



HUMAN
RIGHTS
HOUSE
NETWORK

Annual Report
2003

OSLO

MOSCOW

WARSAW

SARAJEVO

BERGEN

ZAGREB

NAIROBI

MINSK

ISTANBUL

BAKU

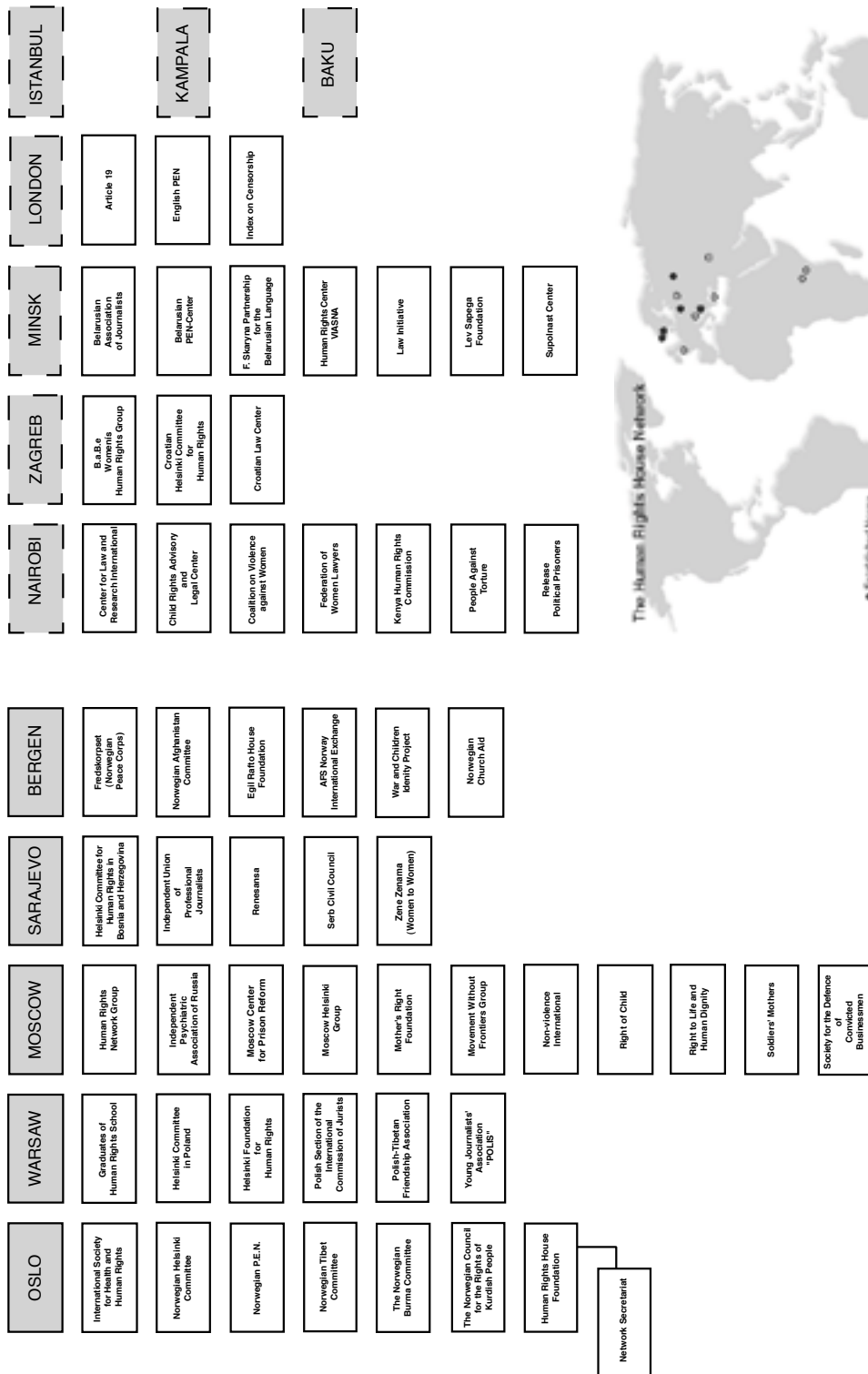
LONDON

KAMPALA



The Human Rights House Network

Established Houses



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Article 1:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.



Introduction

“Defending human rights is becoming ever more of a high-risk venture”.

Nine years ago, in July of 1995, the UN declared safe area surrounding Srebrenica gave way to the pressure of Serbian troops. Some of the worst atrocities of the entire Balkans war were to follow. Due to the eye witness accounts and other testimonies which reached the rest of the world, Srebrenica was soon established in collective memory alongside My Lai, Sabra and Shatila, and Rwanda, all sites of large scale attacks on innocent civilians.

Among the many testimonies from Srebrenica were the Polish-Norwegian film maker Maria Fugleavaag Warsinski's documentary *Crime and Punishment*. In this film, Warsinski tells the story of three men, who were the last remaining prisoners of war and involuntarily brought into an international political game.

Three years after the official ceasefire, on the 10th of December 1998, *Crime and Punishment* was premiered at the Norwegian Human Rights House's marking of the 50th anniversary of United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

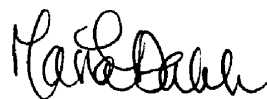
The premiere in Oslo was followed by the local premiere, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where in the meantime another Human Rights House had been established. Organisations within this House participated in raising the three men's case. Less than a month later, the three were free.

Since then, the Human Rights House in Sarajevo has become a meeting point for inter-ethnic, multi-religious and across-the-political-spectrum dialogue. At any point since 1998, four to six organisations have worked together from this house, serving the public and helping thousands of victims of human rights violations through lobbying, media and election observation, human rights education and the provision of free legal aid. From joining forces in a Human Rights House, the organisations also help each other through increased co-operation, added weight to authority approaches, improved access for clients, enhanced security and reduced costs.

The Human Rights House Foundation (HRH) is working to let other countries experience the same set of synergy effects and civil society support. More Human Rights Houses are under establishment in Zagreb, Nairobi, London, Baku, Kampala and Istanbul. In Belarus, Europe's last remaining dictatorship, both the free media and independent human rights organisations continue to suffer violations of their rights, for instance as violations of their freedom of expression and association. The Human Rights House Network has repeatedly addressed these violations. The Belarusian organisations' own assessment is that under the current political leadership, establishing a Human Rights House will be difficult. For the time being, Minsk is kept a virtual house through which human rights NGOs co-operate on various projects.

A human rights defender is someone who acts upon the recognition, in the face of the other, of his or her own humanity. This recognition, it seems, is becoming ever more important. In recent years, and in particular since 9/11, the United Nations' Secretary-General's Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders has documented a deterioration of the security and working conditions of human rights defenders. The experience throughout the Human Rights House Network is the same; promoting and defending human rights is becoming ever more of a high-risk venture.

HRH believes that this development is in itself reason good enough to step up our efforts and establish more Human Rights Houses in more different places around the world. Attempts to improve human rights standards can only succeed if the pressure comes from within, from each and every country's own people. Human Rights Houses help make this possible.



Maria Dahle
Executive Director
The Human Rights House Foundation



The Human Rights House Network Secretariat, Oslo

Activities

The Human Rights House Foundation's (HRH) Secretariat is located in Oslo, Norway. Joint activities carried out by the Human Rights House Network are co-ordinated by the Secretariat. The network's shared ambition is to promote, protect and enhance human rights. This is done through

- the establishment of more Human Rights Houses
- sharing of knowledge and experience between these houses
- carrying out joint projects, involving two or more of the houses

The number of member organisations in each house varies, but in total, the network currently consists of more than seventy organisations.

