the Digicel Group. Mr O'Brien is one of Ireland's leading

entrepreneurs with extensive investments across several sectors. He founded the Communicorp Group which has a portfolio of media and broadcasting-related companies in Ireland and seven other European countries. In 2000 he established The *Iris O'Brien Foundation* to assist disadvantaged communities in Ireland and internationally.



**Mary Lawlor** (Director)  
Mary Lawlor has been constantly inspired by the work of human rights defenders who put their vision of a civil and just

world for all ahead of their own safety. In 2001 she set up Front Line, the International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders to provide round the clock practical support and deliver fast and effective action on behalf of human rights defenders at risk.



**Hina Jilani** is an internationally known human rights lawyer and advocate for human rights defenders. She was the 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.



**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.



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

European Union.



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

Director of the French section of Amnesty International.



**Noeline Blackwell** is Director of FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres), an independent human rights organisation dedicated to the realisation of equal

access to justice for all.



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



**Maria Mulcahy** was involved with "People in Need" from 1988 – 2000. She was responsible for organising the RTE telethons, which raised

€28 million. She was Director of Fundraising for the 2003 Special Olympics World Games.

## LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## IN MEMORIAM

Sadly, since the Dublin Platform in February two of our friends and fellow human rights defenders, Georges Kanuma from Burundi and Bety Cariño from Mexico have died. Georges died from complications caused by malaria due to the lack of adequate medical facilities. Bety was killed during an armed attack by paramilitaries on an aid convoy in Oaxaca .

Georges Kanuma and Bety Cariño continue to inspire us with the example of their courage and commitment and their refusal to give up.

We pay tribute to them.

This book of testimonies is dedicated to all the human rights defenders around the world who work to keep hope alive – and especially to those human rights defenders who have paid for their courage with their lives.



“TODAY WE WANT TO LIVE ANOTHER HISTORY: WE ARE REBELLING AND WE ARE SAYING ENOUGH IS ENOUGH, TODAY AND HERE WE WANT TO SAY THEY ARE AFRAID OF US BECAUSE WE ARE NOT AFRAID OF THEM, BECAUSE DESPITE THEIR THREATS, DESPITE THEIR SLANDER, DESPITE THEIR HARASSMENT, WE CONTINUE TO WALK TOWARDS A SUN WHICH WE THINK SHINES STRONGLY; WE THINK THE TIME OF THE PEOPLES IS COMING CLOSER, THE TIME OF UNREPPRESSED WOMEN, THE TIME OF THE PEOPLE AT THE BOTTOM.”  
**BETY CARIÑO**



“WHILE I COULD HAVE EITHER CONTINUED MY WORK IN SECRET OR BE A PUBLICLY KNOWN ACTIVIST MY CHOICE WAS SIMPLE. I CHOSE TO BE ACTIVE IN THE PUBLIC EYE AND ALSO STARTED TO OPENLY EXPRESS MY VIEWS IN THE GENERAL MEDIA. HOWEVER, THIS DECISION WAS NOT ALWAYS EASY AS I LOST A LOT OF FRIENDS AS A RESULT. I AM FOREVER GRATEFUL TO GOD THAT MY FAMILY CONTINUE TO SUPPORT ME IN MY MISSION.. I AM NOT GOING TO STOP FIGHTING FOR MY RIGHTS AS SOMEONE WHO IS GAY IN BURUNDI.”  
**GEORGES KANUMA**

## FOREWORD

The Dublin Platform is a special event. It brings together some of the bravest people in the world who every day put their own lives on the line in defence of the rights of others.

The Dublin Platform was established in 2001 as a safe space in which human rights defenders can share experiences, learn from each other and come up with new and more effective strategies to enable them to continue their work without the risk of harassment, intimidation or arrest.

Human rights defenders come from many different countries, cultures and political backgrounds. The one thing they have in common is their commitment to creating more equal and just societies based on the principle of human rights for all.

Human rights defenders could take the easy option, ignore the needs of those around them and focus on making a better life for themselves. Instead they give all their passion, energy and commitment to the struggle for human rights – and for that they pay a heavy price.

They are stigmatised by politicians and in the media. They are labelled as enemies of the state and subjected to threats of imprisonment or assassination. Their families may be at risk and they face being isolated within their communities.

But human rights defenders rise above the pressure and the pain to maintain their vision of a better society and to offer hope to others.

Human rights defenders are the key to the future. It is their peaceful non-violent work for human rights that offers the best hope of dealing with the many ills that beset our societies.

This is why Front Line was founded: to help protect these brave men and women on whom so much depends. This is also why the Dublin Platform was created: to help support this global network of men and women whose work challenges apathy and the indifference of the rich and powerful.

This is why Front Line works to: Protect One Empower a Thousand.

**Mary Lawlor**  
Executive Director  
Front Line





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HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ARE THE KEY TO THE FUTURE. IT IS THEIR PEACEFUL NON-VIOLENT WORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS THAT OFFERS THE BEST HOPE OF DEALING WITH THE MANY ILLS THAT BESET OUR SOCIETIES

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# BOOK OF TESTIMONIES

THE FIFTH DUBLIN PLATFORM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS,  
DUBLIN CASTLE, DUBLIN, IRELAND, FEBRUARY 10-12, 2010

## ASIA

### BURMA ANON HRD

As a daughter of a political leader in NLD, I have been interested in political activities since my childhood days. But since my graduation, I have worked in one of the NGOs in Myanmar. I usually went to some villages, towns and cities under the supervision of the NGO. According to my work experience with the NGO, I found out about the lack of human rights almost everywhere I arrived. The worst is no knowledge at all of human rights. No one dare say even the word "human rights". No-one or no organisation educates the Burmese except human rights defenders, National League for Democracy members and the new 'generation of 88' students, but now they are in prison. So, I decided to go to the legal assistance office of the NLD where NLD lawyers work for human rights in so many ways.

What I want to let the world know is that the Myanmar Military Government is not a de jure government but a de facto one. The Supreme Court will not be accepted, as all their decisions are illegal, as they are illegal. It means breaking the law.

Fourteen leading activists of the 88 Generation Students group, including five women, were given 65-year prison sentences in a court in Insein Prison for participating in a peaceful walking protest in August 2007. At the same time, 25 other activists, including five monks and women who took part in the September 2007 uprising, were sentenced to up to 26 years imprisonment. The well-known labour activist Su Su Nway was sentenced to 12 and a half years in prison.

Section 33 of the electronic law describes: "Whoever commits any of the following acts by using electronic communications technology shall, on conviction, be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend from a minimum of 7 years to a maximum of 15 years and may also be liable to a fine." In section 33 (a) "doing any act detrimental to the security of the state or prevalence of law and order or community peace and tranquility or national solidarity or national economy or national culture." In section 33 (b) "receiving or sending and distribut-

ing any information relating to secrets of the security of the state or the prevalence of law and order or community peace and tranquility or national solidarity or national economy or national culture.

Most of the political prisoners have no legal right for defense such as being allowed to have lawyers. There is no chance to meet and consult with legal advisers or lawyers and so on. Permission of the judge is required to meet the prisoners at the court. It is completely forbidden to meet famous leaders such as Daw Aung Sun Su Kyi, Min Ko Naing, Kyaw Zaw Lwin and Nyi Nyi Aung. No one was allowed to listen to the special court at the prison in Insein.

The courts seem to make decisions according to their military superiors' wishes and their instructions, and not according to their own will. All the witnesses are government servants, such as police or local administrative committee members or people who are influenced by them anyway.

The lawyers try to fight against this unjust legal system. The current judicial system in Myanmar is not free. It is just a kangaroo court system which helps to prolong the military dictatorship. In one word, there is no law and order at all in Burma. So, human rights cannot develop in such a country. But the new generation has a burning desire to restore and defend basic human rights.

I decided to become one of this new generation in Burma. Thank you.

SO, HUMAN RIGHTS CANNOT DEVELOP IN SUCH A COUNTRY. BUT A NEW GENERATION HAS A BURNING DESIRE TO RESTORE AND DEFEND THE BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS.

## CAMBODIA

VICHET CHAN

### BRIDGE ACROSS BORDERS SOUTHEAST ASIA



Vichet Chan works as an assistant with the Bridge Across Borders Southeast Asia Initiative which is an international grassroots organisation working to bring people together to overcome poverty, injustice and inequity in the Southeast Asia region.

Attacks and threats against human rights defenders have been steadily increasing since 2008 and are becoming more violent than ever before. Various community representatives who came out to play important roles regarding their land disputes and their land rights became targeted by the authorities and were threatened and falsely accused, and in many cases, some representatives were arrested and detained in

prison. Furthermore some labour union leaders have been arrested and injured because of their lawful activities in gaining rights for fellow workers. Many staff from human rights organisations are still under threat and are constrained from doing their jobs due to shrinking freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and now the NGO law.

In Cambodia, human rights defenders know that they can only rely on the law a little bit and sometimes not at all. Amongst the cases of attacks and threats against human rights defenders, they remark that no authorities will investigate these cases and will more likely arrest them as suspects and condemn them. In many cases human rights defenders have been condemned under the penal code and some have been seriously threatened.

The Paris Peace Accords in 1991 provided the basic law for defending human rights defenders including freedom of setting up communities, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. The Royal Government of Cambodia signed and ratified the Law of Human Rights in 1992, based on the UN Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The two treaties and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are included in the National Law of the 1993 Constitution.

Conversely, the Government of Cambodia takes little care of human rights or about the international treaties they have signed.

Today, I have the great honour to participate in this meeting which is the meeting between human rights defenders from various countries around the world in order to share experiences

with each other. I am also one of the victims who has had my land grabbed by the local authorities, the municipal authorities and by a private company and was previously followed, intimidated, threatened and falsely charged by the courts. The community leaders and I have been trying hard to defend our land in these land disputes with the Government and private companies. Even women and children are pioneers. Monks and parliamentarians have also joined our struggle. It's most important to have solidarity, activism without violence, and good manners. All of these are good strategies for the people in Cambodia as Cambodia is a country which follows Buddhism.

Cambodian people are Buddhist, polite, moral and have good manners. Dey Krahom community where I used to live was an example of an active community which did much more advocacy than other communities. This is why we managed to resist eviction for 4 years as we had media conferences, concerts, ceremonies, demonstrations and solidarity. The people in Dey Krahom community tried hard to stand up, hand in hand to defend their homes non-violently, protesting against armed riot police and heavy bulldozers belonging to the company who wanted to develop our land. But unfortunately the Government still keeps working with private companies, using military police to evict people, and ignoring the people's land rights. Moreover, the people continue to beg for peaceful negotiation.

On January 24th 2009 after a four year resistance movement, the houses and property of the residents in Dey Krahom were cruelly destroyed by the authorities of the municipality and workers employed by the company. It was a bitter experience and it is one of the chronic problems which are happening throughout the country in Cambodia. The Government claims they are never responsible for these evictions and said they have tried hard to develop the country. Sadly apart from the international community, the Government is the only one who can solve this land problem.

IN CAMBODIA, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS KNOW THAT THEY CAN ONLY RELY ON THE LAW A LITTLE BIT AND SOMETIMES NOT AT ALL. AMONGST THE CASES OF ATTACKS AND THREATS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, THEY REMARK THAT NO AUTHORITIES WILL INVESTIGATE THESE CASES AND WILL MORE LIKELY ARREST THEM AS SUSPECTS AND CONDEMN THEM.



## FIJI ISLANDS

PETER WAQAVONOVONO

YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONCERNED NETWORK



Peter Waqavonovono is the President of the Young People's Concerned Network (YPCN) which is a network of youth advocates from around Fiji. This network shares resources and updates network members on campaigns, projects and workshops, and provides a sounding board for its members who come from an array of different advocacy areas.

I would like to share with you my challenges as a human rights defender and the many success stories I have had in my own nation.

On December 5 2006, Fiji's democratically elected government was overthrown in a military coup d'état. Also in 2006, YPCN made brave press

releases and organised peaceful protests and gatherings. In 2006 and 2007 YPCN had our democracy shrine destroyed twice and members unlawfully arrested. Since 2006 I have been arrested and detained 5 times, I have received 8 acts of intimidation and 2 cases of physical abuse.

On the 25th of December 2006, 4 activists and one journalist including myself were detained and we all faced physical abuse – in fact we were tortured. In February 2007, the military admitted to detaining 1,100 people. Most of these people are young people and women. Since then more and more activists have received similar treatment.

In June 2009, our constitution was purportedly abrogated and a military government put in place and our whole judiciary removed. Fiji is now governed by many decrees and orders that have silenced the media, removed many freedoms, and curtailed the powers of our Human Rights Commission.

An interesting clause in one of Fiji's Decrees, the Public Emergency Regulation Decree gives amnesty to state security officials who commit human rights abuses. Let me share one example of this impunity enjoyed by military and state officials. Sakuisa Rabaka, a Fijian youth, was arrested in early 2007, abused and died as a result of his injuries. His murderers (7 soldiers) were found guilty of manslaughter in 2008. Because of the military Government and the Public Emergency Decree, his murderers were released. There is a law that limits human rights and makes it illegal to take the military Government to court.

Human rights defenders were warned on January 5th of this year, through a nationwide radio address by a high ranking military officer, that active lobbying and activism against the military Government would be treated very harshly this year.

I am excited today. Fiji is currently under review at the UN Council for Human Rights. NGOs have used this opportunity to make a clear reflection on the situation of human rights and the shocking non-compliance Fiji's military Government has towards the conventions and declarations of the UN.

If our work is to be successful it must become contemporary – especially when you are trying to make the message as appealing as you can. Using contemporary arts to spread clear messages of unity, peace, youth development and human rights has proven very successful. Concerts, school choir competitions, dance and drama are simple things we have used to throw in clear strong messages that help our cause. The Black Armband Campaign is also a very peaceful tool that we have used to make advocacy hip, cool and up-to-date with the fast generation. Using Twitter, Facebook and emails we have found that it is much easier to get people involved in the work we do and hear uncensored views about Fiji.

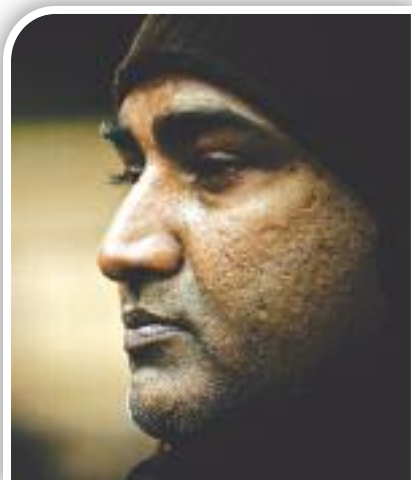
This year commencing August 12th 2010 to August 11th 2011, the United Nations General Assembly has declared this the International Year of Youth. This has become a breath of fresh air for youth activists world-wide – that our efforts in youth development are shared by the many other world leaders who acknowledge that youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow, youth are the leaders of today.

Before I finish, I would like to offer a word of encouragement and affirmation, Martin Luther King once said "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy". Everyone in this room meets that measurement or has the ability to meet it. Let's be great sources of inspiration and strength even at the most controversial periods of our advocacy.

THE BLACK ARMBAND CAMPAIGN IS ALSO A VERY PEACEFUL TOOL THAT WE HAVE USED TO MAKE ADVOCACY HIP, COOL AND UP-TO-DATE WITH THE FAST GENERATION. USING TWITTER, FACEBOOK AND EMAILS WE HAVE FOUND THAT IT IS MUCH EASIER TO GET PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE WORK WE DO AND HEAR UNCENSORED VIEWS ABOUT FIJI.

## INDIA

### AJEET SINGH GURIA



Ajeet Singh is the founder and President of GURIA, which was set up in 1993 to fight against human trafficking and forced prostitution, especially amongst women and children.

As the founder of GURIA, I began the fight against human trafficking and forced prostitution with the adoption of the three children of a victim of commercial sexual exploitation.

This crusade against slavery is an endeavour to realise full citizenship rights and return the balance of power to the socially, economically and politically marginalised, criminalised and enslaved women and children in brothels. It has focused on preventing second generation prostitution, child

prostitution, trafficking and re-trafficking, and revictimisation of the women & children. This head-on strategy must minimise the dependence on the criminal/trafficker/brothel keeper/police/politician/pimps nexus. It is a precondition and the first step towards freedom from sexual slavery – a stage for options.

I have been threatened several times and criminals even reached the GURIA education centre in the red-light area searching for me as a result of my work – being a complainant in several FIRs (first information reports), being a witness in the courts, oppping bail for traffickers, exposing fake bail bonds, supporting brothel seizures and the follow-up of criminal cases against 244 human traffickers.

GURIA keeps informing the police with ample proof but no action is taken except for lodging one FIR (first information report) in 2008 in which the investigation has moved nowhere to this date. In this unholy alliance, police go so far as to refuse to differentiate between the victims and the accused, treating the victims as accused and using biased investigation to help the traffickers take back custody, filing wrong FIRs and charge sheets or not filing FIRs at all to facilitate escape of the accused.

In March 2007 I led the longest ever march against human trafficking (800km), which ended with the arrest of all the protesters just before the culmination at Nithari, near New Delhi. Earlier, in 2000, I was arrested during the three month long relay fast unto death against rape and exploitation of female victims in protection homes. In 2004 there was a confrontation with the shiv sena (hindu fundamentalist outfit) over the issue of providing an alternative to the women

musicians of red-light areas, through concerts in this conservative holy city, thereby supposedly creating cultural pollution.

In another incident of 25th October 2005 I organised a rescue operation of enslaved, trafficked minor girls through thousands of GURIA volunteers from the red-light area of Varanasi when police, hardly 300 metres away, did not respond to written, faxed, telephone and verbal complaints. But since we exposed the police and the state, my wife and I were charged with eight fake criminal charges after the police themselves burnt the place and destroyed shops to implicate us. As the rescue was in progress the police beat us up, and because of this the brothel keepers managed to take back many rescued girls. This civil society participation was the paradigm shift for the critical mass which has developed into a successful strategy to create and sustain the first child prostitution free red-light area since 2001 at Varanasi.

Looking at the bad experiences with the caste-based patriarchal, feudal and communal police, upon investigation of over 100 trafficked minor girls enslaved for prostitution at Allahabad red-light area, I with two other colleagues took the risk of making a film over a period of 9 months (disguised as salesmen) as evidence because, in the absence of the rule of law, the police's first attempt always is to deny the crime and target us as revenge. The police posted within the red-light area, as a hallmark of prostitution, take bribes and sex favours for every new girl trafficked and for giving protection to continue the flesh trade.

As I, along with a magistrate and volunteers, reached the red-light area on 6th March 2009 police immediately changed sides to beat us up and offered opportunities to the traffickers/brothel keepers to escape with the trafficked minor girls in spite of video documentation of at least 70 minor girls. Against all odds, I along with over a hundred backup support volunteers risked our lives to rescue at least 20 trafficked girls but still the police showed only 17 trafficked victims as rescued, and the other 3 rescued girls were released from the police station. Until midnight I was threatened, harassed and abused by the police and they threatened to kill me in a police encounter and implicate me in many criminal cases as has been done in the past, but at the same time nothing has been done to date to rescue the remaining trafficked minor girls documented on the video.

IN MARCH 2007 I LED THE LONGEST EVER FOOT MARCH AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING (800KM), WHICH ENDED WITH THE ARREST OF ALL THE PROTESTERS JUST BEFORE CULMINATION AT NITHARI, NEAR NEW DELHI.

## INDIA

### ANJUMAN ARA BEGUM

#### SOUTH ASIA FORUM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



Anjuman Ara Begum works as a Regional Research Associate for the South Asia Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR). SAFHR has undertaken a three year project entitled 'Understanding Impunity: Truth, Justice and Reparation in the Context of India'. As Regional Associate for North East India Anjuman's major work responsibilities include: collecting and compiling data on human rights violations in objective and standardised formats, their digitalisation and transfer into computer databases; conducting field interviews with the victims of abuse.

India became independent in 1947. While the whole nation was busy celebrating the joy of independence, people's aspirations in the north

eastern part of India were completely ignored and a marathon armed conflict has ensued since then. It is estimated that about 50,000 people have been killed so far in this low intensity war which has been ongoing for the last 60 years. Disappearances, secret killings, torture, custodial killings, fake encounter killings, indiscriminate bombing, extortion and kidnapping by non-state actors, sexual violence etc. have become an everyday affair for the people of north east India, and this situation is hardly highlighted in the national media.

Given the prevailing situation in north east India, human rights defenders face immense challenges and threats from state and non-state actors. Human rights activities are treated by the state as supporting or sympathising with the insurgent movement. On the other hand, human rights defenders are also not free from the wrath of non-state actors. Brutal killings of human rights defenders like Sanjoy Ghose and Parag Das have shaken the conscience of HRDs and created a fear psychosis among them. A total of 22 journalists were eliminated by both state and non-state actors in the region in the last 20 years. Lawyers have faced harassment. Civil society members have been arrested and tortured by the state for their human rights activities. Lachit Bordoloi's passport was impounded for 12 years. Jiten was arrested on September 14, 2009 while leaving for a conference on climate change. There are many similar stories.

