



# JOIN THE NETWORK PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK



## Observe

Civil Rights Defenders equips some of the most threatened human rights defenders with an alarm they carry around their wrist. In the case of an attack, the alarm gets activated and a distress signal is sent out.



## React

When we know that a human rights defender has been attacked, all supporters of Natalia Project are notified through social media and can start raising awareness. When someone is in danger, he or she needs the world's attention as quickly as possible.



## Engage

Natalia Project is built on support from people all around the world. When you help us spread information about Natalia Project, you create awareness that saves lives.

# SUPPORT THE LIFE LINE FOR THOSE AT RISK

On the front line defending human rights, stand some of the bravest people in the world. These are people who often risk their lives to ensure human rights are respected. They operate in some of the most repressive societies in the world. These Human Rights Defenders are in dire need of international support – From Us and From You.

**NATALIA PROJECT** is the world's first assault alarm system for Human Rights Defenders at Risk. Today, with the use of GSM and GPS technology in combination with social media, this innovative assault

alarm system contributes to increased security on three continents. The project is named in honour of Natalia Estemirova, a brave Human Rights Defender and our partner, who was brutally murdered in the North Caucasus in 2009.

With your support we can expand programmes such as Natalia Project, find new innovative solutions to the challenges facing Human Rights Defenders worldwide and create sustainable change in the name of human rights.

## HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT OUR WORK

### SWEDISH SUPPORTERS

- Swish a donation to **123 900 12 98**
- Text **FÖRSVARA** to **72980** in order to donate 100 SEK
- Donate by credit card by visiting **www.crd.org** and click on Support Us
- Make a bank transfer to our 90-account, **BG 90 01 29 -8**

### USA SUPPORTERS

Make a tax-deductible donation by going to **www.crd.org**  
Click on Support Us and then U.S. Donors

### INTERNATIONAL SUPPORTERS

Please visit us at **www.crd.org** and click on Support Us to donate by credit card.



WE EMPOWER PEOPLE



CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS IS AN INDEPENDENT EXPERT ORGANISATION THAT DEFENDS PEOPLE'S CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS AND EMPOWERS HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK. WE HAVE SWEDISH 90-ACCOUNTS AND ARE A MEMBER OF THE SWEDISH FUNDRAISING COUNCIL (FRF). OUR ACCOUNTING IS SUPERVISED BY SVENSK INSAMLINGSKONTROLL (THE SWEDISH FOUNDATION FOR FUNDRAISING CONTROL). THESE MEASURES GUARANTEE THAT YOUR DONATION IS HANDLED CORRECTLY, AND USED FOR ITS INTENDED PURPOSE. **THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT! YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

# Time to Act

2016 *Civil Rights Defenders (CRD) is an independent expert organisation founded in 1982 in Sweden, with the mission to defend people's civil and political rights and empower human rights defenders at risk worldwide. CRD has a presence on four continents and is active in some of the world's most repressive regions. By working in collaboration with 200 local partners and focusing on innovation, the goal is to achieve long-term sustainable change.*



Between 28–30 June 2015, various sectors of Cambodian civil society conducted a spirited three-day campaign to protest against two repressive draft laws. On the third day, authorities used force to prevent hundreds of members of civil society from peacefully marching toward the National Assembly. Civil Rights Defenders works with civil society organisations and human rights defenders on four continents to empower, advocate for and support civil society in their fight for basic freedoms that are often taken for granted. *Photo: LICADHO*

*We Fight Together / The Roots Of A Movement / Tackling Hate Speech And Discrimination / Detained, But Not Without Rights / Criminalised By Oppressive Legislation / Freedoms Under Attack / Snapshots Of Our Work 2015 / Defenders' Days / Civil Rights Defender Of The Year Award / Innovating Through Technology And Education / Tools Of Oppression / Empowering Human Rights Defenders At Risk In A Proactive Way / Seismic Change Through The Ballot Box / Corporate Social Responsibility - What Does It Take? / Human Rights Trade Off In Cuba*





**Robert Hårdh** IS A SWEDISH HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER and Executive Director of Civil Rights Defenders. He received a Master of Laws degree from Uppsala University in 1997. Robert was an active member in the Amnesty International lawyers' group in Sweden, and was a Board Member of Amnesty International Sweden from 1998–2000. In 1999, he began working at Civil Rights Defenders and was appointed Executive Director in 2000.

He has also been a Board member of Stiftelsen Expo since 2006, is a member of the Advisory Council to the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea and is a Steering Committee Member of the World Movement for Democracy.

# Robert Hårdh

## Executive Director

### Civil Rights Defenders

Stockholm, April 2016

**We live in** a time where globalisation has made the world a smaller place, but at the same time it feels like we have never lived so far apart from each other than we do now. Walls, visible as well as invisible, are being constructed all over the world. Nationalism has increased and thrives in an atmosphere of fear; fear of what is foreign, the unfamiliar, the fellow human being who does not match our own reflection.

**We live in** precarious times where peoples' human rights and freedoms are consistently violated, challenged and questioned. Our rights have become obscure. They are often ascribed regional characteristics and viewed through a kaleidoscope. In other words a malignant viewpoint has developed; that people in specific parts of the world do not have the same needs or demands as in other parts of the world. Simply put they have not earned their rights in this new skewed world view.

**Issues of solidarity** and humanity form the questions of the day as people flee for their lives, away from religious fundamentalists and autocratic dictators, which propagates confusion and misinformation in the so called "protected part of the world" – How are we supposed to accept but most of all afford these refugees? When the real question we should be asking ourselves is how we can afford not to receive them?

**Extremist forces** are bolstering each other and are hijacking a substantial part of the world's agenda while democratically elected leaders are forced to adjust their worldviews or just turn the other cheek to the reality of the situation.

#### Our time is now.

**2016 marks fifty** years since the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was adopted by the UN General Assembly. The Covenant recognises the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all people. It is together with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that was adopted the same year, a central, legally binding convention that is considered customary law.

**The movement of** human rights defenders that essentially emerged as a result of the international and regional treaties signed by the world's leaders are the guiding tools that the world needs the most. A solid bedrock, especially in times such as this. It is us who must ensure that the talk of human rights as values, similar to dishes on a the quintessential Swedish smörgåsbord that can be picked and randomly chosen from, are instead binding, legal commitments that apply to everyone, everywhere.

**This is precisely** what Civil Rights Defenders work is about. When the State violates national or international laws on human rights, we fight for those whose rights have been violated. We ensure that local human rights defenders are given the tools so they can continue their struggle in the fight for basic human rights freedoms and we stand with them, side by side. Our goal is to become more influential and smarter, acting as a role model to our partner organisations so that they can follow a similar path. Through our on-going assistance, together we can ensure more people are empowered to carry out their vital work.

**Together we have** the power to not only make changes but to influence our environment. But we have to renew our commitments and be innovative in order to succeed. Civil Rights Defenders is therefore launching the Human Rights Innovation Initiative bringing together experts from universities, corporations and organisations from all over the world to find tomorrow's solutions on contemporary issues, and to provide improved protection for human rights defenders so that they can continue their important work.

**Through Natalia Project,** Civil Rights Defenders have already demonstrated that we can make life more secure both in a physical and psychological sense for those human rights defenders who are most at risk. Further challenges remain but we are ready to innovate through research and development and turn this into additional solutions.

**In times like** these it is easy to feel hopelessness and a sense of inadequacy. But the international laws of protection for human rights emerged from difficult situations to serve as a solution to on-going and future conflicts and challenges. That is a strength we need to use, together.