Human Rights Houses: Since 1989, Human Rights Houses have been established in Oslo and Bergen (Norway), Moscow (Russia), Warsaw (Poland) and Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina). More houses are under establishment

in Zagreb (Croatia), Nairobi (Kenya), Minsk (Belarus), Istanbul (Turkey), Baku (Azerbaijan), Kampala (Uganda) and London (England).

In addition, HRH has had informal discussions with human rights defenders from Guatemala, Colombia, Afghanistan, North and South Korea, the USA, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Ethiopia and South Africa.

Associating oneself with the Human Rights House Network does not affect anyone's freedom or integrity. As each organisation within a Human Rights House remains free to decide its own priorities, each house is also free to focus on what the member organisations of the house find suitable.

Manual on establishing a Human Rights House: Every new establishment is carried out in close co-operation with local partners. HRH's recently revised manual guiding local partners through the whole establishment process, is available on the network's joint website www.humanrightshouse.org.

Berit Lindeman (left) and Niels Jacob Harbitz (right) started working at the Secretariat in 2003, while Borghild T Krokan (center) was on maternity leave. Photo: Magnar Naustdalslid.



Jadranka Milicevic (Sarajevo) and Hilda Mawanda (Nairobi) work with women's rights at their Human Rights Houses. Photo: Borghild Tønnesen Krokan.



Fundraising: The secretariat's role is to provide both consultative and financial assistance to NGOs wishing to establish a Human Rights House. If an initiative to establish a new Human Rights House is found viable, the secretariat seeks funds from private and public sponsors. HRH does not have its own funds to support large-scale projects, but fundraises, mostly towards Norwegian authorities, on the basis of project proposals developed in other among the houses in the network. In 2003, the Secretariat stepped up these efforts in order to provide a broader base for further establishments.

Network Meeting: Representatives from each Human Rights House, established and emerging, meet annually to decide strategies and priorities for the coming year. Last year's meeting was hosted by the Human Rights House in Bergen, and coincided with the Rafto Prize seminar and award ceremonies. The meeting issued a statement on the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus, which has led to the shut-down of close to all independent human rights organisations.

Internet Activities: In 2003, the HRH Secretariat continued the development of its two websites; www.menneskerettigheter.no and www.humanrightshouse.org. While the former was further adjusted to suit one of its main target groups; primary school pupils, the latter, which is the joint website of the HRH Network, saw part-time contributors from throughout the network employed and sub-pages for all established and emerging Human Rights Houses established. A session particularly dedicated to these purposes during the network meeting in Bergen, boosted the activity at the www.humanrightshouse.org.

Evaluation: In the course of 2003, members of the Secretariat have visited all established Human Rights Houses and also a number of those under establishment. Some of these have been visited more than once, and on each visit, discussions have been held with potential member organisations, international diplomacy, other possible donors, and local human rights experts, all to bring the attempts to establish a new Human Rights House closer to reality. A preliminary evaluation of the Human Rights House concept, preparing the ground for an all-encompassing exercise of this kind to take place in 2004 / 2005, was also carried out in the autumn of 2003 and included visits to the Human Rights Houses in Moscow and Sarajevo.

Seminar on Azerbaijan: In December 2003, the Secretariat hosted a one-day seminar addressing the recent deterioration of the human rights situation in Azerbaijan. The well-attended seminar, which generated notable media interest, also asked what options the international community might have to halt the declining respect for human rights, climaxing in the mass arrests and extensive use of violence and torture during and after the rigged mid-October elections.

New Human Rights House in Oslo: Throughout the second half of 2003, the HRH Secretariat got ever more deeply involved in preparations for the move away from our premises throughout the last fifteen years and into more adequately equipped offices closer to the city centre, where many among the most relevant decision making bodies also are to be found, including the Norwegian Parliament and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This move will enable the Human Rights House to welcome more member organisations, among them the Norwegian Burma Committee and the Norwegian Council for the Rights of the Kurdish People and will also see the Human Rights House co-locate with the Norwegian Section of Amnesty International.



The organisations are to move to the new Norwegian Human Rights House in Tordenskioldsgate 6b in June 2004. Photo: Borghild Tønnesen Krokan.



Administration

Funding

In 2003, the activities of the Human Rights House Foundation was again supported by the contributions of dedicated Norwegian individuals. The total private funding was 300 000 Norwegian Kroner (approximately 45 000 USD). Further, it received generous support from the Freedom of Expression Foundation – 35 000 Norwegian Kroner, or approximately 5000 USD.

Our projects also received generous support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 3.23 million Norwegian Kroner, or approximately 477 000 USD.

Board Members

- Lars A. Christensen (Chairperson), Supreme Court Lawyer and Senior Partner of the law firm Wikborg, Rein &co.
- Mette Newth, Author, Illustrator and Translator. Former Administrator of the Norwegian Forum for Freedom of Expression. Project Manager and Chair of the International Steering Committee for an International bibliographic database on censorship and freedom of expression for the new library in Alexandria.
- Bernt Hagtvet, Professor of Political Science at the University of Oslo. Visiting Professor at Yale University. Has written extensively on human rights and democracy. Research interests: Arendt on Eichmann; sociology of fascism; civil society and the collapse of the Weimar republic; right-wing extremism.
- Knut U. Kloster Jr., Chairman of Navimar Holding.
- Svein Wilhelmsen, CEO Basecamp Explorer.
- Stein Ivar Aarsæther, Senior Vice-President of ABB, President of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee and Treasurer of the International Helsinki Federation.
- Hans Christian Magnus, Sales Director of ResidenSea.

International Advisory Team

An International Advisory Team was set up in 2003, consisting of two representatives from the formal decision making structure at each established Human Rights House:

Oslo: Ms Nora Sveaas and Ms Mette Newth

Moscow: Ms Natalia Taubina and Ms Tatiana Lokshina

Warsaw: Elzbieta Czyz and Zbigniew Holda

Sarajevo: Senka Nowica and Mirjana Malic

Bergen: Ms Therese Jebsen and Mr Kai Grieg

The team will participate in representation, fundraising and discussions on strategic development of the Human Rights House Network.

Human Rights House Network meeting.

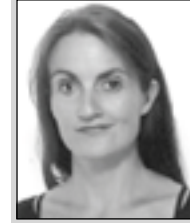
Photo: Borghild Tønnesen Krokan.



Staff

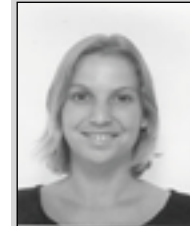
Maria Dahle, Executive Director

Maria has been the Executive Director at the Human Rights House Foundation (HRH) since 1994. She is currently Chairperson at the Board of the Radio station Voice of Tibet. Maria holds a Post-graduate degree from the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration in Bergen, Norway. She has previously worked as a Journalist, and helped establish the Norwegian newspaper Finansavisen. Maria has also worked as a Theatre Instructor.



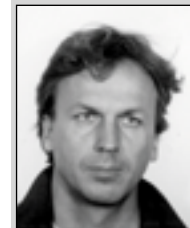
Borghild T Krokan, Project Manager

Borghild has worked at the Human Rights House Foundation (HRH) since May 2001 with the establishment of Human Rights Houses worldwide, and also coordinates information and network activities. She has two Masters Degrees: One in Political Science from the University of Oslo, and one in Media and Communications from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Both dissertations were on human rights. Language studies in Spanish. She has previously worked as a Journalist and as Information Director. Borghild was on maternity leave one year from April 2003 onwards.