India is perceived as a state that respects, protects and fulfils its human rights obligations mostly because of the constitutional guarantee of a wide range of fundamental rights and being state parties to a large number of human rights conventions of the United Nations. The Understanding Impunity project is a direct challenge to this claim. The culture of impunity has

become a part of the administration in India and is practiced at various levels of the administration. This is the prime focus of the research project Understanding Impunity and I am a core researcher of this unique and rare research in South Asia. My research engagement on impunity involves intensive field visits in conflict zones of the north-eastern states. The region is heavily militarised with about 109 militant organisations and about 500,000 security personnel. The victim based research work requires direct interaction with the victims and state agencies and this is not free from risk in a militarised zone in the north-eastern states. The security environment is risky due to the various draconian laws in force, upholding a culture of impunity that hinders human rights work and results in a perennial fear psychosis in the mind of human rights defenders.

I work under constant fear of being arrested under suspicion, arbitrary interrogation and detention and the fear of being attacked by non-state actors too. Several times I have faced the wrath of the security forces as well as state intelligence. In April, 2009, I was interrogated by Home Ministry officials while organising a capacity building programme on research methodology. In January 2010, my family and I were interrogated for inviting a Dutch friend for a family visit. This region is constantly volatile and situations are unpredictable. Heavy presence of security personnel does not make me feel secure but instead creates a fear of sexual violence in my mind while working in the field.

I WORK UNDER CONSTANT FEAR OF BEING ARRESTED UNDER SUSPICION, ARBITRARY INTERROGATION AND DETENTION AND THE FEAR OF BEING ATTACKED BY NON-STATE ACTORS TOO. SEVERAL TIMES I HAVE FACED THE WRATH OF SECURITY FORCES AS WELL AS STATE INTELLIGENCE.

## INDONESIA

### SUCIWATI

#### THE COMMITTEE FOR ACTION SOLIDARITY FOR MUNIR



Suciwati is a human rights defender and is the widow of Munir Said Thalib, an Indonesian human rights defender, and works on the Steering Committee of the Committee for Action Solidarity for Munir (KASUM).

My husband Munir was poisoned with arsenic while traveling to the Netherlands. He was killed in an operation conducted by officials and agents of the Indonesian State Intelligence Agency.

He was targeted because of his activities fighting for the rights of the victims of the Soeharto regime, and for his work to reform the security sector, including police, military and intelligence. Through his words and actions, Munir taught the people of

Indonesia not to fear the army, and to stand up for their rights.

Munir helped found two of Indonesia's leading human rights organisations, as well as a human rights radio station and a think-tank on security sector reform. For his work on human rights, justice, and non-violence, Munir received Indonesia's top human rights prize, as well as awards from Austria and Sweden, and from a number of Indonesian groups, from the Alliance of Independent Journalists to the Union of Street-singers. These awards were a form of recognition that Munir devoted his life to the advancement of human rights and justice for victims.

It has now been more than five years since his murder. Facts that were uncovered in court and by an independent inquiry clearly showed that the facilities of the state intelligence agency were used, in the form of money, documents, and even agents. However, only the perpetrators in the field have been tried and convicted, while the intellectual actors have not yet been touched. Retired Major-General Muchdi Purwopranjono, a former intelligence official and former head of the army's special forces branch, was acquitted by the court in December 2008. His acquittal was deeply hurtful to me and my family and to human rights defenders throughout Indonesia. It reflected the power of violence in Indonesia and the rottenness of the justice system.

The limited success in judging and sentencing the field operatives was only possible with the support and solidarity of the international community. I want to express my appreciation to:

- The European Parliament, which adopted a Written Declaration on the killing of the human rights activist Munir Said Thalib, on 13 March 2008

- Three UN Special Rapporteurs, with mandates on human rights defenders, extrajudicial execution, and the independence of the judiciary, for their intense communications on the case
- Former High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour
- Countries and NGOs around the world for their support

However, the work is not yet done. All of your support is still badly needed in confronting the Indonesian Government.

Conditions now are very difficult for us in our struggle for justice, due to the political reality of Indonesia and the Government's failure to stand up for human rights. The Government of President Yudhoyono is now collaborating with human rights violators, including Munir's killers. As a result, we hope for concrete support from the international community to ask why the process of requesting a review of the decision to acquit Major General Muchdi has come to a standstill in the Prosecutor's Office, and we ask the President of Indonesia for a thorough investigation of the crime.

We hope you will use all of your solidarity and capacity, and urge your government and regional bodies to pressure the Indonesian Government to resolve the case and quickly put in motion a review of the Muchdi decision. We deeply hope for the concrete implementation of the Written Declaration of the European Parliament.

Recognising the importance of the case to the future of Indonesia and the security of human rights defenders, the Indonesian human rights community has adopted the slogan: "Justice for Munir is justice for all." With pressure from Europe, President Yudhoyono may understand the importance of solving the crime in the name of democracy and of human rights.

"JUSTICE FOR MUNIR IS JUSTICE FOR ALL."

## PAPUA – INDONESIA

### FATHER YOHANES (JOHN) JONGA

#### THE DIOCESE OF JAYAPURA – PAPUA



Father Yohanes Jonga is a Catholic priest, and has been working for the Diocese of Jayapura Papua for 25 years. He is also the Head of the Deacon of Keerom Regency and Chairperson of the Inter-faith Communication Forum of Keerom Regency.

Papua has been a conflict area since Indonesia took over the islands in 1963. The main problem for civil society is stigmatisation as separatists. In the name of combatting separatism, the Government deploys massive amounts of military troops and police officers. The deployment, however, is not intended to provide security for the Papua people; on the contrary, the people are anxious and scared.<sup>1</sup>

Freedom of opinion and expression in Papua are still limited, and the Government uses the separatist label to justify violence against HRDs in Papua. Instead of implementing a 2001 law on autonomy in Papua, the Government passed new regulations that forbid people in Indonesia from showing local and cultural symbols, including the Morning Star flag which is alleged to be the flag of Papuan separatist groups.<sup>2</sup>

I was assigned to several dangerous areas in Papua, such as Timika, Wamena and Keerom. As a religious leader, I always bring a message of peace to the people of Papua. We have to develop Papua as a land of peace, where the human rights of Papuans are recognised and protected. Women's rights as well as men's rights must be promoted. Papuan people live in a very rich land, however they live in poverty and in a repressive situation. Therefore, I have to support them to get their rights.

In 2007, I was seriously threatened with murder by members of the Indonesian Army Special Forces. They threatened to kill and bury me in a 700 meter deep gorge.<sup>3</sup> A Jakarta human rights organisation in my network, Imparsial, sent a letter of protest to the Government and the Ministry of Law and Human Rights had already sent a letter to the Chief of the Armed Forces for urgent attention on this issue, but we never got any response. Imparsial then sent my case to the Special Rapporteur on HRDs, Amnesty International, and Human Rights First for urgent action. Ms. Jilani responded and sent an urgent appeal letter to the Indonesian Government.<sup>4</sup>

The local special forces commander was replaced, and the troops reduced their presence in

my village. However, I am still suspected of being a separatist supporter by the military and always under surveillance by intelligence officers. In July 2009, the Chief of Police of Papua requested that I become a mediator between the police and the leader of the Papua Free Movement (OPM) in my district of Keerom. However the military threatened to bring me to justice as a traitor to the unity of Indonesia.

Papuans are urging dialogue with the Government of Indonesia in order to fulfil their human rights and make Papua a land of peace. Therefore, at this important event, I need your support for peaceful dialogue between Papua and Indonesia.

#### References

1. See A/HRC/7/28/Add.2, 28 January 2008, Report of Hina Jilani on her visit to Indonesia in 2007, presented before the UN Human Rights Council in March 2008.
2. The police continue to apply articles 104-110 of the Indonesia Penal Code on treason to arrest students and ordinary people in Papua, accusing them carrying a Morning Star flag. The police also used article 160 on incitement to arrest those participating in peaceful demonstrations.
3. Members of the Special Forces are also suspected of stalking me at the priests' residence in Abepura and trespassing into the yard. I filed a police report on 18 September 2007, but the Regional Police Chief said they could not protect me if the perpetrators were from the military.
4. See A/HRC/7/28/Add.1. para 1130-1135, 3 March 2008.

WE HAVE TO DEVELOP PAPUA AS A LAND OF PEACE, WHERE THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF PAPUANS ARE RECOGNISED AND PROTECTED. WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS WELL AS MEN'S RIGHTS MUST BE PROMOTED.

## MALAYSIA

CHIN HUAT WONG

COALITION FOR CLEAN AND FAIR ELECTIONS (BERSIH)



Chin Huat Wong is a journalism lecturer and a resource person for the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH).

### Getting Arrested for Wearing Black

I am a political scientist by training and a journalism lecturer by trade. My activism is centred around media freedom and electoral reform.

In May 2009, I was arrested for three days under the Sedition Act. My crime? Urging Malaysians to wear black as a civil disobedience campaign to protest against a palace coup in a state called Perak, which happens to be my home state.

Malaysia is what is called an electoral one-party state, or a one-party state with elections. For more than five decades since independence, we have never experienced a change of government. On March 8 2008, the opposition parties however scored an unprecedented victory by denying the ruling coalition National Front (BN) its customary parliamentary two-thirds majority, and the control of five state governments, one of them being Perak.

BN is not willing to concede defeat.

In Perak, it enticed three opposition lawmakers to declare themselves BN-friendly independents, overturning a slim legislative majority held by the State Government. When the Chief Minister requested royal consent for dissolution of the State Assembly, the Sultan instead sacked him. To reinstall itself as the State Government, BN drags in other unelected institutions from the palace, judiciary, election commission, anti-corruption authority, police and the bureaucracy. To complete the coup, BN finally decided to remove the Legislative Speaker who bravely safeguards democracy like William Lenthal before Charles I.

The civil disobedience campaign which we launched, dubbed 1BLACKMalaysia in parody of BN's slogan 1Malaysia, was meant to stop the removal of the Speaker. It was cracked down on mercilessly by BN. After my arrest, about 160 people were arrested in the following days and weeks. Some were arrested for lighting candles, some for providing legal assistance as lawyers to protesters who were arrested, some for staging a hunger strike, and some for simply wearing black.

The coup shows the troubled waters of politics in Malaysia. If the BN loses the next elections

just marginally, will it not contemplate a military coup? And if wearing black is intolerable, what form of political expression would be tolerable under a military junta?

Good news is that because of the political violence – from a cow-head protest aiming at intimidating the Hindus to the recent desecration of churches and mosques – the Government is increasingly delegitimised by Malaysians from all religious and ethnic backgrounds. Our battle is however not won until all parties accept democracy as ‘the only game in town’, or democratic consolidation. The international community can help us by making clear that a betrayal of Malaysian democracy is intolerable to the world.

OUR BATTLE IS HOWEVER NOT WON UNTIL ALL PARTIES ACCEPT DEMOCRACY AS “THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN”.

## MONGOLIA

### BAT-YALALT KHADBAATAR

#### CIVIL FAIR COURT



Bat-Yalalt Khadbaatar is a lawyer and researcher who founded the NGO Civil Fair Court in 2007 with the aim of implementing small projects to protect and affirm human rights based on his research.

After many years of research and after carrying out my own activities for the past 3 years, I reached a conclusion that I would like to share with you. We are making the transition from a power-based society to a rights-based society. We call it democracy. A human being is different from an animal in his intelligence. Human society is unique in its intellectuality. This unique feature is represented by our conscious relations.

I believe that there are three basic indicators which govern the situation of human rights:

- Legalisation of human rights
- State policy on human rights
- Ability to struggle for one's own and others' rights

In Mongolia, we have a good starting point in that human rights and freedoms are widely legalised by the Constitution of Mongolia in conformity with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Although the state is obliged to protect human rights under all laws and regulations, civil servants do not safeguard human rights but simply violate them. Civil servants violate the law, as well as human rights, putting their private interests first. There is no system for overseeing their decisions, activities, and relations and for revealing their mistakes. They are not accountable. Briefly, it can be concluded that civil servants are heavily controlled by political and business groups.

A Mongolian person does not have the ability to struggle for his rights and freedom. Although a Mongolian person has the right to advocate for himself and make a complaint, using freedom of speech to properly satisfy his complaint, civil servants with power often oppress, repress, or hurt those who have criticised or filed complaints against them. For that reason, many citizens voluntarily relinquish their rights.

Based on the above conclusion, we are working to make significant changes to safeguard and affirm human rights in Mongolia. I am sure that other countries also have similar problems. Certainly, the state and its servants and officials do not want to safeguard human rights. They

did not and will not want to do it. We must make changes and then apply them in practice.

I insist that the theory of domestic power sharing be made rational. This is about the transfer of power to the people to build and control their own government. Today, there is a strong feeling that both the judiciary and the state are above the law. Nevertheless, both the court and the state are formed by the people's choice.

Why don't we control their activities, decisions, and relations using simple methods?

Why do the people not gather information about civil servants without the help of the state?

And why don't they draw their own conclusions?

If such a system of accountability is created, the civil service will no longer be a path to riches. Today, the civil service is extremely profitable. It guarantees a standard of living, not in terms of salaries and other state welfare and services, but through the misappropriation of money from the budget, or corruption. It guarantees economic freedom, while human rights are invariably infringed.

I think, therefore, that not only do human rights protection institutions study the causes of human rights infringements, but they should also work to ensure that state policy is humane and human rights are safeguarded and affirmed without borders through the establishment of civil control institutions in their respective countries with the view to gathering information on the violations by the state of the rights of their citizens, detecting civil servants who violate and do not protect human rights, and holding such civil servants accountable. Our goal is to create a system which ensures that civil servants protect human rights.

THIS IS ABOUT THE TRANSFER OF POWER TO THE PEOPLE TO BUILD AND CONTROL THEIR OWN GOVERNMENT.

## PAKISTAN

SHER MOHAMMAD KHAN

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF PAKISTAN



Sher Mohammed Khan is a Council Member and the Vice Chairperson of the North-West Frontier Province (N.W.F.P) Chapter of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. Both of these positions are voluntary positions. He was also recently sworn in as a judge in the Peshawar High Court.

Pakistan and especially Swat, the area that I hail from in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and the nearby Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) have recently been in the news due to the militant insurgency and the Government's brutal efforts to crush it.

In the process human rights are violated by both sides and human rights defenders (HRDs) as well as journalists are at greater risk than ever before.

Pakistan has never had a happy history of democratic governance or of upholding the rule of law. There have been constant military interventions. Military rule translates into rule by the intelligence agencies, which operate above the law in that intelligence agencies can pick up persons at will, torture and at times even kill with impunity. HRDs are particularly vulnerable as they work for the restoration of democracy and human rights. Military rulers malign political parties and political workers to justify their take-over. With political activities banned, military rule increases the space for religious groups and extremist militants.

The so called 'Afghan jihad' waged with western aid and the Pakistan army's support in the 1980s paved the way for violent religious movements in the country. With the huge influx of arms and cash for waging religious war Pakistan's cultural and political landscape saw irrevocable change. Religious-based militias became visible and started challenging and later eliminating voices of moderation and sanity. HRDs were openly harassed and threatened and the Government chose to look the other way, taking no steps to protect HRDs.

The intense religious fever engulfing the state, which at times is encouraged by the state, has seen minorities being persecuted. The Ahmediyya community and Hindus in Pakistan have been particularly targeted and after the so-called war on terror, Christians as well. Human rights defenders working on minority rights and defending or supporting members of the religious minorities charged with 'blasphemy' have been particularly harassed and at times even killed.

With a major international conflict right next door it was only a matter of time before the troubles in Afghanistan reached the Tribal Areas and the North West Frontier Province. In the last few years these militias have stopped all NGO activities in the Tribal Areas and most parts of the NWFP. NGO offices have been attacked, their vehicles, etc, destroyed. human rights defenders have been attacked and killed.

Swat, amongst the most peaceful, picturesque, educated and prosperous districts of the NWFP, was literally destroyed by the religious militants who had links to the Taliban in Afghanistan. Human rights defenders, aid workers, law-enforcement personnel were specifically targeted. Girls' schools and colleges and later all other schools and colleges and police stations were destroyed. Statehood became meaningless. Still, instead of standing up with people of the Swat region the state entered into "Peace Deals" with the militants, undermining not only the democratic governance and the rights of the people of Swat but also making the work of the HRDs impossible and their position highly vulnerable.

At the end I would like to say that HRDs are particularly vulnerable in the Tribal Areas and insurgency-hit parts of the NWFP as well as those working on minority rights issues in the entire country.

STILL INSTEAD OF STANDING UP WITH PEOPLE OF THE SWAT REGION THE STATE ENTERED INTO "PEACE DEALS" WITH THE MILITANTS, UNDERMINING NOT ONLY THE DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND THE RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE OF SWAT BUT ALSO MAKING THE WORK OF THE HRDS IMPOSSIBLE AND THEIR POSITION HIGHLY VULNERABLE.



# THE PHILIPPINES

FLORENCE MANEGDEG

KASIYANA PEACE AND HEALING INITIATIVES



Florence Manedeg is a human rights defender and the widow of Jose Pepe Rivalal Manedeg III, who was assassinated due to his work as a human rights defender in the Philippines, in November, 2005. Florence played the bamboo nose flute and read a poem before presenting her testimony at the Dublin Platform. (The poem appears opposite.)

In my country where the state is ruled by those who have fallen into the trap of delusion and mediocrity... and in a world that has reduced human rights into gruesome figures and statistics of politics and economy, the very sacredness of life and liberty has become an elusive and quite expensive concern. Indeed, human rights have

become a privilege for an elite few at the expense of the broad base of humanity.

In 2000, my brother aged 23 years was killed by a taxi driver employed by a police officer. Three months later, in 2001, another brother aged 15 years was killed by a group of vindictive young men in a mining community. The cases took four years of litigation. The assailants were convicted but the penalty was never implemented.

In the same period, the President of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and her generals and super cops came out on national newspapers and television smiling proudly with the background of bullet-riddled and bloodied bodies of so-called criminals, kidnappers, robbers who had no chance to plead. It was very much criticised, but the message was delivered to the public. A culture of impunity was endorsed.

Then the Human Security Act was passed in line with the anti-terrorism campaign. From an article in TIME magazine, the President was quoted saying, "I pledge to torture, kill, maim every terrorist that comes to our shore". And the bloodthirsty dogs of war were released against the very people the state is meant to protect. On the other hand, the President was also portrayed as very saintly, praying and accepting the will of God, with the blessings of the bishops, the cardinals and even the Pope of Rome.

Pepe, my friend, husband, colleague and father of my children was among those placed in the dreadful list for "order-of-battle". Indeed, he was harassed, hunted, demonised and executed with 22 gunshot wounds. So instead of Pepe meeting me with a smile as I arrived from Hong

Kong as an overseas Filipino worker or what our Government calls the 'living hero' in this modern day slave trade called labour export. I came home to a cold dead body and a shattered family. Pepe was 37 years old. An unassuming yet effective and charismatic human rights defender working for peace, liberty, social justice, good governance like everyone of us here. His case was filed, witnesses backed off, the identified assailant was promoted in rank from Captain to Major in the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Yet, still they were not satisfied. They announced they will kill all his brothers including his wife. His colleagues, his family, my family of course were terrified.

I picked up my flute... wrote letters and appeals, sought dialogues and resolved to learn the art of peacemaking... to redeem sanity, serenity and clarity amidst this worsening chaos. Hell broke loose. They could not understand why I did not come out raging. A poor widow turned crazy – writing, singing, dancing, smiling and crying. I was monitored, harassed and followed by masked men on motorcycles.

With hundreds of activists, church people, lawyers, students, media people, grassroots leaders killed, tortured, imprisoned while the scars of the Marcosian Martial Law continues to haunt, the progressive civil society groups are weakened and fragmented. Indeed, it is a challenge to move on... in a dance, in a song... with art to keep the flow of sacred life flowing... for the children and their children's children.

Today, I stand before you as a bamboo nose flute player and a widow who faces the risk of losing her life or liberty.

## Flow of Life

In the war of raging rocks ...I could not move  
In the middle of fiery rage ... I continue to crumble  
In the sharpness of nails and bullets ... My body bleeds  
In the noise of wailing and screaming ... My soul cries out  
In the ghosts of the past ... and the shadows of yesterday  
My mind is filled with sorrow.  
In the rays of the stars and the rising sun ... My hope is enlivened  
In the heart of beings ... Where I am sacred  
In the heart of beings ... Where I am honoured

TODAY, I STAND BEFORE YOU AS A BAMBOO NOSE FLUTE PLAYER AND A WIDOW WHO FACES A RISK OF LOSING HER LIFE OR LIBERTY.

## THE PHILIPPINES

CERILA F. ANDING  
UNITED WORKERS OF OSMIGUEL



Cerila Anding, from Compostela Valley Province of Mindanao in the Philippines works as a banana selector for the Fresh Banana Agricultural Corporation (FBAC), a subsidiary of Sumifru/Stanfilco-Philippines. This is a multi-million dollar organisation of banana fruit for export to Japan and the Middle East. She is the Union President of the Nagkahiusang Mamumuo sa Osmiguel – NAMAOS (United Workers of Osmiguel), a union dominated by men.

In September 2008, we concluded for another five years the Comprehensive Bargaining Agreement (CBA) with the management through the mediation of the Department of Labour and Employment (DOLE). Unfortunately, the FBAC

management did not implement it. We went back to the Department of Labour and Employment (DOLE) for clarifications. DOLE said the agreement had been reached, and FBAC has to implement it. Still, it has not been implemented. The DOLE is useless.

In the last week of October and first week of November 2008, we hung notices around the perimeter of the company saying “FBAC, please respect the CBA!”, “FBAC, respect our rights!”, “FBAC, anti-women!” and “Stop Union Busting!”.