#### OUR BOARD

**Benedicte Berner**, Chair of the Board, Media Analyst  
**Anna Jonsson Cornell**, Associate Professor  
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**Nicklas Storåkers**, Investor  
**Christoffer Lindblad**, Country Manager at Alumni  
**Gerald Nagler**, Honorary Chair of the Board, one of the founders of the Swedish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights

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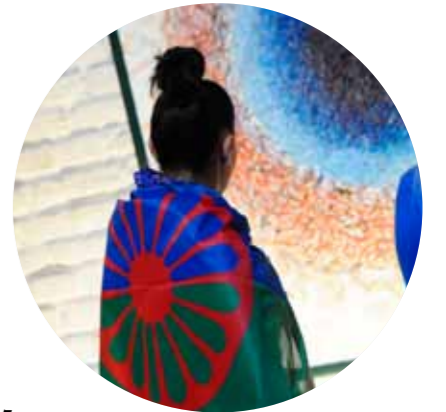
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*We would like to express our gratitude to all of you who made Defenders' Days, and this publication, Time to Act, possible. We would not have been able to make these projects succeed without your help.*

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*We defend people's civil and political rights and empower human rights defenders worldwide.*

# WE FIGHT TOGETHER

With a presence on four continents, we work in some of the world's most repressive regions. By collaborating with local partners and focusing on innovation, our goal is to achieve long-term sustainable change in the name of human rights.

*"We are reminded daily that human rights are not a foregone conclusion, even in democracies. What distinguishes us from many others is that, as an independent human rights organisation, we use innovation to empower individuals at risk, monitor policymakers and demand justice when human rights are violated, and strengthen our partners by establishing long-term collaboration. We fight together."*  
 — Robert Hårdb, Executive Director

## FAST FACTS

For more than 30 years, Civil Rights Defenders has defended people's civil and political rights in Sweden and around the world. In addition to serving as a watchdog, we empower human rights defenders at risk in countries where respect for human rights is scarce.

- **Founded:** 1982. Previously named the Swedish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights.
- **Our vision:** We believe that a world in which human rights are respected is also a safer and more peaceful world for us all. This is the basis of our vision that we strive to achieve through our work.
- **Staff:** 50
- **Operating Income (2014):** 7.7 million EUR (72 million SEK).
- **Where We Work:** In recent years, we have expanded our operations to include regions where the human rights situation is most difficult. Presently, our core focus areas are Central Asia, East Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America, Southeast Asia and the Western Balkans.
- **Shining the Spotlight in Our Own Backyard:** We work for human rights in our own country too, and are unique in this regard. We believe that Sweden, like other countries, needs a strong civil society that scrutinises the authorities in order to continue to develop in a positive direction.

## WE CREATE CHANGE

- **Investigation and accountability mechanisms:** We investigate and hold the state authority accountable when legislation or its application violates people's rights. This is achieved by scrutinising laws, drafting legislation and regulatory activities as well as by bringing lawsuits against states and those in power.
- **Public opinion and advocacy:** Civil Rights Defenders engages in opinion forming and advocacy work, both independently and with partners. We organise campaigns and provide information through seminars, reports, printed and electronic messages. In totalitarian and oppressive states, we spread independent information to people through alternative media and other discussion forums.
- **Support and education:** We provide expertise, training and support to human rights defenders at risk.



One of the many panel discussions we hold on a regular basis to highlight human rights issues.



Raymonda Sylbije from Kosovo part of Natalia Project.



A rally in Cambodia on International Human Rights Day 2015.

Photo: LICADHO



Stockholm Pride Parade 2015.

Photo: Frida Nilson



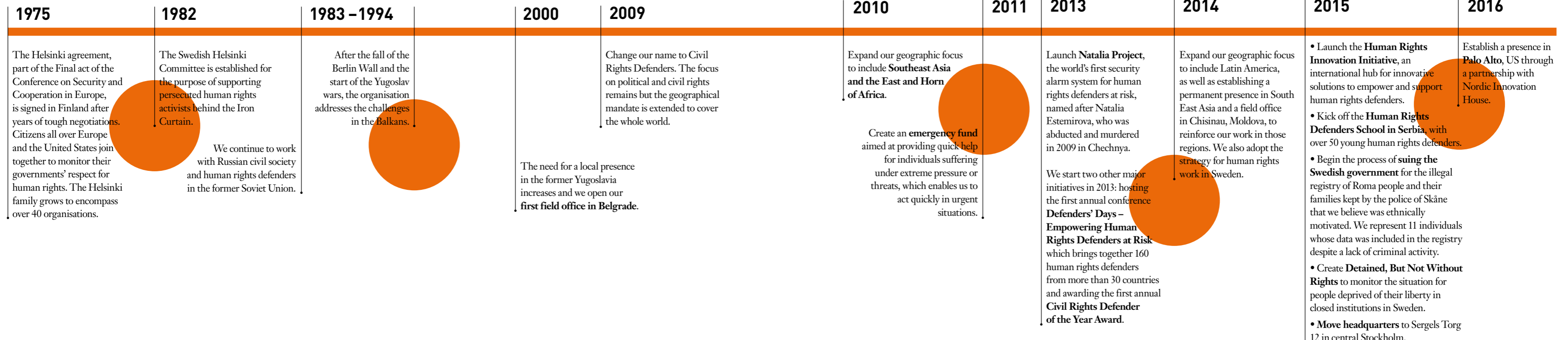
CHAT WITH BENEDICTE BERNER, CHAIR OF THE BOARD

*How do you see Civil Rights Defenders work as critical to the global human rights movement?*

At a time when democracy is under attack globally, Civil Rights Defenders is working on all fronts for people's rights to freedom and justice and for the respect of their civil and political rights. Not only do we monitor state authorities and other actors, and lobby those in power demanding accountability, justice and reparations whenever violations take place, but we are also a field organisation with offices all around the world, making every effort to protect human rights defenders in countries where they face severe persecutions.

*Why is it important to support human rights defenders at risk and how does Civil Rights Defenders empower them?*

Our task is to strengthen human rights defenders in their work by providing expertise, training and support and also to increase their physical security with projects such as Natalia Project. For that purpose, Civil Rights Defenders is currently developing the Human Rights Innovation Initiative, an international hub and catalyst for innovative solutions to the challenges facing human rights defenders. We gather tech experts, academics, business leaders and entrepreneurs into the process of finding world class solutions. Our presence in Silicon Valley is key given the idea that technological progress and the digital revolution will make it increasingly harder for repressive forces to conceal human rights abuses as we are able to provide improved protection of human rights defenders.





# THE ROOTS OF A MOVEMENT

## LOOKING BACK ON 34 YEARS OF CHAMPIONING HUMAN RIGHTS

Civil Rights Defenders, originally the Swedish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, was part of the Helsinki Movement. During the Cold War, an agreement was signed in 1975 by the Eastern and Western Bloc countries in the Finnish capital which inspired citizens in the Soviet Union, Europe and the United States to form non-governmental organisations to monitor their governments with respect to human rights. We spoke with Gerald Nagler, Honorary Chair of the Board and the founder of the Swedish Helsinki Committee, about our organisation's roots, the political environment at the time and the challenges they faced.

### Can you talk about the beginning of the movement which brought about Civil Rights Defenders?

When the Helsinki Final Act was signed in 1975, the human rights situation was very bad. Andrei Sakharov received the Nobel Peace Prize the same year. He could not accept his prize because he was not allowed to leave the Soviet Union. His wife Jelena Bonner presented his speech during which Sakharov called for individuals and groups to organise themselves, according to the Helsinki Final Act, and report on human rights violations.

### So that really ignited the movement.

Yes, that was the starting point. The first Helsinki group was initiated in Moscow by 12 very brave men and women.

### You were invited to go to the Soviet Union?

Before getting seriously involved, I went to Moscow in 1982 to meet Sakharov and his circle of dissidents as well as some of the leading Jewish intellectuals who were in a really serious situation because of violent anti-Semitism and who were refused to leave the country. I was deeply impressed by what they did and by their courage.

### How did you begin to build a network in Sweden to raise awareness about human rights?

The organisation started around my kitchen table. I put together 100 prominent Swedish people with an interest in human rights, including members of the Parliament, the Swedish academy, bar association and independent intellectuals. Our mission was to bring information about human rights violations to the public in the West, to our own government and to international organisations.