Niels Jacob Harbitz, Project Manager

Niels Jacob began working for the Human Rights House Foundation in June 2003, mainly with the establishment of human rights houses in Kenya and Uganda. Niels Jacob has a Masters Degree combining anthropology and media and communication studies. In addition, he has read politics, philosophy and literary theory at New York University and University of Westminster. During the 80s he established and led the organisation Youth for Nuclear Disarmament. He has worked as a freelance journalist, provided literary consultancy and taught media and communications at the University of Oslo.



Berit Lindeman, Project Manager

Berit also began working as a Project Manager for the Human Rights House Foundation June 1st, 2003, with main responsibility for the projects in Eastern Europe. Berit is a Jurist, has additional education in Russian and French and has worked for several years on democratization projects with different international organizations in CIS countries and in Africa. In 2003, Berit focused mainly on the HRH projects in Azerbaijan and Belarus.



Sigurd Kraft Gulbrandsen, Administrative Consultant

Sigurd has worked part-time for the Human Rights House Foundation (HRH) since January 2002, and is also Secretary and Webmaster for the International Society for Health and Human Rights (ISHHR). He holds a Bachelor's Degree with a major in Political Science and minors in Law and History



Support staff

The following persons were associated with the Secretariat in 2003:

Øistein S Galaaen, Camilla Chaussé, Magnar Naustdalslid, Harald Askestad, and Marianne Hille.



Building civil societies

The purpose of Human Rights Houses in conflict-ridden societies is to

i) protect the human rights activists, thereby laying the groundwork for a permanent presence of human rights monitors, and

ii) strengthening the respect for human rights by providing a concrete outlet for human rights complaints for ordinary people.

The ultimate aim of the Human Rights House Network is to institutionalise human rights monitoring, i.e. providing the structural pre-conditions for creating a human rights culture. Human rights are best protected when their values and strictures become automated as a reflex among the police, in the judiciary, in political parties and movements and in the public at large. This requires long-term work and planning in surroundings where often-vulnerable activists can seek each other's company, learn from each other, present to the authorities a voice for human rights concerns and provide links to the international civil society of human rights activists and non-governmental organisations (NGO's). Human Rights Houses should become clearing houses for human rights cases and should serve as centres, in

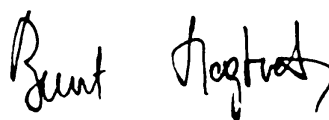
conjunction with the legal and academic professions, for human rights competence and research, offering legal advice, library resources and experience.

Experience has taught us that people spend an inordinate amount of time finding practical solutions for offic-

es, phones, Internet links and the like. By assisting to provide houses where infrastructural needs are taken care of, we will unleash energies that can better be devoted to active work for the promotion of human rights. The fact that these houses are often owned by a foreign foundation will often serve to pacify local conflicts and in itself be a contribution towards peaceful cooperation in the human rights community in societies plagued by conflicts. The mere presence of a

vocal community of this kind can in and by itself serve as a reminder to the larger public of the obligations undertaken by the government to respect human rights.

"By assisting to provide houses where infrastructural needs are taken care of, we will unleash energies that can better be devoted to active work for the promotion of human rights".



Professor Bernt Hagtvet
Board Member
The Human Rights House Foundation



Established Human Rights Houses

The official opening of the first Human Rights House in the Network – the Norwegian Human Rights House (1989) – coincided with historic events in Eastern Europe. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, organisations at the house focused on what they considered to be the main challenge ahead: Supporting fragile, emerging democracies. Key priorities were the establishment of democratic institutions, respect for the freedom of the media, and the rule of law. Among the instruments were election observation, media monitoring, human rights education and information, networking (both nationally and internationally), advocacy, and support to civil society organisations.

OSLO

The Norwegian Human Rights House

The Norwegian Human Rights House in Oslo was established in 1989. It currently houses five member organisations that work with various forms of human rights monitoring, reporting and advocacy, both nationally and internationally:



The Norwegian Helsinki Committee: Monitors compliance with the human rights provisions of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) within

all OSCE signatory states and supports initiatives to strengthen democracy and civil society.

The Norwegian Tibet Committee: One of the largest and most active Tibet support groups in Europe with more than 1500 members. Works to spread information about the situation in Tibet, and encourage Norwegian politicians and the Norwegian government to support the right of self-determination of the Tibetan people.

The International Society for Health and Human Rights (ISHHR): A membership organisation for health workers engaged in work with survivors of human rights violations. Focus on the effects of human rights violations on health, treatment methods, medical and psychological care and psychosocial interventions both on individual and community level.

Norwegian P.E.N: Member of the International P.E.N. - the worldwide association of writers. It exists to promote friendship and intellectual co-operation among writers everywhere, regardless of their political or other views; to fight for freedom of expression and to defend vigorously writers suffering from oppressive regimes.



The Human Rights House Foundation (HRH): Works to establish Human Rights Houses worldwide and develop a network between these. Secretariat of the Human Rights House Network.

In 2003, the member organisations worked to establish a new Norwegian Human Rights House to create a broader, stronger human rights environment. The existing five organisations will co-locate with Amnesty International and three new member organisations: The Norwegian Burma Committee, the Norwegian Council for the Rights of Kurdish People, and Nansen Dialogue Project. The House is scheduled to open in June 2004. The organisations will move from its current address in Urtegata 50 to a new address in the city center: Tordenskioldsgate 6b, 0160 Oslo.

Human rights in Norway: Compared to many other countries, the respect for human rights is strong in Norway. Nonetheless, human rights violations occur in Norway too. These include discrimination and racism, Sami political issues, national minorities, asylum and immigration law, remand in custody and the time required to deal with criminal cases, social and health care, the rights of women, children, discrimination of homosexuals and lesbians, freedom of religion or belief, and freedom of expression. Some of these violations are brought before Norwegian courts or ombudsmen and resolved in these fora, while others are not settled until they have been brought before international bodies.

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has established a sub-committee on human rights in Norway. Since 2002, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee has been the secretariat of the committee, consisting of representatives from the government, NGOs and researchers.

Recommendations to the government: In February 2003, fifteen organisations in the so-called "Norwegian NGO Forum", among them the members of the Norwegian Human Rights House, made recommendations on human rights issues which the Norwegian Government should focus on in this year's meeting in the UN Human Rights Commission. Recommendations were made on seven countries (Colombia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Russia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe), and five issues: Impunity, freedom of expression, protection of refugees, security legislation and terrorism, and women in war and conflict.

Tomasz Wacko

Tomasz Wacko, known to his large number of friends both in Norway, Poland and throughout Central and Eastern Europe, as Tomek, was only 44 years old when he died under terribly tragic circumstances earlier this year.

To his premature death, however, there is also an element of almost unbelievably cruel irony. From



Photo: The Norwegian Helsinki Committee.

his years in the then permanently persecuted Polish underground opposition, Tomek had survived numerous clashes with General Jaruzelski's Police, Army and Security Forces, and also two periods behind bars, during which he became a natural leader for his fellow prisoners of conscience. After fourteen years in Norway, twelve of them spent as a full-time human rights activist, he died at the hands of the Norwegian Police.

Coming to Norway as a political refugee in 1989, Wacko soon became a leading human rights activist. In the course of the next decade, his reputation as an uncompromising human rights defender grew to the point where he was known practically to everyone engaged in similar activities throughout the civil societies of Central and Eastern Europe. During this time, Wacko befriended and helped thousands of people, either through improving their living conditions locally or by way of enabling them to escape their authorities to find security for themselves and their families elsewhere. To the human rights movement in general, but to the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights in particular, Wacko's untimely death is an immeasurable loss. The same, of course, goes for his wife Jolanda and the three children she gave him that he leaves behind.