On November 21st, 27th and for the whole month of December 2008, the Workers for Industrial Peace and Economic Reform (WIPER) with the elements of the 66th Infantry Battalion (IB) of the Philippine Army (PA) conducted a pulong-pulong (a forum) in which the topic was demonising our union and its officers, including myself. They listed all the officers’ names and went house-to-house, telling members to disaffiliate themselves from the union and telling officers to stop doing union activities. They also went to our union office and inquired after the whereabouts of the officers and their doings. They also gathered local village officials for a pulong-pulong (forum). The soldiers labeled the union members as communist supporters.

In a dialogue with the 66th IB,PA and the union, with the presence of the town Mayor and DOLE representative in January 2009, I categorically told the WIPER and the soldiers to get out of our place and refrain from harassing our union officers and members. They took pictures of me.

Since then, members of my family have observed 2 or 3 motorcycles, driven by unidentified men, posted near our house. Similar observations have been made near our union office. While

soldiers, intensified the harassments and operations, especially at night and dawn. I did not stay at home during this time.

Despite the fact that FBAC have not implemented the CBA, the struggle of NAMAOS continues. We believe that the soldiers and FBAC have coordinated efforts to destroy our union, people and our community. In fact, there was an increase in the number of soldiers deployed in Compostela Valley in 2009. Local and national government have done nothing about it.

The struggle for our basic rights is just a part of what many Filipinos struggle for... the right to life, peace and justice. But in a country where the culture of impunity and rampant extrajudicial killings are present, the life of a human rights defender is always at risk.

THE STRUGGLE FOR OUR BASIC RIGHTS IS JUST A PART OF WHAT MANY FILIPINOS STRUGGLE FOR... THE RIGHT TO LIFE, PEACE AND JUSTICE. BUT IN A COUNTRY WHERE THE CULTURE OF IMPUNITY AND RAMPANT EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS ARE PRESENT, THE LIFE OF A HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER IS ALWAYS AT RISK.

## SRI LANKA

PAIKIASOTHY SARAVANAMUTTU  
CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES



Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu is the Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, an independent public policy institute focusing on human rights, governance and peace issues through programmes of research and advocacy in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

I stand before you as a human rights defender in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has just concluded a presidential election and now moves on to a general election. Although the opposition alleges malpractice in the count, the incumbent President is the declared winner of the presidential poll with 58% of the popular vote – 18% more than his nearest rival, the former army commander who polled 40%.

After the election a journalist was disappeared, an editor arrested, a newspaper sealed and many websites blocked. A number of supporters of the main opposition candidate - both retired and serving officers in the army - have been arrested. He himself has now been arrested and is reportedly to be charged with attempting a coup and divulging military secrets in the course of the campaign. It is also reported that he will be brought before a military court, the proceedings of which will be closed to the public and to the media.

All this reinforces the crackdown on dissent and the culture of impunity in respect of a range of human rights violations over the last four years including disappearances and extrajudicial killings, the targeting of the media, allegations of war crimes and the incarceration of some 300,000 Tamil civilians in camps following the defeat of the secessionist and totalitarian Tamil Tigers.

Pertinent to my own situation is the crackdown on dissent and freedom of expression. The ruling regime has created and continues to sustain the public labeling of supporters as patriots and of critics and dissenters as traitors. The organisation I work for – the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) – is an independent public policy centre that works on human rights, peace and governance through programmes of research and advocacy including public interest litigation. As a consequence, CPA and I have been targeted for abuse and treated as a traitor bent on undermining national security and independence and determined to effect regime change.

Last August I received a death threat on the grounds that I personally was responsible for feeding the European Union with information to revoke the GSP Plus trade concession granted to Sri Lanka. The concession is based on the ratification and implementation of some 27 international human rights instruments and labour standards and as per the terms of the concession the EU launched an investigation into Sri Lanka's performance in respect of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention Against Torture (CAT). The investigation found Sri Lanka to have fallen short of its obligations and recommended that the concession be revoked. CPA and I have consistently and publicly maintained that GSP Plus must be extended to Sri Lanka and at the same time, human rights protection in the country strengthened.

Soon after the death threat, I was detained at the airport. I notified the President and key officials in the security and law and order establishment of the threat against me. Subsequently and parallel to the government controlled media launching a vicious campaign of abuse against me, the police recorded statements from me. They also recorded statements from selected members of a group of 130 human rights defenders and civil society activists who published a letter in support and in solidarity with me. I have yet to be notified of the state of the police investigation into the threat.

The space for dissent in Sri Lanka is being systematically shrunk by reference to national security and patriotism. There is the very real danger of the country descending into authoritarianism and of the prospects for a post conflict future of peace, reconciliation and national unity firmly rooted in democratic governance, being destroyed.

ALL THIS REINFORCES THE CRACKDOWN ON DISSENT AND THE CULTURE OF IMPUNITY IN RESPECT OF A RANGE OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS OVER THE LAST FOUR YEARS INCLUDING DISAPPEARANCES AND EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS, THE TARGETING OF THE MEDIA, ALLEGATIONS OF WAR CRIMES AND THE INCARCERATION OF SOME 300,000 TAMIL CIVILIANS IN CAMPS.

## THAILAND

YAENA SALAMAE

### SOR 6 – WOMEN'S SURVIVAL SUPPORT GROUP



Yaena Salamae is one of the leaders of Sor 6 – a women's survival support group.

I have dedicated all of my life to my religion, my husband and my children, as a good error-free Muslim. I would say that the successes of our society have left women behind. However, a demonstration at Takbai Police Station on 25 October 2004 led to the arrest of my son, together with another 57 villagers who were accused of being insurgents. I truly believe that I raised my son in such a way, and I knew my son well enough, that he was not involved in crimes such as we are accused of. With our consciousness of justice, I approached this frontline. My life as a Muslim woman has changed from shyness and

being speechless while hiding my feelings and expressions under my hijab. My days were spent with my sewing machine, but now I am part of the open fight for justice.

My highest formal education was only Grade 4 primary school. My education is too little to fight in courts but with my passion, I am now reading thick law books and starting to call lawyers and human rights activists all the time for advice on how to win the release of my son who is innocent. Besides, while fighting for my son's justice, I leave my house to see whether I can help others. I consider that I am not the only mother who is suffering. There must be other mothers who are suffering in similar situations. There are another 57 mothers who are suffering that their son or their loved one is being detained, and so my work is to help all of them to win justice.

My role as a mother from Takbai is expanding to a role of human rights defender. I have become, more or less, a so called para-legal officer as I act as coordinator between dependents' families and the lawyers for court hearings or in any way I can. Besides that, I also spend my time to visit, talk and give advice and courage to those who lost their loved one in this armed conflict in the southern border provinces of Thailand. I myself also lost my husband as he was shot dead two years ago. We will not abandon the faith that he passed on to us. I help other villagers to call for justice. At the same time, I don't want government officers to assume that all the people here are bad and use violence.

I consider that I have crossed some barrier of custom, language and cultural values. For two years, my son and another 57 villagers have been acquitted from charges of being members of

insurgency. I have not stopped my activities, I still continue to connect and coordinate between villagers and officers in the area hoping to restore justice and peace in the region.

Since my husband was shot dead, my life has been dedicated mostly to my work of heartfelt commitment to defend the human rights of the people in the southern border provinces. At the age of 50, I have become the so-called 'iron woman' of Takbai. With an education only up to 4th year primary school, In 2008 I was one of the women's human rights defenders who received an award from the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand. In 2009, I also received the 'Citizen Hero' Award and also 'Fighter without Loss' from a TV programme. All these awards were not my objective; my objective is to fight for social justice for my society and for our nation.

THERE ARE ANOTHER 57 MOTHERS WHO ARE SUFFERING THAT THEIR SON OR THEIR LOVED ONE IS BEING DETAINED, AND SO MY WORK IS TO HELP ALL OF THEM TO WIN JUSTICE.

## VIETNAM PHAN KIEN QUOC

I come from a country that, contrary to what most people think, is now in great turmoil. Just like in any other country with a dictatorial regime, the Communist Party of Vietnam awards itself all rights to control the people. This situation is precisely the cause for the backwardness and poverty of the country.

However, within the past few years, many individuals and many organisations have courageously stood up and denounced the lack of democracy, human rights violations and the extent of corruption that are forcing many Vietnamese into destitution while simultaneously widening the gap between the rich and the poor. The human rights defenders originate from every class of society: labourers demand safe work environments; farmers demand back their seized lands. Catholics, Baptists, and Buddhists have also unrelentingly prayed for religious freedom and for the return of properties usurped by the Government.

The struggle for human rights also originates from the hearts of thousands of people who have signed petitions to call for the protection of national territory and waters against Chinese expansion, and to denounce the spineless attitude of the Vietnamese. For example, just within six months of launching, the website Bauxitevietnam.info, which was set up by people opposing the Government's plan to open a giant bauxite plant in the Vietnamese strategically sensitive Central Highlands, has attracted twenty million visitors which would have been unheard of a few years ago.

Yet, the Communist Party of Vietnam has suppressed these rightful, peaceful demands without mercy. They have beaten and jailed, coerced Christians, writers, weak and elderly farmers, even those who have served the Communist Party in the past. They have destroyed the forums of the intellectuals and isolated those who have courageously stood up to demand their basic rights.

Christians who have protested against government policy or demanded a more democratic system have been subjected to constant surveillance, harassment and intimidation and in some cases sent to labour camps. One former camp inmate has described his experience to me. "In those 7 years I witnessed an indescribable amount of human suffering. "Re-education camps" are where health deteriorates, dignity dies, and life ends. In these hard labour camps, prisoners were often forced to starve while having to work beyond their physical capacity. They were dehumanised, politically brainwashed, and indoctrinated with the state's agenda. I have cried for many friends who have died in pain and agony from untreated illnesses as there was no medical care, and I have mourned the loss of friends who were secretly killed in the night because they were too stubborn. I can never forget those who were executed because they were caught escaping".

I myself am not afraid of hardships. But the direst difficulty that I and countless other human

rights defenders face is isolation. Through various methods, the Vietnamese Government is escalating its efforts to split, suppress and stomp out the community of human rights defenders. People like me are against the entire government propaganda apparatus. Nevertheless, we patiently and diligently continue because this is the only choice to democratise and build our country. Yet, our efforts will be undermined as long as we have to fight in isolation and operate in darkness; and the road to democracy for us will continue to be a lengthy one. Thank you for your attention and thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my story with you.

NEVERTHELESS, WE PATIENTLY AND DILIGENTLY CONTINUE BECAUSE THIS IS THE ONLY CHOICE TO DEMOCRATISE AND BUILD OUR COUNTRY. YET, OUR EFFORTS WILL BE UNDERMINED AS LONG AS WE HAVE TO FIGHT IN ISOLATION AND OPERATE IN DARKNESS; AND THE ROAD TO DEMOCRACY FOR US WILL CONTINUE TO BE A LENGTHY ONE.

# EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA

## ALBANIA

BRIKENA PUKA

PSYCHO-SOCIAL CENTRE “VATRA”



Brikena Puka is the Executive Director of Psycho-Social Centre “Vatra”, a non-governmental womens’ organisation, created in 1999, with the mission: “The support of vulnerable groups such as women, girls and young people in the region of Southern Albania through awareness programmes and delivery of social services in the community”.

In 2001 Vatra established the first shelter in Albania for girls and women, victims of human trafficking and domestic violence. It is known that these two phenomena represent great challenges and generate huge social problems. In the ten years of our work, we have treated and helped hundreds of people, which because of the

problems they face, have caused huge difficulties for our staff, even endangering their lives.

Among many cases of this nature, today I want to share with you honourable participants an event which happened during these two last weeks, which caused great concern to the staff of Vatra, due to threats made in the courtroom by a violator.

For 4 months we had assisted a woman in our shelter, a victim of extreme domestic violence referred to us by a state centre, which offers the same services as we do.

Her husband is a very violent person, with a low and vulgar family and personal background, owner of some businesses and of a local television network established with the profits from drug trafficking and with strong support from Albanian politicians.

During the time she was staying in the shelter, the woman and all our staff were under continual pressure of attacks and death threats not only by the husband but even by her children. Knowing that it was a very difficult case, we asked the state institutions to take this woman into the care of the state and accommodate her in one of the high security centres. Not only were we not supported, but with their inaction the situation deteriorated to such an extent that the victim, the staff and the shelter itself became the target of violence lasting some days, encouraged by a powerful media campaign across the country. Today, due to the fact that the media published the location of the centre, the names of the staff and of the victims; and due

to the lack of support from state agencies responsible for implementing the laws on domestic violence, our personal integrity and the integrity of the organisation has been challenged, and it has forced some members of the staff to quit their jobs to protect their lives and families.

Thank you.

THE ONLY BODIES TO SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE US TO FACE ALL OF THIS MEDIA TERROR WERE THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND ACCREDITED EMBASSIES IN ALBANIA.

**AZERBAIJAN**  
**MIRVARI GAHRAMANLI**  
**ORGANISATION FOR THE RIGHTS OF OIL INDUSTRY WORKERS (OROIW)**



Mirvari Gahramanli is the Director of the Organisation for the Rights of Oil Industry Workers, which works to uphold human rights in the oil sector in the Azerbaijan Republic, and ensure state accountability in the country.

At the time when large-scale oil projects began to be carried out in Azerbaijan, massive human rights violations began to be observed in the oil sector. Taking these problems into account, on 3rd September 1996 the social organisation 'Organisation for the Rights of Oil Industry Workers' (OROIW) was founded by a group of oil industry workers with the aim of ensuring human rights in the Azerbaijan oil sector.

From 1996 onwards, the OROIW appealed to the Ministry of Justice for registration for many years, but the organisation received state registration only in 2006, following many applications and appeals, and also with the assistance of international organisations.

Members of the OROIW have been subjected to pressure not only from various state structures, but also from the Azerbaijan State Oil Company. I myself as Director of the organisation, and also members of my family and close relatives have encountered serious problems. In 1996 my interviews began to be published in independent newspapers. These interviews were mainly about corruption in the oil sector.

As a result of my activity, several times I was almost run over by cars in an attempt to eliminate or intimidate me.

One morning in 1998, I was detained by officers on the street from the 'Yasmal' branch of the Baku City Police, and I was released only at midnight that night.

On 12th January 2002, at 11am, as I was leaving my house, I was detained together with my daughter by approximately 20 armed policemen. My daughter was released at 5pm, and I was kept in the police station until 10pm, after which I was brought to the local court. Despite the fact that the working day had already ended, they tried to hold a sitting of the court, but under pressure from representatives of international organisations, NGO's and journalists the sitting was postponed. In court they tried unlawfully to sentence me to 15 days in prison, but under pressure from ambassadors from foreign countries and the human rights defender Leyla Unus, the sentence was changed to a fine for 'hooliganism'.

In 2002, when I returned to the country having taken part in and given a presentation at a round table in the US Congress and having appeared on 'Voice of America' radio, I was unlawfully dismissed from my job.

In the period from 2002 to 2003 members of my family and many close relatives were dismissed from their jobs. In 2003 my daughter, when she was dismissed from the Azerbaijan State Oil Company, also encountered physical violence. After her dismissal and an unlawful court verdict she had to go through psychological rehabilitation for a year.

In 2002 I went to the oil industry workers' hospital for treatment for high blood pressure. In spite of my poor condition, the hospital staff refused to admit and treat me (they said they were acting on the instructions of senior civil servants).

In 2003 I was beaten up by the police while I was monitoring marches and pickets. I was brought to hospital with many injuries but I was refused treatment.

Since 2004 we have been carrying out monitoring of the implementation of the project 'The Construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Jeikhan Oil and Gas Pipeline', during which we have encountered many human rights violations. This time our problems, pressure and persecution have become even worse because the President of the country has announced several times that those who campaign against this project are enemies of the country, that we are agents of foreign special forces and that we should be driven out of the country.

So, how do we attempt to solve the problem? We don't run away from the problem, we face the problem. We are not alone. We have close cooperation with the media. We shape public opinion and pressure. We are together and can work as a team. We alleviate and reduce risks. We are members of various associations and networks of NGOs. We have gained many allies. We work together with international organisations.

SO, HOW DO WE ATTEMPT TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM? WE DON'T RUN AWAY FROM THE PROBLEM, WE FACE THE PROBLEM. WE ARE NOT ALONE. WE HAVE CLOSE COOPERATION WITH THE MEDIA. WE SHAPE PUBLIC OPINION AND PRESSURE. WE ARE TOGETHER AND CAN WORK AS A TEAM.

**IRELAND**  
**VINCENT MCGRATH**  
**POBAL CHILL CHOMÁIN**



Vincent McGrath is Chair of Pobal Chill Chomáin which is a community organisation in Mayo in the West of Ireland that has been campaigning against a proposed gas pipeline development. He is one of the Rossport Five who were imprisoned for 94 days in 2005 for refusing to accept a court injunction forbidding them to interfere with work being undertaken by Shell with regard to the proposed pipeline.

For the past ten years our small rural community in the north-west of Ireland has been put through a horrific experience, simply because we will not consent to a dangerous project that is being imposed on us.

Ten years ago when the oil companies came into our community and told us that they wanted to be good neighbours most people believed them and trusted them.

So what has gone wrong? From the outset there was no meaningful consultation by the developer with the local community. There was no pre-planning or community participation in designing the project. As far back as the year 2000 the oil companies, with the support of the Irish Government, had already pre-determined the method of development, regardless of the consequences for the health and safety of the local population. They put shareholder profit before community safety.

We were lied to by the oil companies and misled by our own Government and state bodies, who all concealed important facts about the project. We were not told that the gas refinery would pose a threat to our drinking water supply, which is already contaminated with aluminium from the refinery site. We were not told that wastewater from the refinery could damage the marine life in the local bay and the livelihoods of the local fishermen. Neither the oil companies nor the state authorities told us that the proposed pipeline running close to our homes would transport unprocessed gas that could reach pressures as high as 345 bar; that in the event of a gas leak we would not be able to smell the gas because it would be not be odourised; that in the event of a full-blown rupture/fire/explosion anybody within 400 metres would very likely be killed; that we would have only 30 seconds to get to safety. Yet they were prepared to put such a pipeline as close as 70 metres to our homes through unstable ground.

Therefore the Corrib gas project is in itself a human rights threat because it imperils the health, safety, environment and the viability of our community. For these reasons we cannot consent

to this project in its present form. In the absence of consent a decision was taken to force the project through our community. The state has acted as an advocate and facilitator of the project rather than as a defender of the rights of the citizen.

When landowners refused to sign documents to allow the oil companies to enter their land to lay the gas pipeline the Government brought in a law giving powers of compulsory acquisition for the first time to a private company – in this case Shell Oil. (The validity of this legislation is awaiting a High Court decision). When the Planning Board refused to grant permission for the gas refinery Shell Oil and Statoil held a meeting with former Taoiseach (PM), Bertie Ahern, who facilitated a meeting with the Planning Board. The following year permission was granted for the refinery on the same site.

When local farmers refused to allow Shell onto their lands to install the gas pipeline Shell obtained an injunction against the local community, although it failed to produce any documentation showing that it had legal authority to enter the land. The judge took Shell's word and five local men, known as 'The Rossport Five' ended up in jail for 94 days.

Our people have been beaten with batons, kicked, hospitalised, assaulted and arrested, even though we have been engaged in peaceful protests. Opponents of the project have been targeted and arrested on flimsy legal grounds.

Sections of the media have tried to portray us as ignorant and backward peasants holding up "progress". Embedded journalists and politicians continue to peddle Shell's propaganda, engaging in stereotyping and character assassination. I would like to put on record that our community is not opposed to the development of the Corrib gas field but we are against the way it is being done. We have explored every opportunity to resolve this dispute through dialogue.

Ten years ago the oil companies and the politicians told us that the gas project would transform our lives. As you have heard our lives have been transformed but in ways that we never thought possible. We remain receptive to any positive initiatives that will help to solve this conflict and we will continue to work constructively to find a solution acceptable to all parties.

THE COMMUNITY HAS BEEN UNDER SURVEILLANCE BY THE POLICE WHILE IN OUR HOMES AND EVEN FAR AWAY FROM THE SCENE OF ANY PROTESTS. OUR CAR REGISTRATION NUMBERS HAVE BEEN RECORDED BY THE POLICE WHILE WE ATTENDED PUBLIC MEETINGS. POLICE RIOT VANS HAVE PATROLLED OUR AREA IN AN EFFORT TO INTIMIDATE US AND AT THE SAME TIME CONVEY THE IMPRESSION TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD THAT WE ARE DANGEROUS PEOPLE WHO POSE A THREAT TO THE STATE.



**ITALY**  
**MATTEO PEGORARO**  
**EVERYONE GROUP**



Matteo Pegoraro is the Co-president of EveryOne Group, an international human rights organisation based in Italy which cooperates in the territory of Europe and all over the world for the protection of minorities' rights (especially homosexuals, transgender people, Roma people and migrants).

Since 2006, I have been part of a non-violent campaign against the brutality of the public security forces (State Police, Municipal Police, Carabinieri), which abuse innocent and undefended Roma families and migrant groups, especially those without residence permits who are persecuted on the basis of the new Law No. 94/2009 approved by the Berlusconi Government,

and which treats these vulnerable groups as criminals who can be imprisoned and expelled or held for several months in detention centres similar to concentration camps.