### What did you do when you were on the ground?

Our job was to get information and to support the other Helsinki groups. It worked very well, but sometimes there were problems. I was arrested in Prague – there must have been about 20 policemen. I was trying to argue, saying that we have done nothing illegal. But they did not agree, and I could not get ahold of the Swedish ambassador. But I got ahold of the American ambassador, and he told me to obey. They can easily put narcotics in your luggage he said, and nobody can prove the opposite. So sometimes it was tough.

### So what happened?

We had to leave in a grand style, with two police cars escorting us to the Austrian border ...



From left to right, Gerald Nagler and Robert Hårdh.

*“During one of my first meetings with Václav Havel, I said ‘What can we do to help?’ And so he, in a very modest way, said that this has nothing to do with who is helping whom. He said that we are all fighting for the same human rights. Human rights violations are universal, they are global. We are sitting in the same boat.”*

– Gerald Nagler

*You met with Václav Havel during his free periods from prison. What struck you about him and leaders in the countries you visited, people like Andrei Sakharov, Jelena Bonner, Adam Michnik, Yuri Orlov. What inspired you?*

They were impressive, courageous people! I just admired them. At one of the meetings we were supposed to meet Havel at a café. I got suspicious because there were too many men in leather jackets around. Sure enough, when Havel arrived he was immediately arrested. So we protested, but they broke our cameras, and we were not allowed to follow Havel to the police station.

*How did this work contribute to the process that brought down the Iron Curtain?*

In the late 1980s we saw a light at the end of the tunnel. We tried to work openly, organising meetings with our Helsinki groups in different countries. We organised a meeting in Belgrade, and we knew that the government had been informed. The Yugoslav ambassador to Vienna called me and asked me to stop the meeting. I told him that our meeting was legal, and that it would be very bad

publicity if they stopped us. So we compromised. I gave the Yugoslav Foreign Office an opportunity to talk at our meeting, presenting their view. No arrests were made. It was a very important breakthrough. In December 1989, I phoned my friend Rita Klimova in Prague, who had helped me generously all those years to arrange meetings, to congratulate her on what had happened in her country. She said “I am so happy that you called today, because I got my first job. For twenty years I have had no job, I had to do translations in somebody else's name”. So I said that it was great and asked what her first job was. She said “I was appointed Ambassador to the US”. It is a really good story, because this woman had been so discriminated against all these years, and then she was a great ambassador and Washington loved her.

*It also shows how people's everyday lives were affected. Not only violations to their political and civil rights, but also how their economic situation and their livelihoods suffered.*

They could not work. Also, their children's school and university studies were in danger, and sometimes stopped. On the many trips to places like Prague, when the people I wanted to meet with were in prison, I made a point of seeing their wives, because they were really the ones who suffered. Because the men, they were heroes, well-known internationally. But Olga (Havel's wife) was the one who was suffering, and nobody cared about her. Sometimes they were not really interested (in the struggle), they just had to see to it that there was food for the children. The children also had a tough time because at school they were teased because their fathers were in prison. So it was very important to support these women and their families, who were often not activists themselves.

*How are human rights a universal struggle that affects us all?*

During one of my first meetings with Václav Havel, I said “What can we do to help?” And so he, in a very modest way, said that this has nothing to do with who is helping whom. He said that we are all fighting for the same human rights. Human rights violations are universal, they are global. We are sitting in the same boat. And I can say that I have learned more about human rights from these people than I ever learned in Sweden. ♣



On 25 September 2015 Civil Rights Defenders, together with our partners from the Roma Cultural Centre and the Know-How Centre, organised the first Festival of Roma Culture and Activism (FRKA) in the Serbian capital Belgrade.

Photo: Vesna Lalic

# TACKLING HATE SPEECH AND DISCRIMINATION

Civil Rights Defenders is an important catalyst for change when it comes to addressing minority rights, discrimination and hate speech. In the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe, minority groups such as the Roma and the LGBT communities face ongoing discrimination, hate speech and marginalisation. On 5 March 2015 Civil Rights Defenders filed a lawsuit against the Swedish state for violations of human rights, representing Roma and their family members who were part of the illegal registry of 4,700 people kept by the police of Skåne. The Muslim Rohingya minority in Myanmar have been brutalised and forced from their homes as a result of ethnic violence and also excluded from voting in the landmark elections that were held in November 2015. Here we take you on a tour of some of the regions in which we work where these issues are at the forefront of society and what we as an organisation are doing to influence and challenge perceptions. >>





Civil Rights Defenders has been supporting and empowering the LGBT community in Russia for many years. We have supported Queerfest St. Petersburg since its very beginning back in 2009.

Photo: Svetlana Kolosova

## IMPACT OF CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS THE WESTERN BALKANS

Hate speech, discrimination and intolerance have pervaded all aspects of society in the Western Balkans: the media has often been used as a tool to spread fear, hate speech has marginalised communities and discrimination has fuelled violence against the LGBT and Roma communities. Civil Rights Defenders is at the forefront when it comes to new and innovative ways to address issues of discrimination head on and highlight minority rights.

During a very successful Pride Week in Belgrade in September 2015, Civil Rights Defenders held two ground breaking exhibitions to focus the spotlight on the effects of hate speech on marginalised communities. Online hate speech, especially against the LGBT community, has become commonplace across the Western Balkans. In an interactive exhibition entitled *From Hate Speech to Acceptance*, Civil Rights Defenders made online materials written on Facebook a physical entity by placing them on large posters so visitors to the exhibition had an opportunity to reply to the author of a particular hate comment and visualise these posts on large boards. The exhibition fuelled debate and conversation and gave not only the people affected by hate speech the chance to respond but also an opportunity for the general public to see how real the threats are for marginalised communities and to respond accordingly.

In a subsequent photo exhibition by renowned Serbian artist Sever Zolac and supported by Civil Rights Defenders, *We Exist* showed a series of powerful photos which focused on de-legitimising stereotypes and prejudices based on sexuality, gender, gender identity and assumptions.

*“The Festival is our way of putting Roma people, their needs and human rights in the spotlight. By organising the march, we want to send a clear message that Roma people are equal citizens of Serbia and the Western Balkans and must be protected from any kind of discrimination, which is not the case at this moment.”*

– Adi Sinani, Programme Officer for Roma Rights at Civil Rights Defenders

Civil Rights Defenders, together with our partners from the Roma Cultural Centre and the Know-How Centre, organised the first Festival of Roma Culture and Activism (FRKA) in the Serbian capital Belgrade on 25 September 2015. The main objective of the Festival of Roma Culture and Activism was to challenge discrimination, stereotypes and prejudices and to promote an awareness of Roma culture to the general population.

## OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

**Kosovo:** *The Kosovo Memory Book* is a one-of-a-kind testimony arising out of a need to document all victims of the 1998–2000 Kosovo War. Created by our partner the Humanitarian Law Centre Kosovo with support from Civil Rights Defenders, the book gives an in-depth account of all the casualties – the murdered, disappeared and those that are missing – as well as the crimes committed against them. The book documents 13,517 people.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Monitoring judicial processes regarding hate crimes against the Roma community and returnees from the war through our partner The Association of Democratic Initiatives.

**Albania:** Campaigning for the right to housing for the Roma community with our partners Roma Partners YREM and Ushten.

**Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia:** Including activists in Natalia Project, the world’s first security alarm system for human rights defenders at risk.

## PERSECUTION OF THE ROHINGYA: FOCUS ON MYANMAR

The Rohingya have been repeatedly subjected to a systemic, state-sponsored campaign of violence, abuse and discrimination. The government denies the Rohingya equal access to citizenship. Instead authorities insist on referring to the Rohingya as “Bengalis,” a term that implies their migration from Bangladesh, even though they have lived in Myanmar for generations.