While there is general agreement throughout the international human rights movement over the importance of bringing those responsible for Tomasz Wacko's death to justice, such measures cannot and will not redress the tragic loss. Instead, Tomek is already deeply missed. He will never be forgotten.



MOSCOW

The Russian Research Center for Human Rights (RRCHR) was established in 1992 by an initiative of a number of internationally recognized human rights activists who had struggled for freedom in the Soviet Union since the 1960s, in particular Elena Bonner, Sergey Kovalyov, Vyacheslav Bakhmin, Anatoly Pristavkin, Larisa Bogoraz and Aleksey Smirnov.

Organisations

- Human Rights Network Group
- Independent Psychiatric Association of Russia
- Kiselev League for the Protection of Disabled
- Moscow Center for Prison Reform
- Moscow Helsinki Group
- Mother's Right Foundation
- Movement Without Frontiers Group
- Non-violence International
- Right of Child
- Right to Life and Human Dignity
- Soldiers' Mothers Committee

The former underground activist Mr Aleksey Smirnov was the first leader of the Human Rights House in Moscow, The Russian Research Center for Human Rights.
Photo: Maria Dahle.



Activities in 2003

Monitoring: Monitoring observation of human rights in regions of the Russian Federation and in Northern Caucasus and collecting information in 89 Russian regions in cooperation with regional human rights organizations.

Law-making proposals: Working out concrete proposals on military reform on the basis of repudiation of general conscription and transition to professional army, prison reform and program documents on family policy. Participation in the Health Ministry Commission on preparing changes and supplements to the Law on Psychiatric Care with a goal to prevent widening of use of involuntary measures.

Legal aid: Support to 50 clinics in 26 regions providing free of charge legal aid to the public.

Mental institutions: Regular visits to colonies for juvenile delinquents and to mental hospitals for patients with criminal records. Creation of non-governmental service for protection of rights of patients with mental disorders. Participation in court trials on recognition of citizens as incapable with a goal to protect their interests. Issuing quarterly "Independent Psychiatric Journal" with legal consulting on patients' rights and information about the violations they have been subjected to.

Chechnya: Active cooperation with all human rights organizations speaking against the war and searching a way to peace. Financial help to wounded soldiers.

Children: "Christmas behind bars" – giving presents to under age convicts. Charitable marathon on International Day for the Protection of children's rights – help to disabled children, orphanages, families living in poor conditions with three or more children. Working out concrete proposals on participation by NGOs in solving children-related problems – through social partnership and lobbying regional laws on protection of children's rights.

Prisons: Organization of campaign to fight tuberculosis in prisons. Issued annual reports on observation of human rights in Russian regions, preparing special reports on women's rights, on conditions in the penitentiary system, and on conditions in mental hospitals. Weekly broadcast for inmates.

NGO co-operation: Participation in preparation of Russian NGO's alternative report to UN HRC and UN CESCR. Establishment and active participation in All-Russian Coordination Council "Civil Society – to Russian Children", uniting more than 200 NGO dealing with problem of children.





Thousands were killed in the ongoing conflict in Chechnya. In January, a press conference was held at the Human Rights House in Moscow, focusing on the human rights violations. Photo: The Norwegian Helsinki Committee.

Media: Issuing monthly newsletter “Mother’s Right” with information on rights of relatives of those perished while in the army and on activities of the Mother’s Rights Foundation. Supporting the most significant web-portal “Human Rights Online”, daily distribution of informational digest on problems of observation of human rights in Russia. Translation and publication of two books by Norwegian criminologist Mr. Nils Christie. Regular press conferences on urgent problems of human rights, spreading press-releases, participation in TV and broadcasting.

Human Rights Challenges in Russia

Chechnya: The armed conflict in Chechnya raged on through 2003, leading to the deaths of thousands and massive violations of human rights. The conflict is defined by the authorities as a “counter-terrorist operation” and

hence outside the sphere of international law. Although the 15,000 km² territory is a war zone, a state of emergency has not been officially declared. Under these conditions government officials commit numerous crimes against civilians, and in the course of “special operations” lawlessness merges with criminal practices.

Human rights guaranteed but not protected: The Russian Constitution guarantees the human rights of its citizens, but protection of human rights and freedoms are limited by insurmountable procedural restrictions. The freedom of movement and the freedom to choose residence are restricted by the passport system and the registration regime. In theory citizens can move freely, but numerous bylaws and regulations allow authorities to refuse registration without any valid reasons. A person who is not registered is deprived of the majority of rights and social guarantees.



Lack of control over government activities: The violation of civil and political rights by the authorities is largely made possible by the absence of effective control over their activity, ineffective judicial protection, and opposition to transparency both in the legislative and executive branches of government. To this day, a law for monitoring of human rights at places of forced confinement has not been adopted.

The judicial system: The judicial system does not provide effective protection for the victims of human rights violations. True to the tradition in former Soviet times, judges continue to see themselves as part of the state machinery, and in most cases show solidarity with the state prosecution or the government officials whom laypersons try to bring to justice.

Ethnic discrimination: Chechnya represents a kind of “experimental site” for the use of torture and prohibited methods in the context of violence, outrage, lawlessness, and impunity. After coming back from Chechnya, the officials use this experience in the regions. On top of that, the conflict in the Chechen Republic powerfully fosters the ethnic discrimination which has become a norm in the behaviour of government officials and the public at large in Russian regions. Chechens and Caucasians generally prevail among the victims of unlawful police action and various practices employed by government agencies restricting the liberty of movement and freedom of the choice of residence. A very special situation has taken shape in the Krasnodar territory, where the authorities consistently pursue a policy aimed at ousting the Meskhetian Turks from the region. Since 1989 they have refused to grant Meskhetian Turks residence permits, and since 1991 denied them registration and Russian citizenship, using this to systematically oppress and restrict the rights of this group. The federal authorities do nothing to check the lawlessness of the Krasnodar authorities and grant the Meskhetian Turks Russian citizenship.

People without citizenship: At present, at least half a million (some estimates go as high as three million) people reside in Russia who were citizens of the former Soviet Union but have received neither Russian nor any other citizenship. Unlike the old citizenship law, the new citizenship law of 2002 provides no simplified procedure for receipt of Russian citizenship. As of 2004, when Soviet passports will no longer be valid as a legal form of identification, these persons will find themselves in a complete legal vacuum.

Elections and democratisation: The institution of elections is becoming increasingly quasi-democratic and quasi-competitive as a result of unlawful interference of the executive power on all levels of the electoral process. Often, citizens are offered to elect candidates *de facto*, one of whom is “doomed to win.” Real competitors are barred from participation in the election campaign by means of administrative levers, or have to face various obstacles when campaigning. Election commissions and courts often show bias in such cases. Voting results are sometimes rigged but such falsifications rarely make it to court.

Poverty: The problem of poverty and realization of the right to an adequate standard of living remains the most acute among all issues in the area of economic and social rights in Russia. In recent years certain positive changes have taken place in combating poverty. The number of impoverished people was reduced from 37 to 33 million in 2003 and a progressive tendency for decrease of poverty has developed. Despite the progress, more than a quarter of all Russians still live in poverty.



Poverty remains the most acute human rights problem in Russia. Photo: Erik Giercksky.

Health: The situation in the field of health protection and implementation of the right for highest attainable level of physical and mental health has quickly deteriorated in the last years and represents today the most problematic areas among all economic and social rights in Russia. According to NGOs and public health experts, these concerns apply to the criteria of availability, adequacy, and accessibility. A public health reform placed on the agenda by the country's leadership does not work in practice, because public health administration remains a closed system subject to tough bureaucratic control.