Forced evictions, violations of fundamental rights, violence and discrimination are every day more frequent against these people. On many occasions, when I come into the field to help these people and to verify a human rights abuse, the authorities are very hostile to my colleagues and me: they block us, they prevent us acting as intermediaries between the "cleared out" families/migrants and the authorities/institutions and several times they've threatened and intimidated me, trying to stop me helping these people who are living in tragic conditions. They have organised ambushes with police cars at our activists' homes, summoned us to interviews at the Public Prosecutor's office and police headquarters to investigate and probe who we are and what we do every day. They have failed to uphold our complaints, threatened legal action, arrest, and punishment by law because of our solidarity with migrants, the homeless, and Roma people.

Furthermore, racist, xenophobic and homophobic movements, like the Italian Forza Nuova (New Force), that is based on fascist and neo-nazi politics, have issued death threats to EveryOne Group activists (including me). Two months ago, for example, I found my car completely covered with Forza Nuova's leaflets and materials that sang the praises of armed action against LGBTI people, migrants and gypsies.

The Italian Government is also party to these fundamental human rights violations, and does not give credit to any homosexual couple's rights and refuses to approve an anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia law, that would punish by law attacks and discrimination against LGBTI

people. Many homosexual boys have been seriously beaten in several Italian cities because of their homosexuality and many times homophobic squads have also pursued me and other members of our group, trying to attack us, because of the sexual orientation of many of our members, and also because of our concern for the safety of the LGBTI community.

FORCED EVICTIONS, VIOLATIONS OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS, VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION ARE EVERY DAY MORE FREQUENT AGAINST THESE PEOPLE.

## KAZAKHSTAN ANARA IBRAYEVA KAZAKHSTAN INTERNATIONAL BUREAU OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW



Anara Ibrayeva has been the Director of the Astana branch of the Kazakhstan International Bureau of Human Rights and the Rule of Law for over 11 years.

Since its inception the Bureau has been striving to cover the following areas:

- Provide free legal help for citizens, foreigners, refugees and people without nationality (about 1200-1500 people per year in Astana) in the form of:
  - Legal consultations;
  - Composition of written complaints and communications (including with the UN Convention committees)
  - Search applications and other documents;
  - Represent the interests of citizens in the courts

I myself analyse current law in Kazakhstan in relation to the state's obligations under international agreements on human rights which it has ratified.

I conduct monitoring in the following areas:

- General monitoring of the situation in connection with political rights and civil freedoms in Kazakhstan (including the rights of children, refugees, migrants, prisoners and those accused of crimes, and psychiatric patients). This includes collecting, analysing and evaluating information; presenting reports and analysis to international organisations, including the UN Convention organisations and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE; participation in declarations; and holding press conferences.
- Monitoring court investigations in the most important areas (on freedom of conscience, torture, freedom of assembly/association etc.).
- Monitoring projects with a particular focus on the rights of those in police custody, those held in prison, the observance of due process in court proceedings, the procedure of court-sanctioned arrests, and the conditions of patients held in psychiatric institutions.

I also work on constructive collaboration with state organs in the area of promotion of human rights and participation in the formation of public policy in this area:

- Conducting public campaigns in support of certain projects

- Participating in discussion groups on political and legal issues (for example the discussion group Politon which was formed by former deputy of the Parliament Zaufresh Batalova.
- Meeting with representatives of state organs, including deputies of the parliament, in order to promote legal reform in Kazakhstan.
- Participating in the work of a number of expert councils.
- Member of the expert advisory group of the Commissioner for Human Rights in Kazakhstan.
- Member of the public group on monitoring police activity.
- Member of the public monitoring committee in Astana investigating solitary confinement in prisons.
- Member of the public expert consultation group on the issue of psychiatric health in Astana.
- Member of the working group on the founding of a national prevention mechanism in accordance with the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture (according to Kazakhstan's obligations, this should have been set up by the 21st of November 2009 but this has not been done).

My colleagues and I carry out educational and cultural activities (promoting awareness of international standards in the areas of observance of the rights and freedoms of the individual). This includes the following:

- Conducting seminars, conferences, training, voluntary school of human rights, information hours, appearances in presentations and announcements, giving lectures on human rights, providing training and seminars to participating schools, students of specialist and third level institutions, courts, prosecutors, police, prison officers, doctors, lawyers and university teachers.
- Preparing and disseminating information materials on human rights in Russian and Kazakh; technical guides, booklets, brochures, memorials etc.
- The publication of educational literature on human rights.
- The preparing of tv programmes on human rights.

For two years I have participated in the dialogue of the European Commission in Kazakhstan with the Government of our country to implement the 'Path to Europe' programme.

AS A LAWYER, IN PARTICULAR, MY SPECIALITY IS CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION AND IN PARTICULAR THE RIGHT OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL TO BE FREE FROM TORTURE.

## KYRGYZSTAN

ERKINGUL IMANKOZOEVA  
KAREK



Erkingul Imankozoeva is the President of the social organisation 'Karek' in Kyrgyzstan.

When it has made decisions regarding the national, economic and environmental safety of Kyrgyzstan, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic has often violated the Constitution and made decisions which were clearly against the interests of Kyrgyzstan and the Kyrgyz people. According to the constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Kyrgyzstan is considered to be a democratic state, but unfortunately the reality is very different.

Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that an agreement was signed in 1992 between the

Kyrgyz Government and the Canadian company 'Cameco Corporation' without any tendering process having taken place. It was a general agreement about developing the gold-ore deposit 'Kumtor'. This collaboration with the Canadian company was the first incidence of business collaboration after the Soviet Iron Curtain came down in 1991, but it turned out not to bode well for cooperation with a foreign company and proves that this is not how business should be done in a country with a transition economy. The signing of an agreement that was disadvantageous for Kyrgyzstan, the lack of monitoring of the income received and the lack of accountability of the highest echelons of power led to capital draining out of the country, an unrestrained growth in corruption and the appearance of conflicts between the gold-mining company and the local population.

Instead of becoming a developed country with a promising future, the Kyrgyzstan people have endured ecological catastrophe, a polluted, poisoned environment, more than 100 million tons of tailing dumps with poisonous waste stored under glaciers, and a ruined system of glaciers and lakes.

The most frightening incident was the cyanide catastrophe, which happened on May 20th 1998. A truck transporting sodium cyanide turned over and fell into the river Barskoon. During the accident 1,750 kilos of cyanide were discharged into the river. The Kumtor Operating Company did not alert the local people immediately after the accident, and this delay led to serious consequences for the local people's health. As a result of the accident the inhabitants of the villages of Barskoon, Tamga, Tosor and Zhargylchak received cyanide poisoning, four people died and more than 2000 were hospitalised. These are all villages which are located on the south bank of the mountain resort Lake Issyk-Kul.

A few days after the accident, the company used calcium hypochlorite to neutralise the cyanide. The use of this substance in the given conditions led to the formation of cyanide chlorites and cyanogens, compounds which are toxic for aquatic organisms.

After the cyanide accident the sickness and death rate increased among the local people. Many victims of the accident became invalids of the first or second group. The authorities carried out forced abortions on pregnant women, alleging that the babies would be born with abnormalities.

Several times the local people held protests and pickets to defend their legal rights, but several times they were subjected to various kinds of persecution and intimidation. Some women activists were put in cells and against their will had blood taken from their veins, from which they contracted infectious diseases. 'Karek' lobbies for the restoration of justice, reduction of corruption among civil servants and also aims to force Kumtor to provide information, be transparent in its work and accountable to the local people, and defends the rights of victims. Our organisation met with one of Kumtor's main creditors, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in London. At the meeting we informed them of the environmental breaches in the company's work and asked them to carry out an independent environmental inspection in the mine. After that the Kumtor mine was visited by independent environmental experts from the EBRD. To this day we do not know the results of the inspection, which testifies to the fact that the experts are concealing reliable information from us about the company's work.

In 2005 we secured 4.4 million US dollars from 'Kumtor Operating Company' as compensation to the victims from five villages for the 1998-1999 harvest. We secured the reestablishment of the diagnostic centre in the village of Barskoon at a cost of US\$136,363.

Furthermore, we have won three court cases against the company, and have carried out environmental monitoring in the Kumtor mine. At the moment we are defending the rights of the victims of the cyanide accident in court, for the harm caused to their health by the company. We have won two of these cases.

Karek has received more than 500 applications for legal aid from inhabitants of the five villages and we continue to receive applications. Our fight to restore the victims' rights goes on.

INSTEAD OF BECOMING A DEVELOPED COUNTRY WITH A PROMISING FUTURE, KYRGYZSTAN HAS ENDURED THE SUFFERING OF THE PEOPLE, ECOLOGICAL CATASTROPHE, A POLLUTED, POISONED ENVIRONMENT, MORE THAN 100 MILLION TONS OF TAILING DUMPS WITH POISONOUS WASTE STORED UNDER GLACIERS, RUINED SYSTEM OF GLACIERS AND LAKES WHICH ARE A HEADACHE FOR THE WHOLE KYRGYZ PEOPLE.

**LATVIA**  
**KASPARS ZALITIS**  
**MOZAIKA**



Kaspars Zalitis works for a small organisation in Latvia called Mozaika, which works with and for the LGBTI community in the country.

“Welcome to the European Union!” with these words I usually begin the story about the human rights situation in Latvia, a tiny country in Eastern Europe usually seen as a quiet country until you touch two issues – history or gay and lesbian rights.

“The Death Culture” – this is how we are referred to by politicians, the media and some religious institutions. Since 2006 I have been involved in organising “Prides” in Riga or equality marches, but unfortunately our opponents call it the ‘March

of Death’. For example, at the first Baltic Pride that we organised last year we were welcomed with signs stating “Gays will be treated in gas chambers” and some politicians and police force members said that we should not provoke THEM! By provocation they meant walking and demanding equal rights.

People in Latvia say that they have nothing against gay people but that it’s not natural and they don’t have to see it on the streets. Some people consider every sign of being different to be punishable. So I have been beaten up, called names, threatened and so have my friends and colleagues because someone thinks or knows that we’re different. But as we always say what doesn’t kill us makes us stronger. Unfortunately many people in Latvia are afraid to seek any help because then they would have to disclose information about themselves that could put them in an even more vulnerable position.

Here are some little extras – once a hateful newspaper published the home addresses of all board members of Mozaika and also a private e-mail message I had sent to my colleagues was published in the same newspaper. What followed then was a number of different articles in newspapers analysing my persona.

Later on during Riga Pride 2008 someone who has not yet been identified hacked into our information system and stole Mozaika’s membership database. Soon after they distributed this information all over the world-wide web, which included home addresses, telephone numbers etc.

Meanwhile instead of spreading love and peace, the church and some religious movements

in Latvia are spreading hate. The Catholic cardinal in Latvia officially called to clear Latvian state institutions and schools of “those homosexuals” because they can harm our future and our kids. And that is just a small bit from his “friendly” rhetoric.

It is not that easy to come out as gay in Latvia because it can harm you (physically and mentally), your school, your work, your friends and family. But as love has no boundaries neither has as our activism!

BUT AS WE ALWAYS SAY WHAT DOESN'T KILL US MAKES US STRONGER.  
UNFORTUNATELY MANY PEOPLE IN LATVIA ARE AFRAID TO SEEK ANY HELP BECAUSE  
THEN THEY WOULD HAVE TO DISCLOSE INFORMATION ABOUT THEMSELVES THAT  
COULD PUT THEM IN AN EVEN MORE VULNERABLE POSITION.

## RUSSIAN FEDERATION

### KONSTANTIN BARANOV

#### MOLODAYA EVROPA (YOUNG EUROPE)



Konstantin Baranov is the head of the Rostov branch of a public youth organisation, Molodaya Evropa (Young Europe), which is an international network of organisations from Western and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, promoting European values such as tolerance, intercultural exchanges and human rights.

In recent years in Russia there has been a dangerous tendency of human rights defenders working on xenophobia issues to be regularly threatened by radical nationalists. Thus, in February 2009 the representatives of the “SOVA” Centre (Moscow) – Alexander Verkhovsky and Galina Kozhevnikova, and in August 2008 – the leader of the Institute of Social Problems “United

Europe” (Orel) Dmitry Krayukhin – were threatened. These actions, and others, by the extreme right activists remain unpunished. As the investigations into threats are opened but do not lead to any concrete results, the authors of threats are not found and no measures of protection for threatened HRDs are ordered.

A well known practice of the offices of the Public Prosecutor in Russia is to show received complaints to those against whom they are directed. This may lead to HRDs’ personal data disclosure and heightens the risk of such threats.

Unfortunately, some of these threats turn into action (such as the murder of a famous anti-fascist Nikolay Girenko in 2004 in St. Petersburg). For this reason, public authorities should pay particular attention to the cases of threats to HRDs working on xenophobia issues and thoroughly investigate them.

On July 15th, 2009 I started receiving threats via Internet messages and phone calls. The nature of the threats, nicknames used, and the information from personal web-pages give reason to suppose that their authors belong to extreme right wing groups. One of the extreme right activists published on his web-page an appeal to “all the right-wing people of Rostov”, which proclaimed me an ‘enemy of Russia’ and contained my web-page address and cell-phone number. It also mentioned the complaint that I had lodged with the Regional Prosecutor’s office on July 9th requesting them to issue a warning to one of the city’s night clubs, which hosts concerts by extreme right wing musical groups.

There are serious reasons to suppose that the threats were caused by the disclosure of my

personal data indicated in the complaint. The representatives of the Regional Prosecutor’s office denied such a possibility, but couldn’t point out any other possible causes of what happened.

On July 28th I lodged a complaint to institute legal proceedings in connection with threats I had received. I also sent an appeal to the Office of the Prosecutor General to carry out the inspection into the disclosure of my personal data.

Despite wide media coverage and campaigns launched by Front Line and the Youth Human Rights Movement, no steps have been taken by the authorities to prevent future concerts by extreme right musical groups. Moreover, the police refused to investigate the threats, and instead investigated it as a ‘public insult’, which is a far smaller criminal offence, and the office of the Public Prosecutor replied that the investigation showed no evidence of a possible leakage of personal data.

Since my personal data (including home address) is still available to the extreme right, and no measures were taken to effectively investigate the case and prevent similar ones in the future, I still have concerns for my safety.

IN RECENT YEARS IN RUSSIA THERE HAS BEEN A DANGEROUS TENDENCY OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS WORKING ON XENOPHOBIA ISSUES TO BE REGULARLY THREATENED BY RADICAL NATIONALISTS.

# THE AMERICAS

## BRAZIL

ANA CLARICE SOARES HANAUER

THE LANDLESS RURAL WORKERS' MOVEMENT – MST



On behalf of the landless families who form the MST, I thank you for the invitation to take part and exchange experiences and realities, as well as denounce the attacks on the human rights of those who fight for land, land reform and for social and structural transformations. Thank you very much.

I come from Brazil, famous the world over for soccer, beautiful beaches and carnival, but it hides the brutal social inequality within which the Brazilian people live. The Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST) is a political organisation, autonomous and for the masses, that for 25 years, has been mobilising the landless to engage in the fight for land reform in Brazil. It is represented in 24

states and organises in excess of 1.5 million people who live in settlements and campsites.

The criminalisation of social movements aims at demobilising and demoralising them, among them the MST. This occurs as an outcome of two conflicting concepts: small-scale agriculture, which advocates both popular and food sovereignty, and the agri-business that defends the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources and the submission of small-scale farmers in favour of multinational organisations' profits.

The MST is a legitimate and just movement. The MST fulfills a historical role; the role of mobilising the poor to fight for constitutional and human rights. Through the MST's organisation, families who had no expectations recover their hope and dignity, and produce food. We work in over 2,250 schools, bringing education to over 300,000 landless workers. Above all economic achievements, the MST has raised the cultural and political awareness of these families. The direct fight is the biggest asset that the MST has.

To make the denunciation of the social, economic and environmental problems generated by the agri-business official, the 'Via Campesina' women have organised specific peaceful protests around 8 March. The State Government, in this context, directs public money to the multinational companies, and criminally pursues the organisations that oppose the projects of indiscriminate exploitation of the people and exhaustion of the natural resources. In general, the abuses committed against landless families in Rio Grande do Sul can happen in different ways:

Legal – through the decision of the Public Attorney to label the MST as an illegal movement; court decisions forbidding marches and demonstrations; the shutting down of the Itinerant School; taking leaders to court and carrying out arrests, either by summary arrest leading straight to prison or as collective arrests. (example: the case of 900 Via Campesina women in 2008, detained during a protest in an open air Stora Enso compound for 5 hours and a further 12 hours in a sports hall). Currently, in Rio Grande do Sul, there are over 300 movement leaders being tried in court for these demonstrations.

Physical violence – in demonstrations, with military force outnumbering protesters by three to one; violent evictions, where rubber bullets, tear gas, cavalry, dogs, snipers, electric shock, beatings, physical and psychological torture and metal bullets are commonly used. It culminated in the murder of the landless worker Elton Brum, in August 2009, a clear statement by the police that they will go as far as murdering workers to defend the interests of large-scale farmers and transnational companies.

The Bourgeois Media – the media collude with the transnational companies and international financial institutions against the MST. They make up facts, invent lies to turn the landless families into criminals, for their act of raising the flag for land reform. We are not criminals, we are Brazilians fighting for our rights.

The creation of institutional devices – such as the recent Parliamentary Enquiry Commission on Land Reform. This parliamentary wing aims to instill confusion among the general public, and once more, they want to investigate and fabricate headlines against the MST.

Finally, we have one certainty: the solidarity that we have received in these 25 years keeps us standing, resisting, stubborn and focused on the formulation of an MST and a Brazilian nation for the Brazilian people, and the formulation of a popular project for the country workers and all of society.

Once more, we count on national and international solidarity to face this wave against human rights in Brazil and Latin America. This is my testimony.

THEY MAKE UP FACTS, INVENT LIES TO TURN THE LANDLESS FAMILIES INTO CRIMINALS, FOR THEIR ACT OF RAISING THE FLAG FOR LAND REFORM. WE ARE NOT CRIMINALS, WE ARE BRAZILIANS FIGHTING FOR OUR RIGHTS.

## CHILE

### ANDRÉS RIVERA DUARTE

#### TRANSSEXUAL ORGANISATION FOR DIGNITY OF DIVERSITY – OTD



Andrés Rivera Duarte, transsexual man, 45 years, an activist, a pioneer in the struggle of male transsexuals in Chile, founder of the first organisation of male transsexuals in Chile Transsexual Organisation for Dignity of Diversity (OTD), established in 2003 for the first time in Chile, making a social and political impact. Andrés opened the way and exposed the issue of transgender males, never before addressed by any LGBTI organisation in Chile.

In 2003, I participated in a television programme to raise awareness of male transsexualism, my face was not exposed, but still I was recognised. This was on April 17, 2003. By April 30, 2003 I had no family, no friends and no work. I suffered brutal

transgender discrimination. During a period of 3 years I was unemployed, I lost my house, my property, I spent 7 days without food, searching the streets for food, which eventually led me to depression, alcohol problems and an attempted suicide. At the end of 2003, as a result of the attempted suicide I came to the Rancagua Regional Hospital of Psychiatry and started my treatment and the fight for equality and dignity for transgender people, the fight that is my life and in which I persist.

In 2004, I analysed Chilean law, looking at change of name and sex, and without finding anything precise concerning gender identity, I found a loophole that could be used to file a demand and legally obtain a change. Although justice was acting more as a degrading and discriminatory entity, to submit an application for change of name and sex, it was necessary to have been assessed by a psychologist and psychiatrist, to submit myself to sterilisation by hysterectomy, so as to never procreate, to live as Andrés socially for 5 years, regardless of if in those 5 years one could lose job and family, by discrimination or violation of one's rights.

On the other hand there is discrimination and violation of the human rights of those who are transsexuals, backed by the justice system, by being subjected to an evaluation by the Legal Medical Institute, where they take naked photographs, examine the anus and vagina, use a speculum (a metal instrument that is inserted into the vagina) to see if the person is a virgin, and take photographs of the clitoris and labias. All of this in order for the medical examiner to report that we have the body characteristics of a man or a woman. Characteristics that are obvious to the eye. After all of this, 3 years on in 2007, I got my legal change of name and sex without the medical operation – phalloplasty. The first case in Chile to be able to show that to be a man or woman did not depend on having sexual organs, but that being a man was

something more than the genitalia, and while I had no penis, I felt psychologically masculine.

In 2008 I had the honour of receiving the Felipa de Souza Award for my tireless struggle for equality and dignity.

The Chilean Government has no policies of equality, respect and dignity that relate to the transsexual population. We are absolutely invisible. While we are working on a Draft Law on Gender Identity, and performing a series of workshops on transsexual issues, the road that lies ahead is still significant, because we want transsexuality to be incorporated into national health policies. We want this issue to be on the curriculum in the universities, in training the professionals, we want care and respect for our identity, we want to be respected and to insert ourselves into society with equal rights for all.

AT THE END OF 2003, AS A RESULT OF MY ATTEMPTED SUICIDE I CAME TO THE RANCAGUA REGIONAL HOSPITAL OF PSYCHIATRY AND STARTED MY TREATMENT AND THE FIGHT FOR EQUALITY AND DIGNITY FOR TRANSGENDER PEOPLE, THE FIGHT THAT IS MY LIFE AND IN WHICH I PERSIST.