The situation for the Rohingya has been steadily worsening since the outbreak of violence in 2012 when the rape and killing of an Arakanese woman by allegedly three Muslim men triggered a deluge of violence between the two groups. In the past three years, more than 100,000 Rohingya have fled anti-Muslim violence in Rakhine State. Approximately 140,000 remain in internal displacement camps in Myanmar.

The ultra-nationalist Buddhist movement has been actively inciting hatred and violence against the Rohingya and Muslim population, escalating tensions.

This movement is increasingly politically influential, leading to authorities passing the controversial package of “protection of race and religion” bills, ostensibly aimed at further marginalising the Muslim minority.



## MEET WAI WAI NU

Wai Wai Nu is a former political prisoner and a Rohingya activist. Since her release from prison, she has dedicated herself to actively fighting for peace and non-discrimination in Myanmar. The Women’s Peace Network Arakan, headed by Wai Wai Nu, acts as a platform to build peace and understanding between communities in Myanmar, with an emphasis on fighting for the rights of Rohingya women. They actively campaign to end the persecution of the Rohingya.

In July, Wai Wai Nu helped launch a new social media campaign, “My Friend”, to promote tolerance and counter hate speech against the Muslim minority in Myanmar. “My Friend” encourages people from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds to use social media, including Facebook and Twitter, to take selfies together. These selfies are symbols of solidarity in a nation marred by communal violence and anti-Muslim propaganda.

Wai Wai Nu spoke of a deliberate state-sponsored campaign to spread hate propaganda that began in the early 1990s and intensified from 2012 onwards. “Since 2012 particularly, there has been a growth of hate speech including the words of ‘illegal Bengali kalar,’ ‘rapists,’ ‘terrorists,’ ‘invaders,’ and others [to refer to Muslims],” she said. “This hate speech and propaganda is spread by politicians and monks.”

Wai Wai Nu has been personally targeted by hate speech and abuse. At times, it is instigated by extremists who target her on social media. “I frequently receive harassment and abuse on Facebook with many dirty words”, she said.

Bias and discrimination against the Rohingya and Muslim minority is prevalent among civil society members as well. She narrated her experience with a former colleague and democracy activist who publicly told her “We only accept 135 ethnic groups, we will never accept more than that. We will protect our country from invaders.” “It made me really heartbroken,” Wai Wai said, “he was pointing his finger to me and aggressively saying this in front of many other Burmese activists.”

## CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS’ WORK ON BEHALF OF THE ROHINGYA

Civil Rights Defenders supports the defenders who fight on behalf of the Rohingya and against discrimination. We provide capacity-building support, including trainings with a specific emphasis on physical and digital security. We help defenders create a working security network to respond immediately and effectively to emergency situations. We lobby foreign governments to push local authorities to honor their human rights obligations under international law, stop the systemic discrimination against the Rohingya, and make tangible and institutional changes to improve their lives. We speak out on behalf of our partners, including through issuing regular publications to mobilise international support on behalf of the Rohingya.

## TACKLING HATE SPEECH, DISCRIMINATION AND MINORITY RIGHTS HEAD ON IN RUSSIA

Accurate statistics are impossible to compile when it comes to the number of hate attacks perpetrated against the LGBT community in Russia. Beatings, insults, illegal detention, harassment and on occasion murder are just some of the serious issues facing LGBT people in Russia today. Often victims do not come forward to report cases for fear of reprisals, facing more discrimination or losing their jobs as happened to a University Professor in the North of Russia merely for being a member of an LGBT organisation. Civil Rights Defenders has worked for many years in Russia, together with LGBT organisations, to empower and support human rights defenders who work within a Russian legal framework intent on further marginalising them from society and the outside world.

*“At the moment we have 39 documented cases of hate crimes in our database for 2015. All are not from St. Petersburg. No doubt the number is higher than 39 at this point in time, because I have not received new cases*

*from our monitoring teams throughout the country for the end of 2015. Included in our cases are three from Moscow with others coming from the regions of Omsk, Tomsk, Krasnodar, Samara, Astraban, Perm and Tyumen and these are the cities where we have monitors.”*

– Maria Kozlovskaia, Russian LGBT Network

**Tatiana Vinnichenko, Chair of the Russian LGBT Network and Former Director of Rakurs, both long-term partners of Civil Rights Defenders recounts her experience of discrimination and hate speech.**

“One day I had a meeting with the Vice-Rector for Security at the Northern Arctic Federal University and Director of the Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communications, my immediate superior.”

“Over a conversation lasting approximately 40 minutes, I realised that I was being forced to leave due to the fact that I am the Chairwoman of an LGBT organisation. He advised that as a university professor, I cannot be part of a public organisation and therefore must choose whether I want to work as a university professor or an LGBT organisation.”

“I was compared to a religious sect, my work was blamed for promoting homosexuality and my superior referred to the fact that ‘some’ Moscow officials had accused the University of the promotion of homosexuality by reason that I work there.”

**It got worse for Tatiana Vinnichenko.** Shortly after that event, the head of the department of her faculty, where at least two staff members are lesbian, gathered all the lecturers and said “In my department no lesbian can ever become an Associate Professor.” “This was direct hate speech against me – me as a lesbian teacher can never move up the ladder!”, Tatiana recalls.

*“I believe it is so important to educate people against hate speech and to identify cases because the perpetrator of hate speech is really committing a crime by broadcasting it. Hate speech is like the circles forming in the water after a stone is thrown – a stone is not thrown in a literal sense, but the waves can spread out and lead to many people being hurt.”*

– Tatiana Vinnichenko

It is in such a difficult environment that Civil Rights Defenders impact is most felt. We support our partners in every way possible through:

- Trainings and professional consultations such as burnout prevention and strategic litigation.
- Increasing networks and capacity building trainings through participation at Defenders’ Days; the international Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association - ILGA Europe Conference and Stockholm Pride festival where they also benefit from tailor made training. Defenders’ Days conference organised by Civil Rights Defenders is a crucial forum for elevating the major issues faced by LGBT groups in Russia and matching those who can readily provide expertise and training.
- Providing moral support and expertise while also advocating against oppressive laws which are strangling LGBT civil society and NGOs in Russia.
- Facilitating meetings and panel discussions between our partners and those in the international community who can make a difference such as Maina Kiai, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association. 📌







# DETAINED, BUT NOT WITHOUT RIGHTS

*“We hope the impact of our work will be that the human rights of all persons who are detained or at risk of being detained will be better and in accordance with human rights standards, that the risk of arbitrary detention will decrease and that the legal security of those at risk will be increased.”*

– Annika Jyrwall Åkerberg, Legal Adviser at Civil Rights Defenders

In 2015, Civil Rights Defenders launched a new programme focused on monitoring the situation for people deprived of their liberty in closed institutions in Sweden. The goal of this new programme *Detained, But Not Without Rights* is to develop long-term monitoring from a human rights perspective. Based on a broad analysis, and including interviews with persons in closed institutions and visits to institutions, we will advocate for necessary changes to ensure that Sweden fulfils its international obligations and that people in closed institutions are guaranteed their human rights.

Legal Adviser Annika Jyrwall Åkerberg is currently developing the methodology for how the information will be gathered and analysed, as well as engaging in various lobbying activities. We spoke with Annika about this exciting new initiative:

*Please tell us about the work that you are doing at Civil Rights Defenders.*

Our task is to monitor the situation in closed institutions in Sweden. We will analyse existing reports, statistics and other sources but also visit institutions as well as conducting focus groups and interviews in our work to investigate. We will also cooperate with organisations representing persons who have been or are at risk of being detained. Based on the information we receive, Civil Rights Defenders will analyse the situation, highlight problems and draw attention to violations of individuals’ human rights before, during and after their detention.

We will also make an analysis of whether the Swedish legislation that concerns persons who have been deprived their freedom of liberty is fully consistent with Sweden’s international agreements. In areas where we notice Sweden does not fulfil their obligation under international law, or the law is unclear, Civil Rights Defenders will draw attention to shortcomings by making public statements, writing articles to media or pursuing cases in the courts.