WARSAW

The Human Rights House in Warsaw: The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights

The Human Rights House in Warsaw was set up in 1993 by the Polish Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HFHR). The House is mainly devoted to human rights research, education and monitoring, with a focus on civil and political rights in Poland and other countries.

Organisations

- Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights
- Helsinki Committee in Poland
- Association of Young Journalists "POLIS"
- Polish-Tibetan Friendship Association
- Polish Section of the International Commission of Jurists
- Association of the Graduates of Human Rights School

Activities in 2003

Training and education: Theoretical courses in human rights and the mechanism for protection of human rights. Training in the skills of effective action for protection of human rights and respect of the rule of law (such as the techniques of human rights monitoring, public interest law actions, organisation of public campaigns etc.). Public education, e.g. through production and distribution of educational films in Russian and English, often shown on TV in various countries.

Courses for professionals: Courses for professional groups (lawyers, defence counsels, judges, the staff of Ombudsman's offices, politicians and parliamentary experts, journalists, teachers), providing knowledge on human rights and the techniques for rights protection typically employed by specific professions. Expert consultations of strategic plans of action and implementation of individual projects.

NGO training: Advanced Courses for activists of human rights NGO's and other "watch dogs", as well as young academics and community leaders in the CIS countries,

who graduate from the HFHR Summer or Winter School on Human Rights or other international course giving a solid knowledge on human rights. Approximately 50 persons are qualified for each Course.

Seminars: 1) In September 2003 HFHR held a seminar called "Free Elections". The seminar's participants - human rights activists from former Soviet states - discussed the issues of democratic elections, and possible civil society's initiatives related to those (such as elections monitoring). 2) In October 2003 HFHR hosted four representatives of Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights (NKHR) from Seoul, South Korea. Their visit was related to the preparation to the 5th International Conference for North Korean Human Rights and Refugees which took place in Warsaw in March 2004. It will be organized jointly by HFHR and NKHR.

Iraq: HFHR has developed a new programme aiming at establishing a human rights watchdog organization in Iraq.

The documentary film maker Kim Longinotto talks to the audience at the Warsaw Human Rights in Film International Film Festival. Photo: The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland.



Human rights film festival: The HFHR has been organizing Human Rights in Film International Film Festival at the Centre for Contemporary Art -Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw as an annual event since December 2001. Films of all sorts (documentary and fiction, short and long, new and old) dealing with human rights are accompanied by meetings with film directors and NGO activists, as well as panel discussions with the most renowned specialists in the field of human rights. This year's festival took place on December 10-14. Since February 2003, Human Rights in Film Travelling Film Festival has taken selected films from the repertoire of the December 2002 festival in Warsaw to 5 towns in Poland and in the fall will continue its trek around Poland before moving on to Ukraine. Both the Warsaw festival and the travelling festivals have met with enthusiastic response. Over 4000 people attended each Warsaw festival, and over 1000 were present at each travelling festival. In 2004, in addition to Poland and Ukraine, the festival will





Demonstrators in Warsaw protest against the gross human rights violations in North Korea. Photos: The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland.



travel to the Caucasus. The festival is considered a form of public education and is free of charge.

Monitoring racism and xenophobia: In 2003 HFHR has become the National Focal Point in The PHARE RAXEN_CC /The European Information Network on Racism and Xenophobia/, Project of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). EUMC and the National Focal Points cooperate and network with organisations, institutions and individuals from academic, social and political fields dealing with racism and xenophobia. Information and data, including scientific research results, from NGOs, EU Member States, EU institutions and international organisations are collected and analysed.

Torture prevention: Along with other Helsinki Committees from our region, HFHR takes part in “Prevention torture in closed institutions of Central and Eastern Europe”, a programme which is administered by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee. The programme monitors the activities of police officers, staff of prison institutions and psychiatric hospitals.

Journalist workshops: POLIS organised two courses of journalistic workshops for students. This is a joint program of HRHR, POLIS and “Open Republic” – An Association against anti-Semitism and Xenophobia. The project’s aim is to engage a group of young people in human rights activities, either in one of the patron organisations or in the participants’ own project. During a one year course workshop participants gather theoretical knowledge on human rights as well as learn practical skills necessary in a human rights activist’s work.

Human Rights challenges in Poland

State policy towards refugees: Currently there are about 5000 persons in the refugee procedure waiting for a decision on their refugee status. Only a few percent of the applicants receive this form of protection in Poland.

Chechen refugees: The changing state policy towards Chechen refugees was and still is the most important



challenge in the field of migration policy in Poland. Having their refugee status refused, about one thousand Chechens fled to the Czech Republic and applied for refugee status there.

Immigration: In 2003 two new legal acts concerning foreigners was adopted and came into force in the 1st of September 2003. One is Law on Aliens which opens for legalisation of foreigners who have stayed illegally in Poland for more than seven years. The second is the Law on protection of foreigners on the territory which gives opens for receiving other forms of protection. On the other hand the authorities introduced detention for those applying for refugee status, who do not have the right to enter Poland or are illegally on the territory of Poland. This violates the 1951 Geneva Convention.

Family reunions: The legal situation of foreigners who are married to Polish citizens still remains a challenge. Polish law does not provide sufficient protection. The new law on foreigners is more favourable, but the practice of officials is still improper. Inefficiency of the Polish judicial system results in protracted proceedings.

Police brutality: Instead of charging the police, proceedings tend to be directed against the victims of police brutality. In such cases, the victims may file an application with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) against violation of Article 3 of the Convention.

Prisons: Extremely overcrowded penitentiary institutions, complaints submitted by inmates against prison administration concern first of all the living conditions. The number of complaints against medical care in prisons is equally high. Both types of cases may involve violation of ECHR's Article 3.

Security services: Dramatically extended powers of security services with practically no judicial or parliamentary review whatsoever. Both forms of the review exist but are fictitious in practice. Both the police and the security services intercept communication without any judicial approval. In itself, this fact is a violation of ECHR's Article 8.

Parliamentary legislation: Very low quality of parliamentary legislation, reducing the people's confidence in the law and nurturing their conviction that the economically and/or politically stronger may go unpunished even if they evade or disrespect that law.

Marek Nowicki

Marek Nowicki, President of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights. Renowned human rights activist and educator, died on October 10, 2003. Thanks to his dedication, the Helsinki Foundation is one of the most experienced and professional non-governmental organizations in Europe.

From 1972-1981 Marek Nowicki was a nuclear physicist at the University of Warsaw's Department of Mathematics and Physics. In



the nineteen-seventies he co-founded the

Photo: The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland.

Student Mountaineering Movement in Poland, and in the eighties was the President of the Federation of Academic Mountaineering Clubs as well as a member of the board of the Polish Mountaineering Association.

In 1980-81, Marek Nowicki was the head of the Mediation Commission in the Mazowsze Region of Solidarity, and later became the head of the Protest Action Team of the Mazowsze Region where he organized demonstrations and planned strikes. During Martial Law he was interned in various prisons.

Once released from internment, he founded the underground publishing house Neutrino and was the editor-in-chief of the underground quarterly, *Praworzadnosc*, in which he signed his articles, "Man".

In December of 1982, Marek Nowicki was one of the key founders of the underground Helsinki Committee in Poland. He took part in writing the first reports on human rights abuses in Poland that were passed on to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Following the collapse of communism in 1989, members of the Helsinki Committee created the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights and chose Marek Nowicki as its president. Today, thanks to his dedication, the Helsinki Foundation is one of the most experienced and professional non-governmental organizations in Europe.