**COLOMBIA**  
**DANILO RUEDA**  
**COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND PEACE**



Danilo Rueda is a Coordinator with the Committee on Justice and Peace, a human rights organisation with 22 years of experience building a collective space, rather than a space just for individuals. This collective space, rooted in respect for people's rights and international human rights law has signified the intent to affirm the reconstruction of the rule of law in Colombia.

Colombia has been racked by crime and state terror, murder, enforced disappearance, torture, forced displacement and the use of the judiciary as a weapon of war against the people, social and trade union leaders, human rights defenders, opposition politicians, sex workers, gays and lesbians and youth amongst others. The impunity

for these crimes which can be considered as crimes against humanity and which are calculated in the last 20 years to have reached 50,000 disappearances, 43,000 executions, 5 million internally displaced, according to the databases of organisations.

This structural injustice in state violence is fostered by the media, which is concentrated in the hands of a few producers of information and entertainment companies. This media/electoral control is as shameful a use of the media as the buying of votes, coercion, or the power to corrupt with the money from either drug trafficking or powerful corporations. This impunity has also legitimised the economic power of a few who have used state violence to enrich themselves or maintain their privileges.

Thus, in Colombia they justify silence or hide crimes of state under the pretext of pursuit of the guerrillas. The formality of a political democracy remains without social democracy, without participatory democracy, without environmental democracy – it is rather a democracy without rights. The justification of armed violence to protect state communism, atheism, the attack on private property, has now been integrated into the crusade against terrorism, in the name of good manners, good morals, investor confidence and 'social cohesion'.

The human rights defenders of our Justice and Peace Commission in the last 18 years have been the target of a campaign which combines accusations, death threats, illegal surveillance, illegal interception, kidnapping, assassination attempts and attempts of forced disappearance and false charges brought before the courts. Some of us, myself included, have been forced into temporary or permanent exile, but at the same time we develop creative ways to survive and maintain our identity and continue our work.

A year ago, a Colombian magazine released a report on the state security agency, DAS, which was controlled by President Alvaro Uribe for the last 8 years. This report describes DAS's objective of neutralising and waging an intelligence offensive against; the judges of the Criminal Chamber of the Court (who are investigating the relationship between paramilitaries and politicians), independent journalists, opposition political leaders and human rights defenders, including our Justice and Peace Commission.

This systematic persecution by DAS which aims to locate and neutralise leading opponents, is an attempt on our life and honour, and that of our families and communities and is a clear violation of the most elementary principles of law. Since 2003, this situation has had a persistent impact that is intended to affect our freedom, autonomy and privacy as well as the support, solidarity and protection we enjoy. The application of these methods of intimidation, media campaigns, pamphlets, ballots and death threats, have developed with large-scale financing from public resources.

From 2003 until today the campaign of slander against our organisation has not ceased, the mechanisms have been multiple, and while I'm here, the allegations in the mainstream media do not stop, as per the recent article in *The Wall Street Journal*. Those responsible for crimes against humanity, those responsible for gross and systematic violations of human rights, the beneficiaries, are afraid of the truth, and do not want to return the land, taken away with blood and fire. They do not want to foster a deliberate democracy, a democracy with social justice. Our work will not cease. But we believe that, even in the face of unjust imprisonment or death by silenced bullets, we must continue to document and denounce these issues before national and international courts. Our reason for being is to uphold truth and justice, to fight for reparation for the victims of thousands of crimes against humanity in our country, so we are part of the Movement of Victims of State Crimes. Their cause is ours and ours is yours.

THUS, IN COLOMBIA THEY JUSTIFY, SILENCE OR HIDE CRIMES OF STATE UNDER THE PRETEXT OF PURSUIT OF THE GUERRILLAS, THE FORMALITY OF A POLITICAL DEMOCRACY REMAINS WITHOUT SOCIAL DEMOCRACY, WITHOUT PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY, WITHOUT ENVIRONMENTAL DEMOCRAC – A DEMOCRACY WITHOUT RIGHTS.



## COLOMBIA

### MAGALI BELARCÁZAR

#### FEDERACION DE MUJERES CAMPESINAS DE NARIÑO



The situation of poverty, marginalisation, corruption and discrimination against women were the reasons that led to the women in the municipality of Ricaurte to begin the process towards the promotion of the rights of women in the late 80s. with the organisation of public events marking important days such as March 8, International Women's Day and November 25th, International Stop Violence Against Women Day. We attain massive participation by women involving the entire municipality, for at that time our main concerns were social and economic problems.

In 1995, we begin the civic movement Pie de Monte Costero Nariñense with a strike as the only means of presenting the social demands of the

region like: roads, energy, health and education. This process was a space where rural women participated actively and assumed leadership in negotiations with the Government. We carried out several campaigns but at the time we did not envisage the arrival of the war in our region.

In the late 90's we are seriously affected by the fumigation of illegal crops and the arrival of paramilitaries in the region of Putumayo that detonates a bloody war of dimensions never imagined in a zone of tranquillity, harmony, and rich in biodiversity.

The absence of a policy that stimulates food production and agricultural welfare leads to the expansion of drug trafficking as an economic alternative through many regions of the country with grave consequences for the population. The spraying of crops affects bread products, and causes health problems especially among women and children. At the same time, the incursion of the paramilitaries backed by the government armed forces sees the beginning of a strategic war aimed at the dispossession, displacement and exile of communities who have lived and cared for Mother Earth in the region for many years. This is now the nightmare and terror affecting the region. Behind the mega-projects we see the deepening of violence and death.

Since then, rural women experience the longest nightmare under the current government, which is why one of the most important strategic aspects of our organisational process is the protection of human rights. We began to participate in national and regional mobilisations in the search for peace with social justice. In April 2004 we take part in a massive demonstration at the borders with Ecuador demanding land rights, food sovereignty and an immediate halt to Plan Colombia and free trade agreement negotiations. From Ricaurte we continue to

coordinate this process along with other organisations and in two months we achieve the participation of 3,000 women.

The deterioration of the situation in our regions and the impact on livestock and crops in the area lead to the mobilisation of women leaders from several rural municipalities to have a meeting in Samaniego in May 2006 where we agree to advance the creation of the Federación de Mujeres Campesinas de Nariño. (Federation of Rural Women of Nariño). And in order to achieve a greater impact, we begin the process of strengthening women's associations in each municipality. This leads to the establishment of the Asociación de Mujeres Campesinas y Sembradoras de Vida y Paz de Samaniego (Women Growers of Peace and Life of Samaniego) under the important leadership and humanitarian work of Magali Belarcázar.

AT THE SAME TIME, THE INCURSION OF THE PARAMILITARIES BACKED BY THE GOVERNMENT ARMED FORCES SEES THE BEGINNING OF A STRATEGIC WAR AIMED AT THE DISPOSSESSION, DISPLACEMENT AND EXILE OF COMMUNITIES WHO HAVE LIVED AND CARED FOR MOTHER EARTH IN THE IN THE REGION FOR MANY YEARS. THIS IS NOW THE NIGHTMARE AND TERROR AFFECTING THE REGION.

## EQUADOR

### LINA SOLANO ORTIZ

#### WOMEN DEFENDERS OF MOTHER EARTH



Lina Solano is a member of the Frente de Mujeres Defensoras de la Pachamama o Madre Tierra (Women Defenders of Mother Earth), the Coordinadora Campesina Popular de Morona Santiago (Popular Coordination of Peasants of Morona Santiago), the Coordinadora Nacional por la Defensa de la Vida y la Soberanía de Ecuador – CNDVS (the National Coordination for the Defence of the Life and Sovereignty of Ecuador) and of the Unión Latinoamericana de Mujeres – ULAM (Latin-American Women’s Union).

My name is Lina Solano Ortiz. I am from Ecuador, from a town called Indanza in the province of Morona Santiago, Ecuador Amazon, where today,

the situation of human rights defenders is very delicate due to the presence of transnational mining companies, such as the Chinese-Canadian funded company Corriente Resources, which is based in the area where I live.

As a result of my activism as a human rights defender, and of being identified as one of the main leaders of the ‘anti-mining’ resistance as the Government has branded us, I have had to face diverse forms of repression and persecution.

In the year 2005 I lost my job in the school in my town, the sole reason being that I had motivated the students to participate in a series of informative conferences on the environmental impact of large-scale mining and human rights.

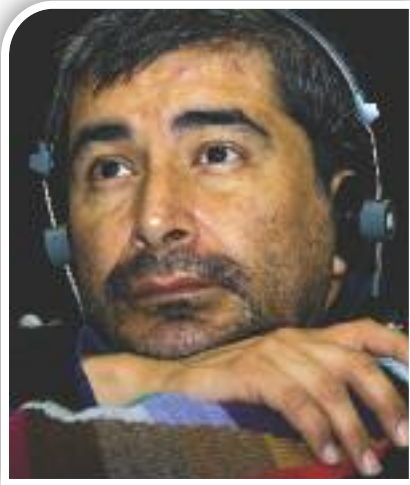
In the year 2006, due to the mobilisation that succeeded in getting the mega mining projects in our zone suspended, the company, the Government and the state began a campaign of judicial harassment against me. I have been subjected to several criminal trials and have been falsely accused which has put me at risk of being imprisoned for several years. The majority of the cases against me were closed as a result of a general amnesty granted by the National Constituent Assembly of Ecuador in the year 2008. However, proceedings which we were not aware of continued in spite of the amnesty. In this particular case, I have been falsely accused of trespassing, together with 17 other people, on the Corriente Resources site which is based in the area known as Rosa de Oro. Witnesses, who we suspect are being paid by the mining company, have identified me as the leader of the group allegedly involved in this incident although I was not even present at the place on the date and time stated in the preliminary inquiry No. 55-2007.

In the year 2007, I was deprived of my liberty in a violent, arbitrary and illegal manner, and arrested in the city of Cuenca, Azuay province, by members of the police while I was documenting the repression which occurred during the national uprising against the mines in June of that year. I was later released thanks to a Habeas Corpus granted by the Mayor of the city. The charges against me in relation to this incident were dropped as a result of the amnesty in the year 2008.

During all this time I have received constant threats by email and mobile phone. However, the hardest thing to deal with has been the campaign undertaken by the Government, the state and the corporations, to discredit and defame me in their efforts to silence me, starting with the very President of the Republic, Rafael Correa, who on various occasions has publicly insulted me.

AS A RESULT OF MY ACTIVISM AS A HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER, AND OF BEING IDENTIFIED AS ONE OF THE MAIN LEADERS OF THE “ANTI-MINING” RESISTANCE AS THE GOVERNMENT HAS BRANDED US, I HAVE HAD TO FACE DIVERSE FORMS OF REPRESSION AND PERSECUTION.

**GUATEMALA**  
**YURI GIOVANNI MELINI**  
**CALAS**



**SURVIVING A CRIMINAL ATTACK, FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

There can be no doubt that a certain purpose has taken hold of my life these days. To be once again at the forefront of CALAS (the organisation which I founded ten years ago and which I still lead), giving my best, is a great responsibility.

Since that day, Thursday the 4th of September 2008, more than fifteen months have gone by; a period that was useful to me to think deeply and define what role my life will play in the future and how to exercise my rights and obligations as a responsible citizen.

I am sincerely worried about the environmental future of Guatemala. The degradation of its nature is clear. There is a lack of public awareness, both from the citizens and from the authorities. In this country, we are truly losing our forests and the reforestation programmes are not effective. Because of that, we need to close the hunting season on our forests. Water issues are chaotic. There is a lack of regulation, politics and institutionalisation. Issues of public participation are looked down on, such as consulting communities about mining for metals.

The criminal attack on me has been an opportunity to realise that I shouldn't be afraid, nor have any limits in my life, my work or my love for Guatemala. These fifteen months have been a long time. A long time to grow spiritually, to develop myself and to get to know myself better, in the shelter of my faith, with love from God, my family, my partner and from the team I work with.

I received and lived with the solidarity, the prayers and the signs of affection of thousands of people, who approached me to tell me: "I've prayed for you. I'm so happy that you're alive and fighting for the environment of the Guatemala we love."

These are words that motivate me and at the same time reduce the physical pain of seven surgeries. I accept any physical limitation or consequence with humility, faith and courage; because I know I am doing the right thing, that I am on the right side, and that my loyalty is to my country, to Guatemalan society in general, but especially to those who still have to be born, with those who will inherit this land tomorrow, perhaps having run out of natural resources, destroyed, contaminated, devastated, having overshadowed its marvellous nature.

At this conference on protecting human rights defenders, I give my personal testimony;

because surviving the tragic experience that happened to me in 2008 isn't easy. And in my case it should motivate me to inspire others, to motivate them and to ask them not to be afraid, to talk, to speak and to act for those who have no voice.

To put thoughts and ideas into our mouths; the worries of those people who are ostracised in society and in my case in their environment, those who it hurts to see the environment of my country being destroyed.

In my heart there's no room for resentment or hatred. On the contrary: I offer and give forgiveness to those who carried out or planned this attack. All the same, I go through life one step at a time. I know that I have realised and done the right things, I learnt this in my home and I carry it out on the street: I serve. I defend human rights, the right to a healthy environment in particular; I live for this, I fight for this.

'Justice for Nature.'

AT THIS CONFERENCE ON PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, I GIVE MY PERSONAL TESTIMONY; BECAUSE SURVIVING THE TRAGIC EXPERIENCE THAT HAPPENED TO ME IN 2008 ISN'T EASY. AND IN MY CASE IT SHOULD MOTIVATE ME TO INSPIRE OTHERS, TO MOTIVATE THEM AND TO ASK THEM NOT TO BE AFRAID, TO TALK, TO SPEAK AND TO ACT FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NO VOICE.

**MEXICO**  
**BETY CARIÑO**  
**CENTRO DE APOYO COMUNITARIO TRABAJANDO UNIDOS – CACTUS**



Bety Carino was killed during a violent paramilitary attack on a peaceful solidarity caravan on the 27th April 2010 as the caravan tried to enter the autonomous indigenous municipality of San Juan Copola. This is her testimony.

Our feet steady and firm on the ground.

Our heads held high; dignified, with focused spirit and burning heart.

Brothers and sisters,

With my voice, I speak for my brothers and sisters of my mixteco people, from rebellious Oaxaca in this great country called Mexico. And in these lines

I cannot speak of myself without speaking of the others, because I can only exist if they exist. Therefore, we exist as us.

Brothers and sisters, these women I am; a daughter, a sister, a mother, a comrade, a teacher, an indigenous woman, a Mixteca, an Oaxaqueña, a Mexican, they represent us women who go forward leading our peoples against the looting of our Mother Earth, for the benefit of large transnational corporations and financial capital. Today, with our voices, with our struggles, with our hands, the legitimate wishes for social justice of the Mexican revolution are being kept alive; our struggle is the same one as that of Morelos, Magón, the great Zapata and, in today's Mexico, the EZLN-led struggle that has cost the lives of thousands of Mexicans, all of them poor people from the bottom of society who have fought these fights. The place they have been given in history continues to be one of exclusion and they have been forgotten. Today we, the young, the indigenous peoples and the women are at the head of this catastrophe.

Our fields now are the scenes of ruin and disaster, victims of indiscriminate commercial exploitation, genetically modified crops, the ambitions of the multinationals; this has consequently caused the forced migration of millions of our brothers and sisters who, in the words of my grandfather, "have to leave in order to remain."

In Mexico the right to autonomy, the right to exist for the indigenous peoples is still being denied, and today we want to live another history: we are rebelling and we are saying enough is enough, today and here we want to say that they are afraid of us because we are not afraid of them, because despite their threats, despite their slander, despite their harassment, we continue to walk towards a sun which we think shines strongly; we think the time of the peoples

is coming closer, the time of unrepressed women, the time of the people at the bottom.

These days, discontent is present throughout the length and breadth of our national territory. Because of this the presence and participation of us, the women we defend, cannot be put off any more in the daily business of human rights; we want to construct a world with justice and dignity; without any kind of discrimination; today we are pushing forward a profound and extensive process of organisation, mobilisation, analysis, discussion and consensus which is helping us to build up a world in which many worlds can fit. We are the result of many fights, we carry in our blood the inheritance of our grandmothers, our roots make demands of us and our daughters are rebelling.

WE ARE REBELLING AND WE ARE SAYING ENOUGH IS ENOUGH, TODAY AND HERE WE WANT TO SAY THAT THEY ARE AFRAID OF US BECAUSE WE ARE NOT AFRAID OF THEM, BECAUSE DESPITE THEIR THREATS, DESPITE THEIR SLANDER, DESPITE THEIR HARASSMENT, WE CONTINUE TO WALK TOWARDS A SUN WHICH WE THINK SHINES STRONGLY; WE THINK THE TIME OF THE PEOPLES IS COMING CLOSER, THE TIME OF UNREPPRESSED WOMEN, THE TIME OF THE PEOPLE AT THE BOTTOM.

## MEXICO

### LUCHA CASTRO

#### THE CENTRE FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN



Last month, I said goodbye to my son Jesus Luís. He was returning to finish his final year at university. We hugged very strongly and promised to look after ourselves. Before parting, I carried out the rite which I always do when one of my daughters or sons leaves: in front of the prayer corner, I give the benediction, and it's the last image they keep of their home before leaving.

He left and I could see the fear in his eyes when he told me, "I'm sure that the soldiers won't do anything to you, but to f\*\*k with you they can torture or kill me", and with a firm voice he gave me instructions: "without being paranoid, let's make a plan for until I'm safe", and we invented codes in order to communicate by telephone on

the long journey of four hours until the border crossing.

A case of the forced disappearance of two women had brought us into conflict with senior military officers and by night, for security reasons, I have had to stay with a friend. When my son left, I couldn't contain the tears, "how far had I brought my family in this commitment to human rights?", I remembered a similar scene 15 years ago, my son was hardly six years old, and we were walking happily hand in hand when he stopped, suddenly, and tightening my hand, said to me: "Mama, those are the people who want to catch you". That moment I saw two police officers carrying out surveillance. I knelt down, I took him by the shoulders and said "my love, nothing's going to happen to me, but I want to tell you something, if sometime they arrest me, please never think or let anyone tell you that I am a bad mother." Jesús Luís has twice received my calls for help: "son, tell your father that they're taking me to jail".

Next summer, Jesús Luís will have three months of vacation. We've already spoken about it, it was difficult to accept it. "Son," I said to him, "forgive me, but I don't want you at home, you have to look for another place to go". I feel comforted because I'm not alone, my friends at Front Line are helping me to find an option.

These anecdotes and many others that could fill a book are those which hurt me through my work as a human rights defender: the risk to which I've put my family, the price I pay is very high. My three daughters, my son, and my five grandchildren live far away from me, for security reasons I've sent them away. Not a day passes without homesickness seizing me, thinking that I won't be there when they take their first steps, or when they say their first words, or at their birthday parties. For my grandchildren, I'm a stranger who visits them once a year, who arrives

to love them for a few days which they hardly remember, in order to leave later with a damaged soul. I live exiled in my own country, fighting against the ghost of homesickness.

Every year, we promise to meet at Christmas in the family home, where I keep the Christmas decorations, which I never put up because nobody comes. I don't want them to come, as the situation of the state keeps getting more violent. We all know that there won't be any meeting, but we fool ourselves in order to keep living in hope and make our separation more tolerable.

Irma, the nanny of my children who has lived in our house for twenty eight years asks me, "Madam, won't we decorate the house for Christmas this year?" and I always respond, "No, but definitely next year if we're together."

THE PRICE I PAY IS VERY HIGH. MY THREE DAUGHTERS, MY SON, AND MY FIVE GRANDCHILDREN LIVE FAR AWAY FROM ME, FOR SECURITY REASONS I'VE SENT THEM AWAY. NOT A DAY PASSES WITHOUT HOMESICKNESS SEIZING ME, THINKING THAT I WON'T BE THERE WHEN THEY TAKE THEIR FIRST STEPS, OR WHEN THEY SAY THEIR FIRST WORDS, OR AT THEIR BIRTHDAY PARTIES. FOR MY GRANDCHILDREN, I'M A STRANGER WHO VISITS THEM ONCE A YEAR, WHO ARRIVES TO LOVE THEM FOR A FEW DAYS WHICH THEY HARDLY REMEMBER, IN ORDER TO LEAVE LATER WITH A DAMAGED SOUL. I LIVE EXILED IN MY OWN COUNTRY, FIGHTING AGAINST THE GHOST OF HOMESICKNESS.

**NICARAGUA**  
**MAYRA SIRIAS**  
**RED DE MUJERES CONTRA LA VIOLENCIA**



Since the Ortega Government came to power in 2006, Nicaragua has suffered a rapid deterioration in its democracy which, among other things, can be seen in:

- Constant violations of the rule of law in the state, because when the institutions are at the service of one party there can be no constitutional rule of law;
- A complete domination of all the powers of the state;
- The violation of the republic's constitution, which has manifested itself as a ruling by six magistrates, members of the Supreme Court of Justice and of President Ortega's party, granting him the right to re-election;
- Mandates by decree to appoint public civil servants without going through the process of the National Assembly;
- Attacks on the right to freedom of expression, the closing down of media which criticise the Government and attacks on journalists;
- Attacks on the right to freedom of assembly, by hindering and repressing demonstrations;
- Electoral fraud in forty of the most important districts of the country, going over the will of the people;
- Corruption and nepotism;
- The creation of an organisation of civil society, called the Councils of Civil Power which are being used as party instruments to confront and repress organisations and persons who are making use of their citizenship.