We will follow and influence the legal developments both in Sweden and in Europe, and hope our work will have an impact on European laws.

*Can you elaborate about the people on whose behalf you are or will be working?*

It can be everyone! Every one of us, who happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time is at risk of being caught by police; all children are at risk that their parent will be a drug abuser, or at risk of being hit or abused; everyone is at risk of having psychiatric problems, etc. Another target group is persons who have committed crimes. Even if they are locked up, they have rights, the same thing for migrants.

*What is an example of a case you are working on?*

One example is the case involving the death of a young man in connection with a police intervention at a hospital in Västerås. Civil Rights Defenders will represent the family. Ultimately, it could entail us representing the family in court, involving breaches of the right to life,

the right to protection against torture and the right to a fair trial.

*What types of institutions are you monitoring and how will you monitor them?*

We will monitor the situation in police custodies, pre-trial detentions, prisons, immigration detention centres, places for compulsory care such as psychiatric care detention centres, youth care detention centres, compulsory treatment for drug abuse, but also other places of risk. For instance, group-living for elderly persons or persons with serious intellectual disabilities, where we notice the residents in group-living are at risk.

*How do you collaborate with other organisations?*

Civil Rights Defenders has initiated a partnership with the Swedish National Council for Social and Mental Health (RSMH), which aims to monitor the situation in closed institutions, highlight problems and draw attention to violations of individuals’ human rights before, during and after their detention. Within this cooperation, Civil Rights Defenders and RSMH will develop methods to investigate the situation in closed institutions and measure developments and identify where such information is lacking. We are also regularly cooperating with other organisations that represent persons who have been at risk of being detained. ▽

# HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS CRIMINALISED BY OPPRESSIVE LEGISLATION

It is a disturbing trend that more and more laws which limit freedom and criminalise the work of human rights defenders are making their way through the regions where Civil Rights Defenders works. We continue to see the space for civil society actors squeezed in many places around the globe through all means available, particularly through repressive legislation, intimidation, violence, crackdowns against independent media and politically motivated trials. From Africa to Azerbaijan, new laws making it nearly impossible for human rights defenders to continue their vital work are becoming the rule rather than the exception. Remarkably, this does not discourage many courageous individuals from standing up for human rights and continuing their fight for freedom, oftentimes even from inside a prison cell.

## IN AFRICA, ANTI-TERRORISM LAWS ERODE HUMAN RIGHTS

East and Horn of Africa are highly affected by the increasing threat and expansion of terrorism. Terrorism threats are increasingly influencing local and regional politics. The simultaneous bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the terrorist attack in Uganda in 2010 and multiple attacks in Kenya since 2013, and the emergence of terrorist groups such as Al-Shabaab continue to dominate politics. The recent terrorist attacks in Kenya only magnify the threat of terrorism in the region. These have caused considerable physical and psychological harm to the victims and societies; on the other hand, it has encouraged many of the governments to introduce “anti-terrorism” legislation whose implementation is highly politicised and eroding the shaky human rights situation further.

Ethiopia and Kenya epitomise how the purportedly anti-terrorism laws are undermining citizens’ basic rights. Ethiopia’s Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP) which came into effect in 2009, has been used to charge or sentence more than 20 journalists and bloggers for alleged crimes of terrorism. The law effectively criminalises freedom of expression by giving a vague definition of terrorism.

Kenya introduced a Security Laws Amendments Bill in 2014 which allows the President to expand the power of the government, and made reporting of terrorism related issues difficult for the media. Significant parts of these amendments were suspended by the courts in February 2015.

In April 2015 two civil society organisations in Kenya were deregistered and their accounts frozen for an alleged link to terrorism. Civil Rights Defenders issued statements to the National Coalition of Human Rights

Defenders Kenya and East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project. The two organisations were later reinstated and their bank accounts released on the order of the court.

**ZONE 9 BLOGGERS - ETHIOPIA**

In April 2014, six human rights defenders belonging to the bloggers group Zone 9 and three independent journalists were arrested in Ethiopia and charged with terrorism on 18 July 2015.

Their arrests were part of a broader crackdown on freedom of expression in Ethiopia. An independent and well-respected blog, Zone 9 takes its name from eight zones of the notorious Kaliti prison. Given the harsh controls on freedom of speech and association across Ethiopia, the bloggers suggested that they and the rest of the country were living in the ninth.

Civil Rights Defenders advocated at the UN Human Rights Council sessions for the release of the bloggers, issued statements on our website and raised the issue in meetings with the US Department of State and the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We also monitored the trial. These efforts contributed in highlighting their cause at international levels.

In July 2015, five were released and in October 2015, the remaining four were found innocent of all terrorism charges after 539 days in detention. In December 2015, the prosecutor appealed against the acquittal of the five bloggers. Civil Rights Defenders caught up with Natnael Feleke, co-founder of the Zone 9 blog, who is well known for engaging with his Facebook and Twitter followers on politics and economics. ▽



**Q&A WITH NATNAEL FELEKE, CO-FOUNDER OF THE BLOG ZONE 9**

*What was your experience of participating in 2014 Defenders’ Days in Stockholm?*

It was my first experience in Europe. I was very impressed by the level of organisation in the country. I met African colleagues from Kenya, Uganda and Somalia who insisted that the state of freedom in Ethiopia is very much determinant on the state of freedom elsewhere in the region. We see countries implementing laws that restrict the work of NGOs that work on democracy, human rights and the media. The visit also made me realise how the end of any struggle for freedom looks like.

*Did you expect that you and your friends would be arrested soon after your arrival back in Ethiopia?*

We had been aware of increasing follow up from the security services in the time running up to our arrest. Although we couldn’t say exactly when, we knew that the possibility of arrest was increasing by the day.

*How was the anti-terrorism law used against you?*

It was a badly constructed case. Initially we were charged with two distinctive articles – one from the ATP and another from the criminal code. However, the evidence presented by the prosecutor for both charges was identical. I don’t think things would have turned out to be different if it was another kind of charge.

*How do you evaluate the way the Government of Ethiopia uses the anti-terrorism law?*

This is the reflection of the absence of rule of law and accountability in the country. As it has been applied in Ethiopia these past six years, the ATP has become an effective tool to silence any form of dissenting voices.

*Do you think the ATP discourages people from engaging in human rights activities?*

Definitely! People will think twice before involving in any kind of activity that has something to do with the respect of human rights and democratisation; that is if they ever think of engaging at all.

*“If there is no fundamental structural change in accountability in Ethiopia, the future of human rights will remain as dim as it is right now and the Anti-Terror Proclamation, together with other laws will continue to be an instrument of repression.”*

– Natnael Feleke, Co-founder of Zone 9 blog



## A MOTHER PREPARED TO PAY THE PRICE FOR TRUTH



Award-winning investigative journalist and popular radio host with the Azerbaijani Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Khadija Ismayilova was sentenced to 7.5 years in prison in September 2015 on politically motivated charges. This photo was taken in 2013, a presidential election year in Azerbaijan, during a protest in which protesters faced a brutal reaction from the police and army. Photo: Jabangir Yusuf

At age 70, Elmira Ismayilova experienced one of the most horrible things that can happen to a mother – the Azerbaijani regime imprisoned her daughter Khadija, an award-winning and internationally respected investigative journalist, on fabricated charges. But Elmira does not regret that her daughter exposed corruption of the presidential family. “Khadija is very strong. She loves me and she would never betray her ideals, even because of me”, Elmira says.

The contrast is galling between the centre of the Azerbaijani capital Baku and the suburb where we meet Elmira. The fanciful fountains, glass-covered high-rises and lavish cars, look like a fairy-tale comparing to Elmira’s large unfinished house. This is the contrast between the lives of those who live on other people’s unhappiness and those who live in truth.