SARAJEVO

The Human Rights House of Sarajevo



The Human Rights House of Sarajevo was established in September 1998. The House has become a place for non-governmental organisations to work together, a place where new ideas and projects are born – all aimed at strengthening democracy and civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Organisations

- Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- The Bureau for Human Rights of the Serb Civil Council
- Independent Union of Professional Journalists
- Coalition of NGOs in BH "IZLAZ"
- Zene Zenama (Women to Women)
- Renesansa



During the Balkans war, the house that is now the Human Rights House of Sarajevo served as a torture and interrogation centre. This picture is from the opening in 1998.

Photo: The Human Rights House of Sarajevo.

Activities

People with special needs: "For Equal Opportunities" is a project to help persons with special needs – disabled, paraplegics, dystrophy sufferers, blind and sight impaired, deaf persons and persons with impaired hearing, people with speech and voice difficulties, mentally retarded and persons with combined difficulties. These people have been completely marginalized. Many are without any social care and to a large extent neglected by their own families. There are approximately 10,000 to 20,000 persons with special needs in the country.

Helping women with breast cancer: "Civic Actions through Partnership" is a campaign for amendment of provisions regulating procurement of orthopaedic aids for women who have undergone breast cancer surgery. The campaign was waged by means of posters, pencils, booklets and so on.

Summer school of Human Rights: In the period from 27 June to 4 July 2003, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina organised the eight annual "Youth School of Human Rights". The lecturers were the experts in the area of human rights from the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as from the organisations that work in the Human Rights House "Zene Zenama", SGV – Council of the Canton of Sarajevo, and the Independent Union of Professional Journalists.

Free legal aid: The Legal Service providing free legal aid is of importance to all organisations at the Human Rights House. Each organisation has sent clients to the Free Legal Assistance Service, thus enabling them to make direct contact with a lawyer.

Human Rights Challenges in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2003

General situation: In 2003, no progress was made in the area of protection of human rights and freedoms in Bosnia and Herzegovina, either concerning the responsibility of authorities at all levels of government or international peace mission. On the contrary, the pressure of nationalists, linked with criminals, upon the most vulnerable groups, especially minority returnee groups, was heightened, with local authorities largely tolerating this and thereby confirming their participation in maintaining ethnic divisions in BiH and tensions between different ethnic and religious communities.



War criminals: Inconsistent and inefficient activities of domestic and international authorities in BiH – including, which was particularly revealing, the failure to arrest the key war crimes indictees. Also cases of toleration of violence against returnees and discrimination against the returnees in various forms have contributed to the worsening of the overall social climate, reminding Bosnians of the pre-war situation with aggressive incidents of nazi-fascist and hegemonistic nature, especially in Republika Srpska.

Religious-ethnic and ideological intolerance: Those in responsible positions in religious communities acted more like political leaders, thus contributing to religious-ethnic and ideological intolerance. Both politically controlled and so-called free media did the same.

The peace process: Short-comings and delays in the implementation of the Dayton Agreement, unsettled relations with neighbouring states, and deterioration of the international climate after 11th of September, have contributed negatively to the overall position of human rights and freedoms in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Mr Srdjan Dizdarevic, President of the Board of the Human Rights House of Sarajevo, warns against the deterioration of human rights protection after 9/11. Photo: Borghild Tønnesen Krokan.



Ruins in Sarajevo: Many people lost everything during the Balkans war. Thousands get free legal aid from the Human Rights House of Sarajevo. Photo: The Human Rights House of Sarajevo.



BERGEN

The Rafto Human Rights House

The Rafto Human Rights House was founded in 1997 in memory of the journalist Egil Rafto and officially opened in 1999. It has become a vital nexus and working community of human rights NGOs in Bergen. Among the users are local branches of national and international organisations. Several joint projects have been carried out, among them educational activities, campaigns and meetings with politicians and human rights researchers.

Organisations

- Amnesty International Western Norway
- NORDPAS
- Norwegian Afghanistan Committee
- Fredskorpset (Norwegian Peace Corps)
- The Egil Rafto House Foundation
- The Rafto Foundation

Activities

Publication of book by Shirin Ebadi: The Rafto Laureate of 2001, Shirin Ebadi, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2003 for her efforts for democracy and human rights. During the Nobel days in Oslo, Ms. Ebadi and the Rafto Foundation released the book "Human Rights and Islam in Modern Iran" (Rafto Human Rights Series, Volume II).

Human rights education: The Egil Rafto House Foundation has developed a human rights program for schools at all basic levels. We regularly receive school classes in the Rafto House for activity based educational programmes. Special topics in the year 2003 have been "Art and Human Rights" and "Freedom of expression". The Foundation has also been involved in education within a special program for optional subjects for the comprehensive school. In cooperation with the Institute of Comparative Politics, the Rafto Human Rights House has developed a 5-credit master's course in human rights, which was held for the second time in 2003 with 36 participants. A seminar for journalists has been held, focusing on the relevance of human rights in journalism, and on human rights as an important reference within media.

The Rafto Prize: The Professor Thorolf Rafto Memorial Prize for 2003 was awarded Paulos Tesfagiorgis, Eritrea. For more than 20 years, Paulos Tesfagiorgis has worked for the empowerment of the people of Eritrea, the creation of opportunities for genuine democratic participation, and the widening of space for human rights. He has maintained that this aim must be pursued peacefully and through popular and constructive dialogue. With this year's prize, the Rafto Foundation wishes to acknowledge and assist the growing number of people in Eritrea who struggle to reverse, through non-violent means, the descent towards a one-man rule and the militarization of society. Demands for democracy and human rights are not tolerated in Eritrea today. Due to surveillance, pressure to maintain unconditional conformity, and absence of freedom of expression, people in Eritrea are unable to organize and make their voices heard. Still, there is a rising desire and demand for participation. It is the hope of the Rafto Foundation that this prize will contribute towards an international focus on the situation in Eritrea, and the opening of space for political discourse in the country.

The Eritrean Human Rights Defender Paulos Tesfagiorgis was awarded the Rafto Prize for 2003.

Photo: The Rafto Foundation.



International activities: Cooperation with the local theatre in Bergen – Den Nationale Scene – in a project to help rebuild the National Theatre in Kabul. Visit by a delegation of Rafto students in January 2003 to refugee camps in south-western Algeria. For more than 25 years an estimated 160 000 refugees, mainly women, children and the aged, have been living in tents in the harsh desert environment. In August 2003 the Rafto Foundation invited five young students from Belarus to attend the Summer School at the United World College in Flekke, Norway.

Network seminar: The Egil Rafto Human Rights House hosted the annual meeting of the Human Rights House Network which gathered representatives from established and emerging countries in nine different countries. As the meeting was arranged in conjunction with the 2003 Rafto Award, the delegates to the Human Rights House Network meeting also took part in the annual Rafto seminar and the award ceremony.



Human Rights defenders brought to silence: Urgent need to support Belarusian civil society

Statement from the Meeting of the Human Rights House Network Bergen, Norway, October 31, 2003

We, delegates to the Human Rights House Network's annual meeting express our deep concern about the Belarusian authorities' campaign to destroy civil society in Belarus. The campaign appears to be a systematic attempt to silence human rights defenders and prevent the development of a pluralist democratic society.

On October 28th 2003, the Human Rights Center "Viasna", one of the few remaining human rights organisations in Belarus, was closed down by the Belarusian Supreme Court. The prominent human rights organisation was the last, so far, of eight such organisations to be closed during 2003. This year's Human Rights House Network meeting condemn the closure of the Human Rights Center "Viasna" as well as previous shut-downs of other organisations, including "Ratusha", "Civic Initiatives" and "Legal Assistance to the Population". Eleven other non-governmental organisations may also be closed in the near future.