As Nicaraguans, we are being faced with a dictatorship, a Government which is based on repression and authoritarianism and not on the rule of law, the constitution and the republic and respect for the decisions of its citizens. John Steinbeck said: "Repression can postpone the day when tyrants fall, but it will strengthen the inevitability of their fall."

Because of my participation in the fight against violence, in defence of the decriminalisation of therapeutic abortion, accompanying Zoilamerica Narváez in filing a report of sexual abuse against President Ortega and my involvement in the case of a nine year-old girl who was raped and made pregnant, my whole life has been affected since the year 2007. As the spokesperson of the National Co-ordination of the Network of Women Against Violence, I was reported in October 2007 together with eight other female leaders of different organisations and accused

of five crimes: including illicit association with the intent of criminal activity, defending the crime of abortion and complicity in the crime of rape. We have, by now, spent a year and nine months demanding the rejection of this report and the Public Prosecutor's Office hasn't published the results of its investigations.

In 2008 a political and terrorist persecution began against my person and against my fellow figures in the feminist movement, especially of the MAM of which I am also a member. Since then, the harassment, pestering, death threats, material damage and persecution against my person have been going on systematically, without getting any reply from the authorities. My house was ransacked, three doors forced; they stole my computer, reports, cameras, electronic equipment, money. They destroyed the crops of my little farm and stole the pump. They invaded a piece of land I own, destroying the fence. They broke the window of my car and stole the radio. They keep me under surveillance. They place a load of trucks with armed men in front of my house, especially when there are political protests.

I was assaulted in a political demonstration in León; they threatened me with a mortar launcher, later someone assaulted me causing me physical injury. I have lived through very difficult moments which have had both physical and emotional consequences for my health.

I want to make it clear that despite all the reprisals we have been the targets of, neither I, nor the other women who have in one way or another been affected, will stop being human rights defenders, nor will we stop fighting for justice, for women's rights and against every kind of dictatorship.

AS NICARAGUANS, WE ARE BEING FACED WITH A DICTATORSHIP, A GOVERNMENT WHICH IS BASED ON REPRESSION AND AUTHORITARIANISM AND NOT ON THE RULE OF LAW, THE CONSTITUTION AND THE REPUBLIC AND RESPECT FOR THE DECISIONS OF ITS CITIZENS. JOHN STEINBECK SAID: "REPRESSION CAN POSTPONE THE DAY WHEN TYRANTS FALL, BUT IT WILL STRENGTHEN THE INEVITABILITY OF THEIR FALL."

## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PAUL CORBIT BROWN  
FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER



Paul Corbit Brown is a photographer from the USA. For more than ten years he has been passionately committed to producing images that further the goals of human rights, social justice, and environmental responsibility.

Blatant human rights abuses and the glaring lack of social justice are a plague to every nation on this planet including the United States – a nation that declares itself to be the epicentre of democracy and the champion of justice. Our own Dr Martin Luther King once stated, “An injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” How ironic is it that I have travelled the globe to document injustice, and now find my work in my own backyard?

The mountainous area where I live is known as Appalachia. It is home to the second most bio-diverse ecosystem in the world. Unfortunately, these mountains are full of coal - the source of 50% of my country's electricity. In recent years, the mining industry has adopted a practice known as mountaintop removal coal mining. Specially designed detonations of explosions equal in magnitude to the bomb dropped on Hiroshima are used to blast the tops of the mountains and then large machines move the shattered remnants into the surrounding valleys in order to reach the coal below.

Hundreds of once vibrant living mountains have been reduced to lifeless piles of rubble that clog and pollute hundreds of miles of streams and the headwaters of our rivers.

After mining, the coal is washed. The highly toxic effluent known as slurry is stored behind earth dams, or worse, pumped underground where it leaks into the water tables and contaminates the drinking water of thousands of people. The heavy metal toxins released during the mining and washing of coal have contaminated our water to the point of causing genetic mutations in the aquatic wildlife.

Entire communities have fallen victim to mystery illnesses, cancer, heart, liver, kidney and lung disease and even death. The deaths of my people do not come quickly from the end of a gun. Instead they come slowly and painfully from the simple act of drawing water from the kitchen sink.

As a result of our opposition to these mining practices, we have been harassed, threatened,

arrested, publicly humiliated, spied upon by our Government, had our property destroyed, labeled as terrorists, assaulted, threatened with the loss of our jobs or the loss of a family member's job and forced to leave our homes.

I myself was arrested while photographing a non-violent protest against one of the mining companies last June. My cameras, cell phone, medicine, wallet, house keys and car keys were taken from me. I was charged with trespassing and conspiracy. I was released from jail after a short time and after posting a cash bail. Only my driver's license was returned.

The police gave my equipment to the FBI and all the data from my cameras and phones was copied and distributed within many branches of the Government from the local police to the Federal Office of Homeland Security. Several months later my equipment was returned but it had been smashed and broken beyond repair. The memory card in the camera at the time of my arrest was not returned and the police deny that it ever existed. All of this was in an effort to suppress my freedom of speech and the right to a free press – two freedoms supposedly guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States.

The Government that was created to protect the people is now providing a safe haven and support for those corporations guilty of these acts of violence against us and the planet that sustains us. Indeed a government that does not protect its people becomes complicit in their suffering and their deaths.

Now my dear brothers and sisters, I have witnessed the passion and commitment of each of you. I realise that we struggle in solidarity rather than solitude. Through our commitment, I believe we must build a world where justice is the rule rather than the exception.

The issues of human rights, social justice and environmental responsibility should no longer be mere matters of expediency for corporate profit.

Justice will come as quietly and brilliantly as a new dawn, and I will rejoice in seeing her radiant reflection in each of your eyes.

We CAN, we MUST persist.

THE DEATHS OF MY PEOPLE DO NOT COME QUICKLY FROM THE END OF A GUN.  
INSTEAD THEY COME SLOWLY AND PAINFULLY FROM THE SIMPLE ACT OF DRAWING  
WATER FROM THE KITCHEN SINK.

**VENEZUELA**  
**JOSÉ LUIS URBANO**  
**FUNDA.PDE**



José Urbano: A family man of humble origin, who in 2004 attempted to enroll his daughter for a 3rd consecutive year in the public school Luis Beltrán Prieto Figueroa, located in Barcelona, in the state of Anzoátegui, Venezuela. The head master of the institution requested the payment of a 'collaboration' fee of 40,000 Bolivares which he could not afford to pay at the time. This led him to make a complaint to the relevant authorities arguing that it was a breach of Article 102 of the Constitution which states that education is a fundamental right and ought to be free of charge.

This family man is me. This complaint led to the persecution of my daughter, who was the victim of abuse, suspended from classes, and was threatened with burning down her family home with all its occupants inside. Based on these attacks, I decided to create FUNDA.PDE the only NGO in Venezuela and Latin America that fights for the right of children to have free education and not to be discriminated against for social or economic reasons. On the 9th February 2007, the NGO convened a radio marathon requesting school supplies to be donated to the children and denouncing the fact that these children attend classes in subhuman conditions.

On February 10th, 2007, the vehicle I was travelling in was intercepted and shot at, wounding me in the stomach and penetrating my small intestine. While in hospital, Luis Razetty the bodyguard of the Governor visited me and told me that if I wanted to stay alive I should forget about the issue of education. After spending three months in hospital I took refuge at a sister's house. I received a visit of the CICPC investigations team but since I do not trust the police I decided to move out fast. A group of hooded and armed men attempted to kill me again. Given the constant threats, Amnesty International issued a public statement that brought these threats to an end. The incident was reported in the annual report of the CIHH.

After recovering from the attacks I decided to continue my radio station, which had been on air for two consecutive years, advocating for the rights of the child and denouncing schools that enslave and exploit children under the pretext that they do not receive any help from the Venezuelan Government. There are girls that continue to be subjected to sexual exploitation in some educational institutions. On October 20, 2009, by order of Deputy Iranian Aguilera Professor and Chairman of the Legislative Council, it was decided to silence the space condemning child exploitation and child slavery in Venezuelan schools.

Our NGO is constantly harassed and threatened, and most of our members are forced to live clandestine lives for security reasons. The Head of Education Mr. Anzoategui, said "Mr. José will either go to jail or be buried."

ON FEBRUARY 10TH, 2007, THE VEHICLE WHERE I WAS TRAVELLING WAS INTERCEPTED AND SHOT AT, WOUNDING ME IN THE STOMACH AND PENETRATING MY SMALL INTESTINES. WHILE IN HOSPITAL, LUIS RAZETTY THE BODYGUARD OF THE GOVERNOR VISITED ME AND TOLD ME THAT IF I WANTED TO STAY ALIVE I SHOULD FORGET ABOUT THE ISSUE OF EDUCATION.



# AFRICA

## ANGOLA

**CECÍLIA GREGÓRIA CASSAPI AUGUSTO**  
**ASSOCIAÇÃO CONSTRUINDO COMUNIDADES – ACC**



I am Cecília Gregória Cassapi Augusto, and I have dedicated myself, unwaveringly, since 1997, to the cause of the poor and excluded in Angolan society, first through the Association “Leonardo Sikufinde – Shalom Angola” – ALSSA, and after 2003, through the ACC, sacrificing my youth, education and spare time. From 1997 to 2009, I always worked as a volunteer, without any wages or subsidies, in various causes such as negotiating the recovery of communal land appropriated by farmers, lobbying in public politics, formation of community groups, challenging cases of torture and private incarceration practiced against members of the community, and constitutional campaigns. I was part of the team that undertook the study of the economic, social, cultural and environmental life of the agro-pastoral communities of the towns of Chibia and Gambos, whose report is about to be published.

On the other hand, since the death of my father in 1997, I became the head of my family, accompanying the children with special attention and giving them my full support, even in times when circumstances were very difficult. Then, a sequence of bereavements affected my life but did not discourage me. In 2004, my older sister died, leaving five children behind. In the following year, her husband, also died, which forced me to become guardian of the children, representing an additional burden of responsibility. In 2006, my young sister’s husband died, leaving two children, the youngest just under two years of age and born with a congenital deficiency, which required special care. This little girl was my namesake, and we celebrated joint birthdays. I devoted practically all my energy to care for this child, who had fragile health and spent her days back and forth between home and hospital.

On 26 May 2009, after a few days in hospital, the girl passed away, which shook me considerably. When I was offered a chance to study by the Open Society in Luanda, my colleagues considered that I should take that opportunity and leave that environment. However, with the help of the Religious Congregation of the Sisters of the Light and Catholic doctors, it was discovered that I had suffered a deep and intense but reversible post-trauma effect, commonly known as burn-out (exhaustion).

One event that compounded the trauma was the arrest and torture with electric shocks of 22 people, between 2003 and 2005, as well as the difficult situation of these victims and the impossibility of accompanying and taking care of them, as none of them were indemnified for the torture inflicted upon them.

Another event was the difficult situation of girls raped in farms and mining areas by businessmen, and the mental impact of accompanying them, particularly, the impossibility of assisting them in overcoming the trauma. Some of these girls became pregnant after the rape and gave birth to babies, without the support of their parents.

To make matters worse, Angola is home to ‘shepherding’, a term given to the situation where secret service officials follow every step of human rights defenders, which involves monitoring from phone and internet connections to field trips for meetings with other leaders. After these meetings, these secret service officers demand to know what was discussed, while intimidating and making direct threats to us.

Another issue is that potential donors avoid sponsoring projects for the protection of human rights, as they might fall out of favour with the Government and lose contracts for exploring oil, diamonds and other natural resources. This lack of donors forces us to work without any wages, while putting our families at risk. I have personally lost, at least, five members of my own family, through not being able to afford proper medical treatment for them.

As a consequence, many potential human rights activists, after being intimidated, stay away from our organisations and prefer to pursue other opportunities, in order not to put their future at risk.

For many of these reasons, from May 2009, I began to suffer the effects of burn-out, where I feel that my force has reached its limit, without having accomplished much to date. On one side, there are the communities, especially the victims, who will continue to suffer, and on the other side, my own family, abandoned and with me unable to help them. Only my faith in God has helped me to withstand these days since I contracted this exhaustion.

AS A CONSEQUENCE, MANY POTENTIAL HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS, AFTER BEING INTIMIDATED, STAY AWAY FROM OUR ORGANISATIONS AND PREFER TO PURSUE OTHER OPPORTUNITIES, IN ORDER NOT TO PUT THEIR FUTURE AT RISK.

## BURUNDI GEORGES KANUMA



On the initiative of Georges Kanuma, eight young people met in his house on 18 August 2003. The meeting set the foundation stone for the non-governmental organisation ARDHO which translates into Association for the Respect of Homosexual Rights. The association was created as a reaction to many incidents that violated the rights of the homosexual community.

At the beginning, the organisation was merely designed to provide a social support network for homosexuals targeted by assaults. However, thanks to the support of regional organisations we subsequently evolved and began to claim our rights as citizens of Burundi who have a different,

yet entirely acceptable sexual orientation.

At a regional conference in 2004 we realised the distinct vulnerability of homosexuals to HIV/AIDS. However, organisations struggling against AIDS refused to acknowledge the implications of the illness for our community. Consequently, we started promoting information about HIV/AIDS on private radio stations. The radio was a great tool to publicly disseminate information on the true nature of homosexuality. We also launched campaigns informing the public about protection measures against infection with HIV.

One of the non-governmental organisations, the ANSS (National Support Association for HIV infected persons and AIDS patients) which struggles against the spread of AIDS, supported us in our quest. The ANSS was one of the first organisations which assisted HIV infected individuals in 1993. After successfully convincing them of the importance of our mission, they were also the first to include MSM (that is, men who have sex with men) in their projects.

At the same time, the Parliament of Burundi introduced a new law which effectively rendered homosexuality punishable by law. Organisations like the ARDHO and the ANSS were supported by some civil society organisations in pleading for the revocation of this law since it was believed to reinforce the invisibility of homosexuals in society.

While I could have either continued my work in secret or be a publicly known activist my choice was simple. I chose to be active in the public eye and also started to openly express my views in the general media. However, this decision was not always easy as I lost a lot of friends as a result. I am forever grateful to God that my family continue to support me in my mission. As soon as I started expressing my points of view in the Burundian press, I received phone threats

from individuals who claimed to be members of the CNDD FDD which is the leading party in Burundi. They accused me of promoting homosexuality in Burundi and asked me to stop immediately.

As human rights defenders in Burundi, we are constantly put at risk. For instance, the President of OLLUCOM (Organisation for the Fight Against Corruption) was assassinated in broad daylight. Furthermore, the Vice-president of our organisation received threats in the midst of our campaign against the new legal code which criminalised homosexuals. What is more, his immediate circle of friends issued those threats. His landlord immediately expelled him from the apartment and his family stopped talking to him. He now lives in Canada. We must therefore concertedly search for effective ways to protect ourselves so we can pursue our everyday work with maximum results.

Sadly after returning to Burundi, Georges contracted Malaria and died as a result of complications and lack of adequate health care.

WHILE I COULD HAVE EITHER CONTINUED MY WORK IN SECRET OR BE A PUBLICLY KNOWN ACTIVIST MY CHOICE WAS SIMPLE. I CHOSE TO BE ACTIVE IN THE PUBLIC EYE AND ALSO STARTED TO OPENLY EXPRESS MY VIEWS IN THE GENERAL MEDIA. HOWEVER, THIS DECISION WAS NOT ALWAYS EASY AS I LOST A LOT OF FRIENDS AS A RESULT. I AM FOREVER GRATEFUL TO GOD THAT MY FAMILY CONTINUE TO SUPPORT ME IN MY MISSION.

**CAMEROON**  
**MAXIMILIENNE NGO MBE**  
**PRODHOP**  
**REHAC – NETWORK OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**  
**IN CENTRAL AFRICA**

Maximilienne Ngo MBE is the Secretary-General in Prodhop, an organisation dedicated to the promotion and defence of human rights in Cameroon and since 2007, she has also worked as an advocacy officer for REDHAC (the network of human rights defenders in Central Africa).

On a regional level, resulting from my functions, our network has warned national, regional and international NGOs and governments of the threats to human rights defenders in the context of their work.

In such a way, we are dealing with certain incidents in Rwanda, notably the affair around our colleague François Biyuma which remains worrying since he is still detained. He was falsely accused of complicity in genocide, when he prepared to publish the results of an investigation into the rape of an underage individual who accused District Judge Gacaca.

In Cameroon, many human rights defenders have benefited from our support. To give but a few examples: Mr Nono Théophile and Ndjonga who were tortured and arrested for having organised a peaceful protest. Human rights journalists are also not spared: Medjo Lewis is still detained at the Newbell Central Prison for his part and Mombio at Bafoussam prison, Jean Bosco Tall who was imprisoned and then released in exchange for a hefty fine, and Alex Gustave Azebaze who is summoned to appear before the court, but is not detained at this time. I have also learnt about the kidnapping of two other journalists in our country.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, we have monitored the trial of the journalist Maheshe who was killed by two men in uniform. Other Congolese human rights defenders were either evacuated from their homes or exiled availing of the tight partnerships between certain international NGOs. For instance, human rights defenders of the Republic of Chad, like Daniel Deuzoumbe and others were escorted by REDHAC for safety reasons.

In brief, the REDHAC has intervened on behalf of human rights defenders at risk in Central Africa, in Gabon and in Congo-Brazzaville. In all those cases, intense communications were followed by talks with the governments in question.

In the context of my two roles, I have been subject to harassment since 2008. The secret services of our Government, the Catholic community and certain Central African governments have threatened me on multiple occasions. These threats consisted in spying, wiretapping, attempted abduction and threats against my children on the phone. My children were told that “your mother would be arrested and imprisoned”. When you have children of such a young age who experience such distress, you will understand the predicament I find myself in as a result.

Starting from May 2008 until December 2008, I was under constant police surveillance since secret service agents took turns showing up outside my house.

I would like to take this opportunity to officially thank the International Observatory for Human Rights Defenders as well as the OMCT for supporting me so promptly. On behalf of both the REDHAC and the Prodhop, I would also like to thank Front Line for their instant support every time human rights defenders at risk cry out for help.

However, before finishing my testimonial, I would like to tell you about the most recent risk hovering above my head. In August of 2009, an unknown individual entered my home during my absence with the pretext that I had asked him to repair my television. He searched my room thoroughly and precipitately left when one of my aunts who called by my house addressed him. After having made enquiries, it turned out that this agent possibly planted objects (such as a weapon or drugs) so as to later accuse me of possessing illegal objects. I filed a complaint against the intruder for trespassing.

My dear colleagues, I have thus far managed to withstand all threats and this conference gives me the courage to continue.

I bow especially before the courage of female human rights defenders. Despite manifold threats and harassments to their lives, they continue to pursue the struggle in their respective countries. We continue to challenge our divided governments who oppose any notion of democracy and human rights. Our solidarity has to remain our guiding motive. We will achieve our aim of implementing human rights in our countries only on the basis of solidarity.

I BOW ESPECIALLY BEFORE THE COURAGE OF FEMALE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS. DESPITE MANIFOLD THREATS AND HARASSMENTS TO THEIR LIVES, THEY CONTINUE TO PURSUE THE STRUGGLE IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES.... OUR SOLIDARITY HAS TO REMAIN OUR GUIDING MOTIVE. WE WILL ACHIEVE OUR AIM OF IMPLEMENTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN OUR COUNTRIES ONLY ON THE GROUNDS OF SOLIDARITY.

## CAMEROON

### STEAVE NEMANDE

#### ALTERNATIVES CAMEROUN



Steve Nemande is the President of Alternatives-Cameroun which is an organisation that supports freedom, tolerance, free speech and the respect for the poor and social minorities. It was created in 2006 and assists the LGBTI community with health issues, including their struggle against HIV, hepatitis and sexually transmitted diseases. Moreover, the organisation promotes an understanding of the community about their rights. It also offers judicial assistance and engages in a discourse favourable to recognising homosexual rights in Cameroon.

In Cameroon, homosexuality is banned by law. Article 347 bis in the penal code stipulates that

homosexuality is punishable by imprisonment of six months to five years, and orders fines between 20,000 and 200,000 francs for all persons having sexual intercourse with persons of the same sex.

A societal taboo prevails around the topic of sexuality in general, and homosexuality in specific. No dedicated programmes on sexual education are offered in schools and colleges. Instead, educational programmes spread propaganda about reproduction.

Society in Cameroon exhibits very strong sentiments against homosexuality. Due to scarce knowledge about homosexuality, homophobia and lesbophobia prevail as types of social behaviour. (Gueboguo, 2006). This is aggravated by a high degree of misinformation, nurtured by the “hate press” which decries homosexuality as a crime, and associates it with zoophilia and pedophilia. There is also a slightly simplistic perception, whether it is true or not, that homosexuality is used as an instrument for climbing the social ladder. This practice is purportedly entertained by certain wealthier, political strata of Cameroonian society and reinforces feelings of frustration that exist within the general society and result from economic hardship and poverty.

Most religions in Cameroon condemn and stigmatise lesbians and homosexuals. This is especially true for Greek-Orthodox Catholicism, the religion of the majority in Cameroon. On 25 December 2005, Monsignor Tonye Bakot for instance presented a homophobic speech.

I myself was victim of homophobic attacks at the hands of my immediate neighbourhood: Fire-crackers exploded inside my house and the front door was vandalised with the inscription PD.