Khadija Ismayilova, 39, is one of several leading human rights defenders that paid a high price for her love for truth. It comes as no surprise that the government tries to silence her; Khadija’s reporting has exposed corruption as high as the president of Azerbaijan.

“She examined the state head’s business, which is why she is now sitting in prison”, says Elmira. She speaks quietly and does not sound bitter, despite the suffering of her daughter. She gets to visit her once a week. “We only see each other through the glass and talking on the phone. Naturally, it is intercepted. I cannot even kiss and hold her”, Elmira laments.

Khadija’s incarceration did not come as a surprise to Elmira. When a threatening article was published about Khadija, her mother told her “Soon they will put you in prison”.

Prison conditions are not easy; Khadija shares a small cell with four other women. There are eight toilets for 200 women. But she is treated relatively well. Elmira says this is due to the attention Khadija receives from Europe.

“The other girls are obviously not on her level, they’re drug dealers. She teaches them to read. The most important thing is to educate young people. They see so much nonsense on television and young people learn that giving bribes is normal.” Elmira looks at her guests with gentle brown eyes; her tranquillity is in stark contrast to her tragic story.

She believes that many feel forced to take part in the corruption. Wages are so low that a regular teacher’s salary barely covers enough for food. For this to change she calls for stronger actions from Western politicians. “We are very grateful to everyone who supports us. But we need to address the problems at the government level as well. These questions must be raised at the highest level”, she says.

Since Khadija went to prison, Elmira has become her voice – she gives interviews and works hard for her release. Khadija’s friends started joking that the authorities should have detained the mother instead. “They may put me in prison, but then I will at least be with my daughter”, she says with a smile.

When we say goodbye Elmira adds: “Remember to pay attention to Khadija, but also the others who are in prison. It is very important that you talk about all of them.”



Khadija at work in the Baku studio of RFE/RL. Photo: RFE/RL

Some time after our meeting, Khadija was sentenced to 7.5 years in prison. Despite the long sentence neither Elmira nor Khadija have changed their stance. They are still thinking about all imprisoned human rights defenders. “I saw her the other day and brought food for her. They sent half of it back. They said it was too much, but she is not only eating it herself. She shares with everybody in her cell. It might be related to the fact that Khadija wrote a letter concerning another prisoner she was worried about”, Elmira says.

In the background, Khadija’s sister underscores the importance of continued pressure on the Azerbaijani authorities: “Thank you very much for your support. Many of us here think that it helps that human rights organisations are fighting for rights.”

“It also gives Khadija strength”, says Elmira. ♣



“Remember to pay attention to Khadija, but also the others who are in prison. It is very important that you talk about all of them.”

– Elmira Ismayilova

Khadija Ismayilova with her mother Elmira Ismayilova in July 2014.

Photo: Meydan TV/Jabangir Yusuf



## DRACONIAN NEW LAW THREATENS CIVIL SOCIETY IN CAMBODIA

The Law on Associations and Nongovernment Organisations (LANGO) became law in August 2015 against a backdrop of an already shrinking democratic space, where human rights defenders and their organisations have been intimidated, criminally prosecuted and imprisoned for their peaceful activism.



Between 28-30 June 2015, various sectors of Cambodian civil society conducted a spirited three-day campaign to protest against two repressive draft laws, LANGO and the Trade Union Law. On the third day, authorities used force to prevent hundreds of members of civil society from peacefully marching toward the National Assembly.

Photo: LICADHO

In response to the threat that LANGO poses, Civil Rights Defenders and a diverse coalition of local, regional and international civil society organisations published critical analyses of the law, held seminars to discuss strategy and educate the public, submitted concerns to UN human rights mechanisms and organised creative public protests to advocate for its withdrawal. Strong civil society advocacy (see more on page 18) against the law triggered multiple public statements of concerns from embassies of donor countries, UN agencies and UN human rights representatives. We spoke with some of our human rights colleagues about the effects of the law on their work.

**NALY PILORGE**, Director of the Cambodian League for the Protection and Defence of Human Rights (LICADHO), which was heavily involved in the Say No to LANGO campaign says that “There is no question that LANGO has started to hit civil society in Cambodia. The impact of LANGO is being most keenly felt by our community based partners. Even before the implementation of LANGO, local authorities were making unlawful demands for communities to register under LANGO in rural areas.”

**What long-term impacts** this law will have on civil society remain to be seen, but the effects are already rippling throughout the country: “On one hand we see many NGOs restricting their own space fearing they will be targeted by local authorities and/or closed down after the passage of LANGO. On the other hand, we have identified new, stronger and more committed urban and rural groups to move forward despite the threats and restrictions”, Naly Pilorge says.



**PA NGUON TEANG**, Executive Director, Cambodian Center for Independent Media

**How has LANGO affected your human rights work?**

LANGO has potentially bad impacts for human rights NGOs like us, and those impacts are the requirements of complicated registration and administration processes, paying fees and reporting to the government, as well as the possibility of being shut down by the government.

**Have you seen an example of the enforcement of LANGO against local human rights NGOs?**

Though the adopted law does not appear to be enforced nationwide so far, it was used by local authorities to prevent NGOs from implementing their activities. A few days after the King signed the law in August 2015, the authority of Kratie province threatened to punish a community-based group of 69 families protesting land grabbing if they didn't register at the Ministry of the Interior. The move of that authority was a false interpretation of the new LANGO.

**What can the international community do to support your human rights work?**

The international community should increase their support to NGO activities and send clear messages to the Cambodian government that the rights to association and freedom of expression are fundamental rights

guaranteed by international human rights standards to which Cambodia is a state party and also by its constitution and other laws, and make it clear that without such guarantees, billions of dollars donated from Cambodian development partners become a waste.



**MORY SAR**, Cambodian Youth Network

**What challenges have you faced as a result of LANGO?**

LANGO restricted and limited the freedom of association and assembly of Cambodian people, because the law does not allow NGOs or associations to do any activities if they are not registered. Some provisions of the law are too vague and not clear, so it can allow government officials and the court to interpret the law to restrict the rights of people. It is a big challenge for local communities, youths and monks to implement their work because they have no legality.

**It is a concern** and threat for human rights NGOs and will affect our organisation's ability to organise and empower the youth network. It will also be hard for us to mobilise communities to engage in human rights and advocacy work. When we do campaign, the government may accuse us of inciting youth and local communities to engage in activities that affect national security and social order and then they can stop us.

## IN RUSSIA, REPRESSIVE LAWS HIT HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS HARD

Since 2012, Russian lawmakers have adopted a number of laws that curb freedom of expression, association and assembly. The following laws directly hamper, or have potential to hamper, the work of human rights organisations:



Civil Rights Defenders Programme Officer Cecilia Rosing providing support to LGBT defenders from Russia. The sign says “Gay, Hetero, X Human Being”.

Photo: Yulia Tyupicheva

- **The 2012 Foreign Agents Law** forces NGOs to register as foreign agents if they receive funding from abroad and engage in “political activity”. If an organisation does not register or comply with the provisions, an organisation and its head face high fines and imprisonment. The law was amended in 2014 allowing the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to declare organisations “foreign agents” without their consent or a prior court process. Since then the MoJ has included over 70 NGOs into the register, many of them human rights organisations, including four of our partners.

- **The Federal law** that bans propaganda of “non-traditional sexual relations” among minors, adopted in 2013. An organisation or its head can receive administrative punishment (such as high fines) and temporary suspension of activities. Some activists have been sentenced under the law but it has mostly been arbitrarily used against LGBT activists during demonstrations, and to deny space for public meetings. The law has led to an increase in homophobia and hate crimes.

- **Despite national and international condemnation**, Russia adopted the law on “foreign undesirable organisations” in May 2015 under which a foreign organisation can be declared undesirable if it poses a threat to the foundation of the constitutional order, defence capabilities or state security. Working for such an organisation can be connected with high fines and imprisonment and foreign staff banned from entering Russia. The law aims to further isolate Russian civil society from international partners and funding. Two organisations supporting human rights work have so far been declared undesirable – the National Endowment for Democracy and Open Society Foundations.