The authorities' campaign has also been directed at the independent media. The major independent newspaper Belorusskaja Delovaja Gazeta as well as seven smaller newspapers have been suspended by the Ministry of Information for three months. Twenty newspapers have incurred penalties. These measures have already led to the closing of some of them.

In addition to such violations of the freedom of expression and association and the right to be a human rights defender, the right to education in the native language is also becoming increasingly restricted. In what seems like an attempt to control education, the authorities recently closed the Yakub Kolas National Humanitarian Lyceum, the only independent wholly Belarusian-language secondary school.

These events coincide with the build-up to the parliamentary elections scheduled for the autumn of 2004 and amount to an all-encompassing attack on Belarusian civil society. The participants of this year's Human Rights House Network's meeting wish to express their conviction that a vibrant civil society is mandatory for democracy to grow. Hence, we believe that Belarusian authorities must take action to reinstate safe working conditions for all organisations and individuals working for democracy and human rights. This opinion is shared

for instance by the OSCE Mission in Belarus which has recently urged Belarusian authorities to stop their attacks on NGOs and independent media.

The Human Rights House Network would like to draw attention to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 21 and 22, to which Belarus is a state party, expressing the freedom of association and assembly, and Article 19 in UNs Universal Declaration for Human Rights expressing the freedom of expression. These rights are also guaranteed by the Belarusian Constitution. We also refer to Article 1 of the United Nations' Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, stating that "everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels". The Human Rights House Network urges Belarusian authorities to bring its conduct in compliance with these commitments.

The delegates to the Human Rights House Network's meeting appeal to the authorities of all the countries we represent to increase their moral, political and financial support to civil society in Belarus. The meeting also calls upon these authorities to urge their Belarusian counterparts to cease the persecution of civil society and to observe internationally agreed human rights standards. This message can be conveyed through multilateral institutions, but support must also be channelled directly to non-governmental organisations working to promote democracy and human rights.

We, delegates to the Human Rights House Network's annual meeting, representing non-governmental human rights organisations in Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kenya, Norway, Poland, Russia, Turkey and Uganda, express our solidarity with human rights defenders in Belarus in their difficult struggle for the respect of democracy and international human rights.



Emerging Human Rights Houses

ZAGREB

The Human Rights House Foundation in Norway is cooperating with the following Croatian human rights organisations to establish a human rights house in Croatia:

- B.a.B.e (Be active, Be emancipated – Women's Human Rights Group)
- Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights
- Croatian Law Centre

In 2001, the three Croatian NGO's signed a letter of intent demonstrating their commitment to establishing a human rights house in Zagreb. They also want to include other NGO's in the Human Rights House.

The City of Zagreb has generously offered to provide a location to a symbolic rent. It has found a suitable location for a future human right house, and it is reasonable to believe that the practical and technical problems will be solved in the near future. But they need a breakthrough soon, as the forthcoming election will make it more complicated.

Donors from several countries have expressed an interest in supporting the establishment.

Human rights situation: The human right situation in Croatia may be regarded as neutral, neither very negative nor positive. The new government has not carried out any obstruction, but there is no proactive policy either. The policy may be seen as a result of international pressure, and not as a result of real will to improve the human right situation. But the president of Croatia has pursued a positive human right policy. An example of that is that he has apologized for the war crimes committed by Croatian military, and he is the first leader on the Balkan to openly admit atrocities committed from their side. This has been given positive response from the president of Serbia and

Montenegro, and may be regarded as the first step. The government has been more reluctant, and tend to be more populist.

Among the human rights concerns in Croatia are the return of refugees, war criminals and the Hague Tribunal, and reforms within the judiciary and the education system.

NAIROBI



*The Interim Board of the Human Rights House in Nairobi.
Photo: Maria Dahle.*

Seven Kenyan human rights organisations are working to establish a Human Rights House in Nairobi, in co-operation with the Human Rights House Foundation:

- Kenya Human Rights Commission
- Federation of Women Lawyers
- Center for Law and Research International
- Release Political Prisoners
- People Against Torture
- Coalition on Violence against Women
- Child Rights Advisory and Legal Center

The plan is to construct or refurbish a house of approximately 1500 square meters in central Nairobi, to provide offices for the participating organisations and facilities that can be used by other human rights groups and activists in Kenya.



Activities

Advocacy: The main activity cutting across all seven participating organisations is human rights advocacy around various aspects, among them women's human rights, child rights, prisoners rights and human rights in general. Some of the specific activities include lobbying for passage for certain Bills into Law and ensuring that issues of human rights are adequately taken care of during the discussion on the draft constitution.

Legal aid: Other activities are service provision for women, men and children who have faced abuse and need to access justice. Such abuses include domestic violence, violence by state actors, and child abuse.

Training and education: The members have also organized capacity building sessions for various groups including training for prison wardens, for law enforcement agents including Chiefs and the Police; health care providers etc - this is all in a bid to sensitize these groups and also enhance their capacity to respond adequately to human rights abuses.

Human Rights in Kenya

Making good their promises – education: Major changes are happening in Kenya; some of which are a fulfilment of the promises made on the campaign platform of the 2002 Presidential elections that led to a landslide victory for the opposition. One of the promises was that of free primary education for all. The provision of free primary education made the enrolment of children go up by a considerable margin; a bold and unprecedented move that saw support coming in from various funding partners since the cost implication was massive.

HIV and AIDS: The HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to claim the lives of Kenyans at the prime age – with more orphans and households headed by children. The national prevalence rate is 13.5%. There are 2.2 million infected people and AIDS orphans are estimated at 730,000.

Prisons: Conditions in prison remain harsh and torture and ill treatment remain widespread. Despite pledges by senior prison officials to make prisons more accessible, local and international organizations continued to be refused access to prisoners. The majority of deaths in custody are caused by infectious diseases resulting from severe overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, inadequate medical care and

shortage of food, clean water, clothing and blankets. The government has opened up the prison doors and allowed the public to get a glimpse of the prison condition with an aim of making a commitment to improve the living conditions of inmates. Several human rights organizations have already gained access to the prisons



The new regime in Kenya has decided to allow prison inspections, and also various services, to the prisoners. Here, on an 'Open Day' in the women's prison outside Nairobi, the prisoners receive both legal and medical advice.

Photo: Maria Dahle.

Capital punishment: While capital punishment is a highly emotive and polarizing issue in the West, in Kenya, it has seldom been the subject of public debate. The death penalty exists in Kenya's current legislative framework. Persons can be sentenced to death for the crimes of murder, robbery with violence, and treason. However, due to the paucity of police data, it is impossible to determine how many Kenyans have been sentenced to death, how many have been executed, and how many are currently on death row. Moreover, the data is not disaggregated for gender. A motion tabled in Parliament in 2002 seeking the repealing of the death penalty was defeated with a landslide majority.

Civil society and democratisation: Despite the challenges faced in upholding human rights in Kenya, there is now more space for civil society to engage government on human rights issues. This is an opportunity that they have taken to well and therefore there a number of organizations that work well with government in various aspects for the good of all Kenyans. It is hoped that the new Kenya National Human Rights Commission (which includes several members of the human rights network), which was gazetted mid this year, will ensure that the government sustains the promises it made on promotion of human rights in Kenya.



KAMPALA

HRH spent 2003 concluding the necessary investigations to decide that establishing a Human Rights House in Uganda is indeed a much needed and also viable prospect. Towards the end of the year, an Interim Board with representatives of some ten independent human rights organisations was founded in Kampala to work for this end, in close co-operation with the HRH Secretariat in Oslo.