In fact, Pédé has a very negative connotation in French and is used to refer to homosexuals. I was also recently targeted by a defamation campaign made accessible on a Cameroonian information portal page. This was a reaction to an article published in the French magazine Têtu which appeared on the Cameroonian site

To date, none of the other members of Alternatives-Cameroun have been attacked as a result of their activism. However, we believe that with the growing popularity and visibility of our organisation, our members will increasingly be subjected to threats and physical attacks. The so-called Access Centre which is the prevention centre as well as the administrative body of the organisation would therefore constitute the first physical target of possible aggressors.

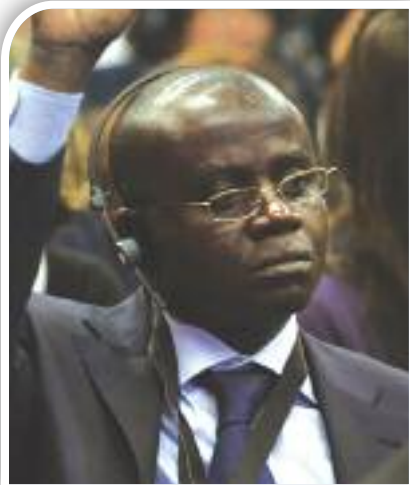
The vision of my organisation is to create a strong and valued Cameroonian society which is democratic and tolerant and calls for individual, social, economic rights, thus displaying initiative and independence.

A SOCIETAL TABOO PREVAILS AROUND THE TOPIC OF SEXUALITY IN GENERAL, AND HOMOSEXUALITY IN SPECIFIC. NO DEDICATED PROGRAMMES ON SEXUAL EDUCATION ARE OFFERED IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES. INSTEAD, EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES SPREAD PROPAGANDA ABOUT REPRODUCTION.

## COTE D'IVOIRE

### MANLAN EHOUNOU KAN LAURENT

#### TRANSPARENCY JUSTICE



Manlan Ehounou Kan Laurent works as a magistrate and is a judge in the Court of First Instance in Abidjan. He is also the President of Transparency Justice which is a non-governmental organisation. Transparency Justice has the mission of promoting the implementation of an equal justice system in the Ivory Coast.

Transparency Justice is devoted to creating an independent, transparent and functional justice system which reflects development. In order to achieve this aim, the organisation pursues the following primary objectives;

We aim to uproot corruption within the judicial system and openly criticise any obstacles to an

operable justice system, and we also assist some of the weakest and poorest individuals in their right of accessing and availing of a more equal justice system.

Transparency Justice believes that a transparent and independent justice system should be free from any political, economic and even, from social considerations. It is obvious that by adopting such a stance the organisation makes enemies, particularly amongst corrupt and opportunistic layers of society. As a result, our mission becomes extremely challenging, but remains nonetheless inspiring.

The organisational goal is precarious: Since civil servants are subject to the state we are expected to maintain our loyal service to the public administration. We thus permanently sway between the requirements of maintaining our loyalty to the regime and our moral obligation to challenge totalitarian power and its negative side-effects.

Moreover, our mission proves difficult since our work is constantly met by threats and intimidation. To illustrate this with an example, the office of Transparency Justice was burgled twice in the course of two years. The office was inaugurated on 21 May 2008. Only two months later, on the night of the 29 June 2008, armed men targeted the office premises. The burglars stole all the technical equipment in the building which comprised five computers and all the accessories. The intruders also injured the guards, one of whom sustained fractures in five different locations. Another guard broke his collarbone in the course of events.

In a following incident, armed men broke into the office on January 2009, claiming all the computer hard disks. This time the burglars did not injure anyone.

The magistrate's assistants who work in my chamber also refused to attend hearings which I presided over as a judge. This situation lasted for over eight months, from 16 March until 19 November 2009, to be precise. It ensued because I had implemented a justice system which allowed the accused to obtain a decision within 48 hours rather than having to wait for months and years. Throughout this period, the client files piled up. The strike therefore had economic repercussions and also impacted negatively on those who awaited their trial. The report which I submitted never yielded any results.

Furthermore, during the night more than a ton of domestic waste was dumped in the grounds of my private residence which is located in the residential area of Cocody. Seemingly, the perpetrators of this attack intended to undermine the morale of a small community of human rights defenders.

Because of all the above, our mission is challenging because every time we successfully defend a wrongly accused individual, the police and security forces strike against us. Every time we prevent an accused from being imprisoned for a civil infraction or divert their arbitrary detention, the police harass us. Every time we prevent political or economic power from influencing judicial decisions or files from intentionally being withdrawn in order to harm an adversary, the system punishes us. Nonetheless, while we may only make small progress at a time, we are satisfied because it still contributes to improving the human rights situation in general.

For this reason, Transparency Justice wants to thank you for your invitation to attend this Platform. The conference makes our mission more widely known. We also hope that the Platform will assist us in creating a network of solidarity to support our organisational aims in the future.

BECAUSE OF ALL THE ABOVE, OUR MISSION IS CHALLENGING BECAUSE EVERY TIME WE SUCCESSFULLY DEFEND A WRONGLY ACCUSED INDIVIDUAL, THE POLICE AND SECURITY FORCES STRIKE AGAINST US. EVERY TIME WE PREVENT AN ACCUSED FROM BEING IMPRISONED FOR A CIVIL INFRACTION OR DIVERT THEIR ARBITRARY DETENTION, THE POLICE HARASS US.

## MOZAMBIQUE

### MARIA SALVA REVEZ

#### MOZAMBIQUE LEAGUE OF HUMAN RIGHTS – LDH



The Mozambican League of Human Rights (LDH), started its activities defending human rights in Mozambique through a group of citizens in 1993 before its official recognition. For its positive and widely-known results at societal level, it was formally recognised by the Mozambique State on 5th May 1995.

Accomplishing objectives has been a difficult task for the LDH as many obstacles were encountered along the way. Case in point, the delay in authorisations for monitoring visits to detention stations, starting with the granting of credentials for human rights activists. Through the observation of certain situations that commonly happen in our society, we identified cases of persecution, carried out by

way of threats, with the clear intention of discouraging the fight against violations of human rights in Mozambique.

Frequently, representatives of my organisation are the target of threats made by telephone, by unidentified people. This happens because of our public denunciation and inside knowledge of human rights violations.

Social communications agencies support us in disclosing these violations of human rights to the general public. For example, the shooting, by members of the PRM, of defenseless citizens is well-known and no punishment or sanctions are applied to the perpetrators of these violations.

Also it is worth noting that, personally, in the province where I am based, I have suffered threats for my activities offering legal assistance to vulnerable people. I have also been threatened with only being given limited access, or even denied access, to state institutions.

This situation does not take place only in my region, but also all over the country, because in the view of our persecutors, the work performed by human rights defenders is an obstacle for the normal functioning of some sectors of the state.

The clearest example of this scenario is observed where unacceptable prison conditions are detected (inadequate feeding, overcrowded cells, etc) by human rights activists. Subsequently, the HRDs present their recommendations for improvements to be carried out, but as a result, the entity in question sees the comments as a challenge to their authority.

Throughout my experience, I have observed that isolation and weakness constitute the major causes of the vulnerability of the target groups with which I work.

To solve this problem it is necessary to improve standards of education within the communities, as well as rallying new members, and increasing support for my organisation. Also it is necessary to establish a closer partnership with independent community radio and TV stations to document and publicise the reality of human rights in the country, the work of human rights defenders and to raise awareness of citizens' rights.

The current economic downturn also affects our financial resources as our donors cannot release adequate funding for my organisation, therefore affecting the hiring of trained guards for our residences and offices as well as the installation of security systems and the upgrading to safer computer technologies.

To conclude, it is a prime concern of my organisation to provide ever-improving conditions of security for all human rights defenders who, directly or indirectly, have contributed to the fight for human rights. This involves regular training of these defenders, which generates financial costs that my organisation cannot solely afford. Hence, support is necessary and deserved for its execution.

Good luck to the human rights defenders!

I HAVE SUFFERED THREATS FOR MY ACTIVITIES OF OFFERING LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO THE VULNERABLE CLASSES. I HAVE ALSO FACED THREATS OF LIMITATION OR INTERDICTION OF ACCESS TO STATE INSTITUTIONS.

# NIGERIA

PATRICK B. NAAGBANTON

THE CENTRE FOR ENVIRONMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENT



## Still At the Barricade

This is my first time attending the Dublin Platform for human rights defenders (HRD), I am here to learn from you all. It is really a rare opportunity to be here among leading HRDs around the world, to participate in this crucial forum of this nature, to discuss, the patterns of attacks against human rights defenders and practical measures to ensure their protection, electronic communications and security, specific challenges facing women human rights defenders and regional mechanisms for the protection of human rights defenders.

In our towns, villages, cities and countries there are hordes of unsung human rights defenders who do the kind of work we do. Many have suffered,

and are still suffering, to protect the dignity of the human person. To those human rights defenders (HRDs) who are not here today, we urge them to remain fearless and courageous. Throughout history the task of creating a humane and decent society has never been easy.

Since Nigeria returned to civil rule in 1999, not much progress has been made in its human rights record. At about 1:30pm on January 1, 2010, I had retired to my bed after the New Year festivity, and was lying on one side of my bed with members of my family when a bullet pierced through my roof and hit my floor just by my side. I was extremely lucky if the bullet had hit me while asleep or awake I would either been maimed or dead. The bullet came from an Italian Berretta pistol. The Nigerian police are a group who mostly use such weapons and bullets.

The majority of our work is concentrated in the states of the Niger Delta region. Since the oil boom of the 1970s, the region has been a tumultuous belt, and despite being the source of the nation's economic wealth, remains one of the poorest regions. Proceeds from crude oil sales have barely trickled down to most Nigerians, and persistent political patronage, corruption and mismanagement of natural resources pose as a constant struggle for the inhabitants. The economic degradation resulting from oil and gas exploitation has destroyed the predominantly fishing and farming livelihoods of many residents. Massive gas flaring and oil leaks pollute the air and water supply, posing a constant threat to residents' health. The various elections (whether intra or inter party contests) have aggravated the already tense political climate, as well as well-armed youth gangs and militia groups vied for influence, control and supremacy. Hostage taking, political abductions, revenge killings, and vigilantism spreads.

The post-election periods witnessed clashes between armed elements and state security

forces. The Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD) that I head exposes the abuse, and defends citizens' rights as a way of promoting human rights awareness.

Apart from the human rights newsletter we issue regularly, the campaigns, press releases etc we also produce a comprehensive compendium of the reports called SCORECARD annually, which we distribute widely.

In course of our work, we face threats and harassment but that won't stop us, while at the barricade we must dance together until victory is won.

IN OUR TOWNS, VILLAGES, CITIES AND COUNTRIES THERE ARE HORDES OF UNSUNG HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS WHO DO THE KIND OF WORK WE DO. MANY HAD SUFFERED, AND ARE STILL SUFFERING, TO PROTECT THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSONS. TO THOSE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS (HRDS) WHO ARE NOT HERE TODAY, WE URGE THEM TO REMAIN FEARLESS AND COURAGEOUS. THROUGHOUT HISTORY THE TASK OF CREATING A HUMANE AND DESCENT SOCIETY HAS NEVER BEEN EASY.

## TOGO

ANDRE KANGNI AFANOU  
COLLECTIF DES ASSOCIATIONS CONTRE L'IMPUNITÉ – CACIT



The Togolese Republic is a country in Africa which covers a surface of approximately 56,600 km<sup>2</sup>. Togo experienced its first coup d'état in 1963. Then, at the beginning of the 90s, most sub-Saharan African countries underwent a process of democratisation associated with reforms towards multi-party systems. However, the Togolese regime distinguished itself from most in that it resisted those modernising tendencies.

Instead, the Togolese Republic became infamous for its acts of repression and notorious human rights violations. This in turn made the regime a target of criticism by human rights organisations. As a result, various partners, and especially the European Union, ceased their collaboration with

Togo, effectively forcing the Republic to engage in initiatives of improving the human rights situation in the country.

The implementation of changes was already well underway, when General Eyadema who ruled the country with an iron fist, passed away in 2005. In order to settle his succession, the army subsequently installed Eyadema's son as the new head of state, thereby starkly contradicting the terms of the Togolese Constitution.

The new situation resulted in a wave of civilian protests, both within the Togolese Republic as well as in the midst of the diaspora. Once more, demonstrations, and the contested electoral process which followed, were accompanied with violence against the civilian population. If we are to believe the findings of the UN Commission of Inquiry in Togo, more than 400-500 people were killed in the course of the unrest while over 45,000 Togolese citizens fled the country as refugees in order to seek shelter in Benin or Ghana.

This background justifies the creation of CACIT of which I am currently the Secretary General. Indeed, human rights defenders created CACIT with the backdrop of more than twenty years of political violence and human rights violations in Togo. We realised that perpetrators of crimes against civilians enjoyed full impunity for their crimes in every instance. Therefore, we established CACIT as an umbrella organisation in order to provide legal and judicial support to the victims of violations. The involvement of the Collective allowed individuals to effectively file their complaints with the courts. The presentation of those pleas served a twofold purpose, namely: to bring about justice by identifying the perpetrators of crimes and making them liable for their actions; and to ensure that victims are paid sufficient and fair

compensation for their suffering.

It is essential to note that the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Council has to date not started its work although the authorities and certain politicians met in order to set it up. Nonetheless, CACIT members are convinced that, pursuant to the terms of international treaties that Togo has ratified, the rights of victims to justice should be protected.

CACIT has therefore continued its initiatives to defend the rights of victims. By 31 December 2009, seventy-two complaints were filed with the tribunals in the three main cities where the violations occurred, Lomé, Atakpamé et Amlamé. However, despite the establishment of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission as a justice mechanism, most violations have not been punished to this day.

In order to solve this issue, the CACIT pursues the mission of preserving the memory of the victims of those crimes. The CACIT has started to offer legal and judicial support to victims in order to prevent the development of a climate of impunity.

The initiatives of CACIT are a result of Togo's history of democratisation which started at the beginning of the 90s, but which was tarnished by incessant violence and the brutal suppression of pacific civilian protests, and political opponents.

Due to its involvement in human rights activities, CACIT has become the target of all sorts of threats. The worst experience by far was when the CACIT office was burgled twice in 2009. During the night of the 28 August 2009: all the IT equipment was stolen. During the night of the 6 October 2009: all the IT equipment was again stolen.

However, despite those threats, our commitment to fighting impunity does not falter.

WE REALISED THAT PERPETRATORS OF CRIMES AGAINST CIVILIANS ENJOYED FULL IMPUNITY FOR THEIR CRIMES IN EVERY INSTANCE. THEREFORE, WE ESTABLISHED THE CACIT AS AN UMBRELLA ORGANISATION IN ORDER TO PROVIDE LEGAL AND JUDICIAL SUPPORT TO THE VICTIMS OF VIOLATIONS.



## UGANDA

### GERALD KANKYA

#### TWERWANEHO LISTENERS' CLUB



In 2006, I and other civil society members formed a legally registered platform called Twerwaneho Listeners' Club because of increased human rights violations. We carried out radio programmes and community sensitisation activities. This organisation brought people from different organisations together and activities were sponsored by members.

The radio programmes ran on until early 2007 when threats from the state started. These included; a Non Governmental Organisation's Board being commissioned to close another NGO I was then working with. The Government suspected the organisation of sponsoring the Twerwaneho Listeners' Club.

We received constant warnings from the internal security organs that programmes were anti-government and anti kingdom and trying create a mass uprising. The suspension of the programmes under pressure from the Government. Serious warnings to stop questioning government actions.

The radio station transmitter was burnt down in broad daylight by armed Uganda People's Defense Force soldiers who were also security guards to the Queen Mother in October 2007. Innocent people were arrested and later released.

When I and others called on the state to explain why suspects were not arrested, we were arrested. The state then decided to transfer us far from Fort Portal and charge us with treason. We were paraded before the press by the Regional Police Commander with three robbers who had robbed a bank. This was to humiliate us and the people who supported us.

We initially faced nine charges each, including threatening violence, inciting violence, defamation, and creating public anger against the Government of Uganda. The charges kept changing and finally the case ended with six counts.

Radio programmes were banned by the Inspector General of Police. After being released on bail, we sued the state for unlawfully banning radio programmes and abusing our right to freedom of expression. The matter was successfully heard by the High Court which ordered that the programmes be reinstated.

Despite this the Government continued banning the radio programmes by intimidating the radio management and followed me to my work place and influenced my dismissal through warnings to the organisation.

Further, orders of the High Court notwithstanding, the Government prosecuted us with framed up criminal charges which were futile because the High Court had already dismissed the prosecution. Efforts by the Attorney General to appeal the verdict in the case were also dismissed.

This shows how determined the Government is to keep oppressing human rights defenders. The National Media Council included me in the list of blacklisted people not to appear on any radio programme. The state was determined to drain me financially with ever increasing legal fees.

The turning point in the court case was in August 2009 when the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project started monitoring the trial. A team from the organisation led by the Executive Director Hassan Shire, attended and issued press releases that attracted international attention.

At this point the case lost ground after the Presiding Magistrate sensed danger with the direct monitoring and reporting of the trial by international human rights bodies like the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project and Front Line. The Presiding Magistrate had no option but to dismiss the case.

There is a need for strategies to make perpetrators think twice before they act. We decided to hold all perpetrators accountable by taking them to court.

We also decided to sue the state for malicious prosecution and false imprisonment. We hope this will teach those in authority that there are other measures to hold them accountable. Hopefully the abuse of the rights of human rights defenders will decrease in our region.

AMONG THE ACTIVITIES WE CARRIED OUT WERE RADIO PROGRAMMES, COMMUNITY SENSITISATION OUTREACH ACTIVITIES TO MENTION BUT A FEW. THIS ORGANISATION WAS A PLATFORM THAT BROUGHT MANY PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONS TOGETHER AND ACTIVITIES WERE SPONSORED BY MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS.

## ZIMBABWE

PELAGIA SEMAKWELI-RAZEMBA

ZIMBABWE HUMAN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION



In 1999 when we were attending a civil society human rights workshop at Murehwa Business Centre (rural Mashonaland East province), I was kidnapped by one Bvunzawabaya 'Madzeka'. The man is a well-known Zanu PF activist. Unknown to me was the fact that he and Irene Muokoto (now late) used to befriend and woo women who were targeted by the Zanu PF Government and party for their activism with the intention of detaining or eliminating them.

I knew Irene as an activist. We were attending the same workshop, besides sharing a room. She asked me to accompany her to some village close by to see her relatives and I agreed.

As we walked down to the village, a car stopped by and Irene acknowledged she knew the driver and we could get a ride from him. I didn't suspect anything until I heard them calling some people to get ready for their 'prey'. Irene was sitting next to me and I enquired how long it would take us to get to her village and she didn't respond. Instead, she took out a black cloth from her bag and tried to tie it around my eyes and I resisted. I immediately jumped out of the moving vehicle on realising that my life was in danger. I ran through the nearby bushes in spite of the fact that I was injured from the fall. Fortunately, I am sure they didn't stop. I only found myself at the district hospital the following day, while they were planning to transfer me to the provincial hospital. I had immediately received assistance from NCA, one of the civic organisations that had planned the workshop, who made it possible to get assistance from Amani Trust, another organisation specialising in assisting victims of state-sponsored violence and human rights abuses who are denied medical care and counselling at government institutions.

I was given to understand that a well wisher had picked me up off the side of the road where I had fallen and been left for dead, had seen my nametag, and located the organisers of the workshop I had attended. I recovered from the injuries and returned home.

I started receiving daily threats from known government intelligence officials and Zanu PF activists. I was assisted by Amani Trust to get accommodation in Chitungwiza (Harare metropolitan's satellite town) where I lived in Seke 'B' high-density suburb. One weekend I arrived back at my new lodgings to find that it had been broken into and my household property had been destroyed by 'unknown' attackers who my landlord said had come looking for me. The landlord went on to ask me to vacate his property as he was no longer prepared to offer me accommodation. I went to report the matter at Chitungwiza police station but was surprised

to be locked up instead. With the assistance of Mbidzo, Muchadehama and Makoni legal practitioners I was released two days later without charge.

Because of my activism I lost my mother on 13 March 2005. She died from injuries sustained after receiving a thorough beating from some Zanu PF activists. She had refused to reveal my whereabouts at the time.

These are just a few of the incidents in which I have been targeted for different actions by the former ruling party, and I believe that my life still remains in danger in spite of the inclusive government. My predicament is worsened by the fact that Zanu PF has deliberately sought to soil the image of human rights defenders in particular and civil society organisations in general whom they accuse of being opposition supporters.

We are currently in the process of writing a new constitution for Zimbabwe, and as a HRD, together with my organisation, we collected views from citizens, produced a book on them, but I remain a target of Zanu PF supporters because they are advocating for our current constitution to remain or the draft that led to the birth of the Government of National Unity in September 2008 to be endorsed as the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

ONE WEEKEND I ARRIVED BACK AT MY NEW LODGINGS TO FIND THAT IT HAD BEEN BROKEN INTO AND MY HOUSEHOLD PROPERTY HAD BEEN DESTROYED BY 'UNKNOWN' ATTACKERS WHO MY LANDLORD SAID HAD COME LOOKING FOR ME. THE LANDLORD WENT ON TO ASK ME TO VACATE HIS PROPERTY AS HE WAS NO LONGER PREPARED TO OFFER ME ACCOMMODATION. I WENT TO REPORT THE MATTER AT CHITUNGWIZA POLICE STATION BUT WAS SURPRISED TO BE LOCKED UP INSTEAD.