**Civil Rights Defenders** has used international mechanisms and lobbied national and international actors in order to change these laws. As the persecution and illegal inspections of our partners and other human rights defenders stepped up under the foreign agents law, we issued several statements and urged authorities

to respect the work of our partners and end repression of human rights defenders. We opposed the adoption of the law on foreign undesirable organisations and our partners have legally fought the implementation of the propaganda law and the foreign agents law. In February 2015, the Russian Constitutional Court recognised that the existing mechanism for unscheduled inspections of NGOs by the Prosecutor's Office violates the Russian Constitution and must be changed, a direct result of a joint complaint of our partner Memorial and several other NGOs.

*“Under the ‘foreign agents’ law, any organisation receiving foreign funding and engaged in human rights activity becomes a potential target. If you’re branded a ‘foreign agent’, in the eyes of the public you are a ‘spy’. This completely discredits and undermines our work.”*

*Our organisation was one of the first to be persecuted under this law, and to be able to continue to work effectively, we had to liquidate the NGO, and now exist as an ‘initiative group of citizens’. The whole process took two years of litigation, a huge amount of administrative resources and an emotional toll on the entire team. Several people burnt out and had to quit activism entirely. But we are still here, working harder than ever, organising festivals, documenting and litigating against violations of rights, and providing legal and psychological support to the community. For as long as the community needs us, we will find a way to continue working!”*



**Polina Andrianova**  
Photo: Sarah Deragon

– Polina Andrianova, Russian LGBT activist



On 28 June 2015 approximately 350 protesters, including land activists, unionists, local and international NGO staff, garment workers, tuk-tuk drivers, monks, farmers, youths, media and representatives of LGBT groups gathered in front of the National Assembly before marching to protest against repressive laws in Cambodia. Photo: LICADHO

### CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS' USE OF LITIGATION AND TRAINING AS A TOOL TO EMPOWER AND PROTECT:

#### USING THE STATE IN SWEDEN:

We represent eight Roma individuals and their family members who were originally registered by the police in Southern Sweden as part of a database of 4,700 Roma individuals. They believe that they were in the registry because of their ethnic origin. We filed a lawsuit against the Swedish state on 5 March 2015.

#### BRINGING RUSSIA TO ACCOUNT:

Our partners have brought Russia to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) to seek redress for victims of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture and other grave human rights abuses in the North Caucasus and have succeeded in getting millions of Euro in compensation to the victims. The goal of our partners is to end impunity by sentencing the perpetrators of these crimes. Due to this pressure, the ECtHR recently made its first rulings establishing that the current local authorities are perpetrators in grave human rights violations.

#### AMENDING LAWS THROUGH STRATEGIC LITIGATION:

Our partners are seeking hate crime provisions against LGBT people to be included within the current Russian Criminal Code framework. One of our strategic cases formed the basis for the United Nations Human Rights Council to issue concluding recommendations to Russia to take into consideration homophobic and transphobic motivations when investigating crimes against LGBT people.

#### TRAINING FUTURE HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYERS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS:

By training young law students and recent graduates through our Human Rights Defenders' School and the Moot Court Competition, students have increased their knowledge of European and Human Rights Law and influenced their own communities. At the Trans European Moot Court Competition held at the ECtHR, students have the opportunity to debate a topical human rights issue in a real court setting. Such a hands-on approach is creating human rights lawyers of the future, equipped with the tools to strategically litigate against human rights abuses in their communities.





Wai Wai Nu is a former political prisoner and a Rohingya activist in Myanmar.

# FREEDOMS UNDER ATTACK

From Cuba to Cambodia, Sweden to Somalia, Civil Rights Defenders works on four continents to campaign, advocate and support change within societies through working closely with civil society partners and human rights defenders. In many regions basic human rights freedoms such as the right to expression, association, assembly, freedom from discrimination and the right to a fair trial are either loosely followed or completely disregarded by oppressive governments. This is the atmosphere that many of our partners must work in...

*A youth activist dances to a song “Yeung Min Sok Chet Te! (We Don’t Accept It!)”, in front of the Cambodian National Assembly on 28 June 2015, to protest against the repressive draft laws. The melody is based off of a well-known pop song, and the lyrics were re-written by youth activists, land activists and NGOs to reflect civil society’s rejection of the draft laws, and as an assertion of their rights. Photo: LICADHO*

## THE LANDSCAPE OF THE REGIONS WE WORK IN

In Russia and Southeast Asia, laws are being adopted at speed to curtail or even halt the work of NGOs and to oppress minority groups in an attempt to destroy freedom of expression, assembly and association. In East and Horn of Africa, bloggers and journalists have been prevented from exercising their rights to freedom of expression and legislation has been developed to effectively silence human rights defenders. Latin America has seen hundreds of political prisoners incarcerated for their political views while the independent media in the Western Balkans continue to be put under pressure from authorities intent on using the media as a propaganda tool rather than to accurately inform the public. Civil Rights Defenders is at the forefront in these regions impacting the lives of human rights defenders by equipping them with the tools to advocate for and effectively create change.



Natalia Sokolova

*“For at least four years, civil society in Russia has come under constant pressure from the authorities. At lightning speed, the State Duma, adopts different laws and amendments to restrict as many rights and freedoms as possible, with the threat of criminal persecution constantly hanging over the head of the ‘offenders’, i.e. civil society. The law on ‘undesirable foreign and international organisations’ is destined for the same purpose. Its clear aim is the further destruction of Russian civil society by banning both foreign and Russian NGOs and other organisations from working in Russia.”*

– Natalia Sokolova

### NO REASON IN RUSSIA

Above are the words of Natalia Sokolova, Executive Director of Memorial Human Rights Centre, a long term-partner of Civil Rights Defenders. Memorial works closely in conflict zones in the Russian Federation, especially when it comes to fighting against impunity, and on behalf of victims of discrimination and political persecution.

Signed into law by President Putin in May 2015 the “Undesirable Foreign Organisations” law states that



any foreign or international organisations “who pose a threat to the foundation of the constitutional order of the Russian Federation, the defence capability of the country or the security of the state” can be designated as undesirable by Russia’s Prosecutor General and receive fines and up to six years in prison. The law can be used against almost any organisation, alienating them from international support and cutting off vital financial support. In 2015, foreign NGOs, supporting human rights work in Russia, began appearing on the black list.

“The current situation leaves us little or no hope that we will be able to operate as a legal entity and if we do, how long will it be for. However, many of us continue to fight using all legal mechanisms available to ensure that the right to freedom of association will one day be a reality”, added Natalia Sokolova in relation to the future of civil society in Russia.

Prior to the introduction of the Law on Undesirable Foreign organisations, Russia was well on its way to strangling the last of its civil society voices. The “Foreign Agents” Law adopted in 2012 was the centre of Putin’s crackdown on civil society. Under the law, any organisation that receives foreign funding and conducts “political activity” is required to register and publicly identify itself as a “foreign agent” – a term that is widely interpreted in Russia to mean spy or traitor. Civil Rights Defenders has seen leading human rights organisations declared Foreign Agents.

The law banning “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations to minors” adopted in 2013 has severely curtailed freedom of expression amongst Civil Rights Defenders LGBT partners in Russia who often face pressure from many fronts; the Foreign Agents Law and the Law on Undesirable Foreign Organisations are further squeezing LGBT civil society.