A proposal for funding for further development of the project is currently pending with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Meanwhile, the IB and the Secretariat have continued to develop the Human Rights House project and also looked for ways to strengthen network and capacity building activities throughout East Africa, thus including human rights organisations in Tanzania, with whom HRH has also made contact.

Despite considerable improvements of the human rights situation under President Yoweri Museveni, Uganda must still be considered a young and vulnerable democracy, with severe constitutional shortcomings and gross human rights violations taking place every day. The war in the northern regions, and the rapidly escalating refugee and IDP crisis in the same area count for most of the country's human rights related problems, but there are numerous others as well, such as unequal access to justice, insufficient protection and various breaches of women's and children's rights, continuing use of violence by police and security forces, varying degrees of observation of labour rights and last, but not least numerous conflicts between traditional justice and constitutional law, resulting in yet more human rights abuses.

So far, the responses throughout the international community, including potential donor organisations, to establish a Ugandan Human Rights House have been very positive, indicating a clear understanding of the need for such an establishment and also a readiness to consider supporting the actual construction of the house, both morally and financially.

MINSK

In 2003, the Human Rights House Foundation in Oslo continued to work towards the establishment of a Human Rights House in Minsk, the Belarusian capital, with several human rights groups in Belarus:

- Belarusian Association of Journalists
- The Human Rights Center VIASNA
- Law initiative
- Belarusian PEN-Center
- Lev Sapega Foundation
- Supolnast Center
- The F.Skaryna Partnership for the Belarusian Language

Often referred to as "Europe's last dictatorship", Belarus continues to face grave human rights violations. Human rights activists work under very difficult conditions. If registration is accepted, the establishment of a Human Rights House would be a way to meet some of their challenges. The HRH in Oslo also supports joint projects between the organisations, on human rights education and free legal aid.

Massive closings of NGOs and newspapers: The year 2003 may be called the year of massive closings of different NGOs including the human rights centers: Regional resource centers "Ratusha" (Grodno) and "Civil Initiatives" (Gomel); "Varuta" resource center (Baranovichy); Republican organization "Youth's Christian and Social Union"; right defending organization "Legal Aid to Population"; non-governmental organization "Contour" (Vitebsk); "Kasiopeya" Foundation, "Women's Response" non-governmental organization, Trade Union of Air Traffic Controllers, Brothers Luckevich's Foundation. "Vesna" right-defending center is brought in the court and will likely be banned the 21th of October.

Belorusskaja Delovaja Gazeta as well as 7 smaller independent newspapers in Minsk and the regions were suspended by the Ministry of Information for 3 months on politically motivated reasons which caused the closing of some of them and substantial decline in periodicity of publication of others. Dozens of NGOs and 20 newspapers have been incurred penalties by the justice bodies (under far-fetched pretexts). Some of them remain on the verge of liquidation.

The office of IREX Foundation was also closed.



BAKU

In July 2003 HRH made a first visit to the Azerbaijani capital Baku to meet human rights organisations and introduce the idea of a Human Rights House. HRH considered the timing to be good. The next Presidential elections were scheduled for October 15, and an expectation for a new era under a new, democratically elected president had started to grow as the incumbent president, Heydar Aliyev was stepping down because of bad health. If such elections should be carried out in accordance with international standards for democratic elections, it would be the first ever in Azerbaijan.

The next visit of HRH was in October, when a representative of our organisation formed part of the International Election Observation Mission (IOM) under OSCE/ODIHR. In addition, new meetings were held with central human rights organisations. According to the IOM, the Azerbaijan Presidential elections turned out to be a missed opportunity to establish democracy in the country. The son of Heydar Aliyev – Ilham Aliyev - was elected, allegedly by

more than 70 per cent of the votes. On October 16th, as people gathered on Freedom Square, they were met with heavy-handed police and security forces, leaving at least one demonstrator dead. Several hundred were detained. Among the arrested were a newspaper editor-in-chief, an imam and opposition leaders of several parties who were brought to the detention centre of the organized crime unit that later became notorious for its use of torture.

HRH activities: In October, HRH issued a letter to the President-elect Ilham Aliyev, expressing deep concern over the large number of arrests and demanding fair trials or immediate release. HRH continued to work to spread information about the situation in the Norwegian press, and planned a seminar in Oslo with the purpose of highlighting the situation to a wider audience.

The seminar was conducted 12 December with support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Freedom of Expression Foundation. The seminar was titled “The situation of Human Rights in Azerbaijan is worsening,



Police brutality at demonstration during the 2003 presidential elections in Azerbaijan.

Photo: Erazm Ciolek, www.democraticazerbaijan.org



- what is the position of the International Community?" Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Kim Traavik opened the seminar, and HRH had also invited Director Leyla Yunus of Institute of Peace and Democracy as well as Mehman Aliyev, Editor-in-chief of the news agency "TURAN", both Baku. The situation was well documented by the contributors, and the participants, scientists, government officials of different institutions, NGO representatives and press also had the opportunity to watch the events of October 15 and 16 documented on freshly released video footage.

In December HRH awarded Steinar Gil, the Norwegian Ambassador to Azerbaijan and Georgia, the prize "Human Rights Ambassador of the Year". In her award speech, Project Manager Berit Lindeman drew attention to the

fact that Gil's work as a diplomat has been guided by the highest human rights standards ever since the eighties, when he worked at the Norwegian Embassy in Warsaw. Now, as Norway's Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Gil has taken the lead among the Corps Diplomatique in distancing himself with absolute clarity from the regime's violations of human rights. Following the post-election demonstrations, two key oppositionals, the Imam of the Mosque in Old Baku Ilgar Ibrahimoglu and the editor of the newspaper Musavat Rauf Arifoglu, even sought refuge in the Ambassador's residence, fearing that unless they sought such protection, they might be arrested.



One person was killed and several wounded, some seriously, during the very rough handling of the demonstrations following the seriously rigged presidential elections in October 2003.

*Photo: Erazm Ciolek,
www.democraticazerbaijan.org*



ISTANBUL

The Human Rights House Foundation (HRH) has an ongoing dialogue with Turkish human rights organisations on the possible establishment of a Human Rights House in Istanbul. These include:

- Amnesty International Turkey
- Human Rights Association
- Helsinki Citizens' Assembly
- Mazlum der
- IPS Communication Foundation

In 2003, HRH in Oslo supported a joint project between several organisations on human rights education, led by History Foundation. Funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkish primary school books were revised and teachers were trained in human rights.

LONDON

Inspired by the Human Rights House model, three organisations are cooperating to establish a Centre for International Free Expression in London:

- Article 19
- Index on Censorship
- English PEN

The Human Rights House Foundation had meetings with its representatives in 2003. Plans are that the Centre will become a physical reality in late 2004. The Centre will monitor, record and oppose censorship, promote freedom of expression, openness, democracy, and the right of access to information, and will be in the vanguard of action to enshrine freedom of expression as a globally protected legal standard.





A Human Rights House is a working community where human rights organisations share office facilities, co-operate and provide joint services for their clients. Normally, a Human Rights House also include seminar rooms and other technical facilities. The main advantages of a Human Rights House are:

- More co-operation at all levels, also throughout the international network of Human Rights Houses
- Clearer division of labour between the member organisations
- Added weight to authority approaches
- Higher profile, enhanced visibility in the public debate and human rights discourse
- Mutual protection and improved security, both nationally and internationally
- Better access, better services to more clients, users and other visitors
- Increased cost-efficiency, higher value for money for donors.
- Improved outreach at all levels, locally, nationally and internationally

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