# NORTH AFRICA & MIDDLE EAST

## ALGERIA CHERIFA KHEDDAR DJAZAIROUNA



Cherifa Kheddar is an activist of the Algerian women's movement. On 17 October 1996, she co-founded the organisation Djazairouna. Based in the Mitidja region, Djazairouna promotes human rights in Algeria and supports families affected by terrorism. She is the current President of the organisation.

I was myself a victim of terrorism in 1996. However, I luckily managed to escape from the terrorist attack which targeted my family in our family home during the night of the 23 June, 1996.

But while I escaped, my sister who was a trained lawyer and my brother who was an industrial architect were tortured and killed. My mother,

brother and niece survived the injuries they sustained.

Since creating the organisation, I have drawn national and international attention to the situation of terrorist victims in Algeria. Ironically, while international tribunals offer a platform of expression for terrorists, it proved very difficult for Algerian women, the victims of those terrorists, to testify. Effectively, terrorist victims could not express their pain on the international stage without being denounced as traitors. However, this did not prevent me from organising support activities and setting up a solidarity network to benefit women and children who had become the victims of terrorism in the Mitidja region. The Mitidja region has become infamous for the collective massacres of civilians in 1996, 1997 and 1998. And also, I coordinated public interventions to appeal for the commemoration of the victims of those massacres, to implement justice and to establish the truth.

We struggle for the implementation of transitional justice in Algeria and seek to reveal the whole truth of the massacre of intellectuals during those years. We struggle to attain justice for the journalists, activists, civil servants and civilians killed in those years, and for those who were kidnapped, raped and forcibly disappeared. To achieve our aim, I organised weekly public protests outside the government buildings and I will not stop until the day the security forces imprison me. Following my struggle for justice, my work license was suspended (my only financial resource) and I was expelled from the office where I had worked for over twelve years. In addition, my official functions were restricted when I returned to work subsequent to an

appeal. The security forces also threatened me with confinement. They are pursuing a defamation campaign against me and use my professional and organisational circle in order to discredit me and tarnish the reputation of my organisation.

Thanks to the financial support of the European Union, I was able to set up a commemoration centre which I called DHAKIRA (which means memory). Dhakira is a place which allows victims of terrorism to testify in writing, on tape or on video and speak out about the traumatic events of the 1990s. The centre also gives women and children the opportunity to participate in daily activities that are organised by members of the organisation.

In September 2008, I established a listening support network for women and children affected by terrorism. At the same time, we launched information campaigns on the increasingly common terrorist phenomenon – and terrorist actions in the past and present – in schools, colleges, grammar schools and the Blida University. While these types of activities may sound perfectly acceptable to anyone, they are not in Algeria. At any given moment, I could be imprisoned for three and up to six years or fined for my activities. My family and friends are worried sick about my safety.

Nevertheless, the United Nations and other bodies such as the EU, remain bystanders to the injustice done to the Algerian population. Due to settlements between organisations and the slight improvement of Algeria's finances over the last few years, the human rights agenda has been postponed indefinitely due to economic interests. Does this mean that human rights defenders have to wait even longer for the UN (with its official mechanisms and mandates) to intervene to stop the Algerian authorities? Does this mean that we have to wait until the EU elects courageous politicians who will stand up for human rights?

Finally, I want to express my gratitude for being part of an immensely important conference which allows such a great number of HRDs from all corners of the world to be present and share similar experiences of being repressed by powerful states and fundamentalism. Our shared mission encourages me. It gives me another breath of hope to continue my struggle on behalf of the victims that I represent. I will continue to fight for their right to justice, to the truth, to commemoration and for the rights of those killed and those that were disappeared.

WE SEEK TO REVEAL THE WHOLE TRUTH OF THE MASSACRE OF INTELLECTUALS DURING THOSE YEARS. WE STRUGGLE TO ATTAIN JUSTICE FOR THE JOURNALISTS, ACTIVISTS, CIVIL SERVANTS AND CIVILIANS KILLED IN THOSE YEARS, AND FOR THOSE WHO WERE KIDNAPPED, RAPED AND FORCIBLY DISAPPEARED.

**BAHRAIN**  
**NAJI ALI FATEEL**  
**BAHRAIN YOUTH SOCIETY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**



My name is Najji Ali Fateel, married with three children. My wife has contributed to the popular movement calling for my release between 2007 and 2009. She has stood by my side in my human rights activism, since I joined the unemployment committee in 2004, then the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights, and recently, representing the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights in Al-Haqiqa, 'The Truth' mission, dedicated to investigating human rights violations previously committed.

In 2005, I took part along with fellow human rights defenders in founding the first youth oriented rights society in the Gulf region, namely; the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights. The

society undertook many activities in various areas, including training and campaigning, and addressing issues state officials traditionally consider taboo, such as torture, arbitrary arrests, and human trafficking.

In December 2007, there was unrest in Bahrain in the aftermath of an activist passing away in mysterious circumstances due to the use of violence by the security forces against protestors calling for an investigation into human rights violations. I was arrested on the eve of Eid Al-Adha, 21st December 2007. Two days after my arrest, my colleague, Nader Assalatinah, Deputy Head of the Society, was also arrested on different charges. The judge imposed a five year prison sentence in my case. Mr. Assalatinah was released before trial hearings.

Security agents broke into my bedroom early in the morning, and destroyed my house contents. I was arrested in my night wear. Colleagues in Front Line have already watched a video showing the way I was interrogated at the Public Prosecutor's Office in Bahrain when I was still in my night wear, and when the temperature was below 15 Celsius at the time.

Masked members of the National Security Department took us to the Criminal Investigation Department's headquarters for interrogation. However, I was not questioned in relation to the charges brought against me; stealing ammunition from a security forces' vehicle. Rather, members of the National Security Department interrogated me about my relations with the members of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights and several defenders.

I refused to provide confessions against my colleagues at the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights or other defenders. Security agents therefore used torture, especially electro-shock

torture, in order to extract forced confessions.

The arrest of my colleagues from several popular committees and I resulted in a series of protests. A number of activists were subsequently arrested, and the case became more public as it acquired coverage from several satellite channels, and many local, regional and international entities intervened in this regard. In April 2009, a year and a half after my arrest, the King of Bahrain granted a royal pardon to everyone who had been arrested.

Despite my arrest, the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights continued its activism and intensified its work, including providing assistance to the families of human rights defenders, who have in turn formed their own committees, and begun a series of protest events and activities.

The Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights has become today a source of information for different international bodies, and the United Nations in particular. However, members of the Society still face risks; Mr. Muhammad Al-Masqati, Head of the Society, faces imprisonment and/or a fine. I could be targeted as a result of my human rights work and my affiliation to Al-Haqiqa.

To conclude, I would like to thank everyone who expressed solidarity with me and with the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights. Special thanks go to Front Line.

DESPITE MY ARREST, THE BAHRAIN YOUTH SOCIETY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS CONTINUED ITS ACTIVISM AND INTENSIFIED ITS WORK, INCLUDING PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO THE FAMILIES OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, WHO HAVE IN TURN FORMED THEIR OWN COMMITTEES, AND BEGAN A SERIES OF PROTEST EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES.

## EGYPT

### KHOULOU BIDAK

#### INDEPENDENT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER



Being a human rights defender and LGBTI person in the Middle East isn't easy to cope with and especially in a country like Egypt, where social rules have changed dramatically in the last few decades due to religious trends and the influence of Egyptians who returned from the Gulf after the 1960s.

The human rights situation in Egypt has been very difficult for a number of years in all aspects of daily life and this is reinforced by the Government and social repression. Freedom, personal rights and human rights are totally non-existent.

The LGBTI situation in Egypt is very depressing and devastating. In 2002 there was the major

'Queen Boat' case where 52 gay men were arrested, scandalised in the main newspapers and imprisoned only because of their sexual orientation.

Shortly after this sad incident many gay people were arrested as the result of a trap on the internet made by the Government. It is a nightmare for a homosexual person to live in Egypt. Especially if the person is an Egyptian citizen and an activist, even though there is nothing against homosexuality in Egyptian law.

Egyptian society needs time, effort and patience to reach the average level of awareness of personal rights and freedoms. It used to be very difficult to have any workshop and awareness campaign, unless these initiatives were undercover and well protected by foreign authorities. Even meeting these conditions it may not happen. The idea of having an LGBTI organisation or safe space where people can meet and discuss their lives, fears and their dreams is not possible.

In 2009, the first workshop took place in Egypt with a grant from Front Line. It was under the cover of arts and development. A number of 15 participants were there to witness the first workshop in the country discussing the fears and the challenges that LGBTI people face in their daily lives. Out of this came two independent groups, trying to find their way and trying to establish a clear action plan and clear goals. This was only the beginning of it, and we are full of hope to have a space soon for people to come and discuss their identities and who they are.

The idea became clear of having an artistic and cultural group where people from different walks of life can share their experiences and skills. Yet it is not an easy idea in a place where

people are imprisoned and have their lives destroyed without trial and in very inhumane conditions, and where people's rights are flouted daily.

The state security forces in Egypt are a very powerful force, and they interfere in people's lives and accuse them of the most unbelievable charges. A large number of NGOs were cracked down upon by state security only because they do not want them to exist.

On a very personal level I witnessed a lot of social exclusion in society purely on the basis of difference. I have to admit that I committed 'social suicide' a couple of times. One of these was when I was in my early twenties and I stated that everyone has the right to be themselves. As a result, I lost a lot of friends, and my family disowned me for years.

The other one was recently when I came out in my social circles, to family and friends about my sexual orientation and the challenges I face by dedicating every day of my life to that cause.

At this moment I have no idea what the future holds for me or people like me who are considered to be minorities in such a strict society full of differences and yet not accepting any differences on any level.

I still have to face the street in daily life and the hate and anger I cause because of how I dress, look and behave. Nothing will stop me or millions like me all over the globe from claiming our rights for our friends, families and allies.

I STILL HAVE TO FACE THE STREET IN DAILY LIFE AND THE HATE AND ANGER I CAUSE BECAUSE OF HOW I DRESS, LOOK AND BEHAVE. NOTHING WOULD STOP ME OR MILLIONS LIKE ME ALL OVER THE GLOBE FROM GETTING BACK RIGHTS FOR OUR FRIENDS, FAMILIES AND ALLIES.

## IRAQ

**KHANUM RAHEEM LATEEF  
ASUDA**



In May 2008, Asuda came under direct gunfire attack because Asuda is protecting women who face honour-related threats and are often killed by their relatives and family members. The attack could have killed me or any of the Asuda staff if they were at the location at the time when the attack was carried out.

What makes me and Asuda, as well as other human rights activists continue to face threats, is the failure of the security authorities to take serious action, identify perpetrators of such attacks, and bring them to justice. The authorities normally take serious and immediate action against people and organisations suspected of terrorism or if any individuals or groups are thought to pose security

threats. However, the authorities never deal seriously with attacks on human rights activists and defenders.

In addition to women's rights and human rights activists, other groups, such as journalists, come under frequent attack, and suffer abuses and threats. The number of direct attacks and threats against journalists has been on the rise. During the recent elections on 7 March, dozens of journalists were abused, attacked and arrested. Most detentions are illegal. Although these abuses are always brought to the attention of the authorities in Iraq and Kurdistan by local and international human rights organisations, the Government has never taken any action against the perpetrators. Instead of taking action, the authorities always promptly deny any wrongdoing and in many cases where government security and civil officials and employees are involved in attacks on human rights activists, the authorities normally dismiss the case and treat the attack as a personal or social problem as if the Government is not responsible for the personal security of its citizens.

In the follow-up to the attack on Asuda, I sent several official letters to the security authorities in Sulaymaniyah inquiring about the progress and outcome of the investigations into the incident. I have never received an official response and all letters we have sent seem to have been ignored.

Additionally, although we heard unofficially that a few suspects related to the attack on one of the women in our shelter were arrested, we heard after the investigations that all people arrested were subsequently released because of what the authorities had described as "lack of adequate evidence."

Asuda staff and I have been under constant direct and indirect threat via email, telephone and other means. However, the attack on Asuda was one of the most serious ones. In the wake of the attack, many of my colleagues, friends and family members thought I would close down the shelter and leave that job, but I decided to accept the challenge and continue my work.

ALTHOUGH THESE ABUSES ARE ALWAYS BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE AUTHORITIES IN IRAQ AND KURDISTAN BY LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS, THE GOVERNMENT HAS NEVER TAKEN ANY ACTION AGAINST THE PERPETRATORS.

**ISRAEL**  
**SARI BASHI**  
**GISHA – LEGAL CENTRE FOR FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT**



This summer when Mary Lawlor from Front Line invited me to participate in the Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders, I was honoured but also reluctant. I explained to Mary that as an Israeli and Jewish human rights defender, I enjoy significant freedom of operation and certainly I am not subject to the kinds of restrictions that my Palestinian colleagues face or, for that matter, my colleagues in other parts of the world. I wasn't sure what I could contribute to the conference.

I am sorry to say that in the 7 months that have passed since receiving that invitation, the status of human rights defenders in Israel has deteriorated rapidly, due to a targeted attack by governmental and private actors against the legitimacy

of human rights organisations in Israel, including attempts to interfere with our funding, use of the criminal and tax law to interfere in our activities, proposed legislation that would burden our ability to communicate with the public, and targeted attacks in the media, including a campaign of misinformation by government actors.

While the Israeli Government's attitude toward human rights groups who provide assistance to Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territory has always been ambivalent, until recently Israeli human rights groups could operate with relative freedom, including freedom of speech and association and could maintain professional relations with the military authorities through limited procedures for administrative appeal. In recent months, however, and especially since the Israeli Government's military operation in Gaza (December 27, 2008-January 18, 2009), the Israeli Government has been attacking the legitimacy of human rights groups, especially those who advocate for Palestinians.

The Israeli Shin Bet (internal security services) interrogated an Israeli Arab human rights worker, warning him not to engage in "political issues" concerning Gaza; the police opened a criminal investigation into an Israeli group supporting conscientious objection from military service; and the Government launched a public attack against a group that published testimonies of soldiers who served in the Gaza offensive, including asking European governments to stop funding the organisation through their human rights programmes. From September to November 2009, the military declared a boycott of Israeli human rights groups, refusing to respond to our appeals on behalf of Gaza residents seeking exit permits, even in dire humanitarian circumstances, until heavy pressure from the international community and the State Attorney's office led to the cancelation of the boycott. The Executive Directors of two prominent human rights or-

ganisations were arrested at a peaceful demonstration and held overnight after the police claimed that the demonstration was illegal because they used megaphones.

Last month, at the initiative of the Minister of Improvement of Government Services, Israeli lawmakers preliminarily approved a bill that would limit the ability of Israeli human rights organisations to receive funding from foreign governments, including via human rights and democracy-building programmes supported by the European Union and its member states, programmes that give money to a wide variety of civil society actors, including universities, cultural centres, and other non-governmental organisations. The law would essentially prejudice human rights groups relative to a wide variety of other civil society organisations who receive funding from foreign governments.

Israeli government spokespersons have attacked human rights organisations in the media, calling us traitors and spreading misinformation regarding our financial structures.

Beginning this summer, the Israeli tax authorities tried to rescind Gisha's nonprofit status, based on the content of Gisha's work defending the rights of Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territory. We were told that because we offer legal assistance to Palestinians, we could not be considered a public institution enjoying nonprofit status.

Certainly, relative to other places in the world and relative to our Palestinian colleagues, Israeli human rights defenders enjoy significantly more freedom. I do not feel myself to be in physical danger. I still have the freedom to say what I believe is right. What is striking however, is the rapidity of the deterioration in democratic protections and the ferocity of the attack on my work and that of my Israeli colleagues. I believe that the attack against human rights defenders is a symptom of a worrying decay of Israeli democracy. The health of a democracy is measured by its ability to tolerate dissent, especially dissent from governmental policies. Hearing that dissent is all the more important in cases when it comes from human rights groups whose goals are to protect the fundamental rights of individuals who are vulnerable to decisions made by government officials who are not accountable to them.

I am saddened that my colleagues and I must now fight for our ability to continue working – taking precious resources away from the work itself, promoting human rights.

I AM SORRY TO SAY THAT IN THE 7 MONTHS THAT HAVE PASSED SINCE RECEIVING THAT INVITATION (TO THE DUBLIN PLATFORM), THE STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN ISRAEL HAS DETERIORATED RAPIDLY, DUE TO A TARGETED ATTACK BY GOVERNMENTAL AND PRIVATE ACTORS AGAINST THE LEGITIMACY OF HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS IN ISRAEL.

## SAUDI ARABIA ANON HRD

Until recently, discussing anything related to women's rights was considered a social taboo; talking about any women's rights, whether they be political, economic, social, ethical or sexual, was considered a violation of a sacred set of values, the sacred nature of which comes from them being social taboos and not religious ones, contrary to common belief.

These values are given a religious nature as a result of politicising religion with the intention of marginalising women. A clear manifestation of this attitude is the reservations made by Saudi Arabia to article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), on the basis that its provisions contravene Islamic laws (Shari'a). That explains the difficulty of working on these issues, especially with the presence of two authorities in control of the country; the challenge of either is problematic. By these two I refer to the religious authority represented in a religious institution, and the social authority, namely traditions that are derived from tribal values. The population in Saudi Arabia is comprised of several tribes governed by a set of traditions that are given a religious justification in order to legitimise them.

This has gone on for many years, and the international community has called in recent years for reform especially in relation to the situation of women in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the aftermath of September 11th, and the publication of the CEDAW Shadow Reports.

Despite the pro-reform attitudes in the state with the ascension of King Abdullah to the throne, the country still suffers from unresolved problems in relation to women's rights, because of the following number of issues, namely; the absence of clear legislation that protects women and their rights (therefore, the Wali or Guardian is in complete control of a woman's life, and he is the one who represents her, even if he was the abuser); the absence of legislation that protects women human rights defenders; the fact that rights activism is individual and not organisational; the fact that the body in charge of human rights is governmental and its work is limited; the fact that other entities working on women's rights, such as the Himaya (protection) Society, which works to protect women from domestic violence, lacks independence, and functions under direct supervision from the Ministry of Social Affairs, making it therefore semi-governmental; the fact that there are no independent non-governmental organisations working on women's rights in Saudi Arabia; and that women human rights defenders face multilayered pressure from religious and social institutions, which affects the continuity of their activism in the long run.

I myself am a woman defender of women's human rights. My male and female colleagues and I face many forms of harassment aimed at dissuading us from carrying out our legitimate work. It is important to note that this is not practiced directly by the Government, but rather by religious and social institutions, supported by corruption and the abuse of authority.

Travel bans and arbitrary dismissal from work are common curtailments of our work. I myself have not faced this yet, but one abuser filed a lawsuit questioning my qualifications, and I was therefore subjected to an investigation and stopped from continuing my work until the inves-

tigation had ended. After I was acquitted of these charges, my legal status was not corrected, and the offender was not questioned.

Furthermore, a battered woman's family threatened to kill me, and when I submitted a complaint to the police the authorities failed to address the risk I faced, and did not take my complaint seriously. Instead, I was considered responsible for this situation, as I was accused of provoking the victims' families by encouraging women to disobey them.

An abuser also filed a lawsuit accusing me of encouraging his daughter to practice improper behavior, supported by a member of the Protection Committee in the Ministry, who should presumably support the defenders. However, some officials unfortunately give social considerations priority over human rights.

There has also been a campaign on the internet and online forums to turn public opinion against me on the basis that I encourage misconduct. The offenders cannot be prosecuted due to the fact that there are no laws in the country concerning slander using the media.

Lately, as the reformist attitude in the Kingdom has strengthened, we, women human rights defenders became more capable of expressing ourselves and having our voices heard. The ruling family shows some acceptance of our demands, and offences by the old school of strict religious fundamentalism no longer happen with impunity. Saudi Arabia attempts to promote a better image of the country in the international community, and it is therefore necessary to stop violations from taking place. Pressure from international entities helps promote a more active role for women in our society, and achieve our objectives in relation to women's rights.

I MYSELF AM A WOMAN DEFENDER OF WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS. MY MALE AND FEMALE COLLEAGUES AND I FACE MANY FORMS OF HARASSMENT AIMED AT DISSUADING US FROM CARRYING OUT OUR LEGITIMATE WORK.





## Front Line wishes to offer sincere thanks to the following donors.

Without their generous, the Dublin Platform would not have occurred:

The European Commission  
Irish Aid – The Department of Foreign Affairs  
The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
The Sigrid Rausing Trust  
Foundation Open Society Institute  
The Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany – Dublin  
The Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs  
The Oak Foundation  
The Ford Foundation  
The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
The Overbrook Foundation  
The American Jewish World Service  
The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy  
Zennström Philanthropies  
KIOS – The Finnish NGO Foundation for Human Rights  
The Belgian Foreign Ministry  
The Body Shop  
Rothco Advertising Integration  
The Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Participants of the 2009 Front Line Golf Classic

The next Dublin Platform will take place in the autumn of 2011.  
Front Line would welcome any input for the agenda.

Reports from the working groups that took place in this year's Fifth Dublin Platform will be made available on the Front Line web site.

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"TODAY WE WANT TO LIVE ANOTHER HISTORY"  
BETY CARIÑO, MEXICO

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## BOOK OF TESTIMONIES



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