*“The situation is becoming intolerable. Half a year ago the Ministry of Justice conducted a scheduled inspection of our organisation and did not find anything that could be construed as ‘political activity’. Today the same events are seen as political. It seems that we cannot even discuss the issue of xenophobia in public because it may be deemed political. Civil society is being slowly choked”, stated our partner Sergey Alexseenko, Director of Maximum, on accusation that their organisation constituted a Foreign Agent.*

In such an oppressive environment, Civil Rights Defenders provides our civil society partners with the necessary tools to bring Russia to account on the international stage, especially when it comes to barriers to basic freedoms. Over the years, Civil Rights Defenders has participated in making Russia pay millions of Euro in compensation to victims of the Chechnya conflict and their relatives as the right to life and physical integrity is compromised on a regular basis. For over seven years, we have supported Queerfest in St. Petersburg. The central aim of the festival is to “fight against homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and xenophobia” through the medium of culture, art and beauty.

As repressive law after law continue to be introduced in Russia – the latest being the adoption of a bill allowing the Constitutional Court to deem as unenforceable decisions from the International Courts including the European Court of Human Rights – Civil Rights Defenders partner organisations will continue to be squeezed, making our support all the more important.



### EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA – A DISAPPEARING LANDSCAPE FOR BASIC FREEDOMS

In 2015 Ethiopia was ranked the second worst jailer of journalists in Africa after Eritrea and fourth on the Committee to Protect Journalists' list of the 10 most censored countries. Currently there are more than eight journalists and bloggers in prison. Civil Rights Defenders has been working with partners in East and Horn of Africa to ensure that human rights defenders have the necessary tools to tackle laws intent on curtailing basic human rights freedoms.

### EMPOWERING PARTNERS WITH THE NECESSARY TOOLS

Our Ugandan partner Unwanted Witness (UW) works in an incredibly difficult environment to prevent barriers to freedom of expression and association while also highlighting restrictions to these freedoms, such as attacks on journalists and online censorship.

Civil Rights Defenders supports the organisation by giving expert advice and legal analysis of relevant Ugandan Laws used to oppress and control society. Our legal department in Stockholm made the analysis in collaboration with other relevant parties and the document was supplied to UW in early 2015 to assist them in their vital work.



Solejana Gebremichael

*“The support from organisations like Civil Rights Defenders helped us to feel that we are not alone and there are so many more people out there supporting our cause and confirmed that what we were doing was right.”*

– Solejana Gebremichael, Zone 9 blogger

### A SILVER LINING

On 17 July 2014, seven members of the Ethiopian blogger's collective, Zone 9 and a further three independent journalists were charged with planning terrorist acts and scandalising the Ethiopian constitution under the Ethiopian Criminal Code and imprisoned. Civil Rights Defenders was actively involved in advocating for their unconditional release, which finally came to pass in 2015.

We continue to impact civil society in the East and Horn of Africa by inviting human rights defenders from the region to attend the Defenders' Days conference where they receive training to suit their needs from strategic litigation to digital and security training. Over the past two years, Natalia Project – the world's first security alarm system for human rights defenders at risk – has equipped several activists from Kenya and Uganda.

### DRACONIAN NGO LAW MOBILISES CIVIL SOCIETY IN CAMBODIA

In Cambodia, the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations (LANGO), adopted in 2015, has dramatically increased the government's capacity to take punitive action against associations and NGOs. The law has given the authorities broad discretionary powers to block groups from registering, levy fines and bring criminal cases against human rights defenders. But in fighting it, civil society came together en masse, building new alliances and networks.

LANGO establishes mandatory registration of all domestic and international associations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and can be used to criminalise the activities of unregistered groups. The law also allows the authorities to blacklist individual leaders of deregistered NGOs and associations from ever establishing new organisations.

In the weeks leading up to the parliamentary votes in July 2015, hundreds of Cambodians from all walks of life gathered in Phnom Penh and peacefully protested against it.

Among those who participated in peaceful protests and advocacy against the law are individual human rights defenders and local human rights organisations who have faced intimidation, harassment, criminal charges or imprisonment. Despite operating in a high-risk environment, these defenders and organisations continue to speak out against human rights abuses, provide crucial support to victims, and make constructive policy recommendations to the government to improve the human rights situation.

Naly Pilorge, Director of our partner the Cambodia League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) says “The threat of LANGO served to mobilise a cross section of Cambodian civil society and citizenry. With thousands of communities, youth and grassroots' groups, LICADHO participated in the Say No to LANGO campaign, rejecting LANGO entirely.”

*“During the protests, collaborative lobbying and cooperative advocacy, LICADHO made many new friends. Civil society will draw strength from these alliances as it will be*



In September 2015 Civil Rights Defenders held two ground breaking exhibitions “We Exist” and “From Hate Speech to Acceptance” during Pride Week in Belgrade, the latter focusing the spotlight on how social media is used to spread hate speech against marginalised communities in the Western Balkans. It attracted hundreds of visitors. Photo: Vesna Latic

*increasingly important to work together to protect the most vulnerable community groups.”*

– Naly Pilorge, Director of LICADHO

Civil Rights Defenders' NGO partners highlighted at least 11 articles in LANGO that appear to be inconsistent with the Cambodian Constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Cambodia has ratified. An analysis of LANGO by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Cambodia also raised serious concerns regarding contradictions with national and international law. Civil society organisations are currently considering what the post-LANGO environment means for them.

“There is a broad acknowledgement that things will get worse for civil society, at least in the short term, particularly as it is anticipated that the government will increase the selective and punitive use of LANGO ahead of the commune and national elections in 2017 and 2018”, says Naly Pilorge.

Despite the enactment of LANGO, large demonstrations and strong advocacy following recent instances of political violence show that Cambodian civil society has not been silenced.

*“Civil society and human rights defenders have proven resilient and will no doubt continue their important work. But it is clear that those whose official duty is to protect basic rights and the space of the defenders now have new tools to silence them.”*

– Brittis Edman, Southeast Asia Director at Civil Rights Defenders

After the draft law was re-introduced in 2015, Civil Rights Defenders issued several public statements and open letters to the Cambodian authorities calling for the withdrawal of the deeply flawed legislation. Prior to the parliamentary vote on the draft law, we co-convened a private diplomatic briefing in Bangkok for EU embassies about the legislation. Heeding civil society's deep concerns, both the EU Delegation in Cambodia and the European Parliament publicly issued strong opinions against the draft law. 📌



Vanja Calovic

### 2015 FREEDOM OF THE PRESS RANKINGS (OUT OF 180 COUNTRIES)

ALBANIA: 82/180

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: 66/180

MACEDONIA: 117/180

MONTENEGRO: 114/180

SERBIA: 67/180

Source: 2015 World Press Freedom Index

### INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN THE WESTERN BALKANS – FACT OR FICTION?

In Montenegro, the media has often been used as an effective tool for the government to silence its critics. Vanja Calovic, a brave human rights defender who is part of Natalia Project, has been at the forefront of a campaign investigating state corruption. She has been subjected to harassment, physical attacks and been used as a scapegoat in the media in an unscrupulous smear campaign levied against her by the authorities.

As the leading anti-corruption defender in Montenegro, her tireless struggle against organised crime and misuse of state funds has made her a constant target by state authorities. In the Montenegrin publication “The Informer”, the paper published offensive sexual images taken from a random video and claimed that they portrayed Vanja. Its publication was a deliberate attempt to compromise her personal and professional integrity.

“I live in a small country with a corrupt elite where anti-corruption activists are harassed instead of protected by state institutions. Still, no one was ever exposed to such a disgusting smear campaign – it was worse than anything one could expect. It was obvious and harsh revenge from the regime for exposing their corrupt practices during elections. Support from Civil Rights Defenders related to my personal security and advocacy helped to make my voice heard outside of the country. This was

very important for me, my family and colleagues in MANS because it helped to raise international attention and support from many organisations and individuals and, finally the campaign ended”, says Vanja Calovic, anti-corruption activist, and Director of MANS a Montenegrin human rights organisation.

In Macedonia, government influence of the media occurs at every level, most notably through state-financed advertising and defamation charges against journalists. A lack of public debate on important issues and lack of access to accurate and objective information through mainstream media are some of the major issues. The media has also been used to stereotype marginalised groups to great effect.

*“The media has been used in such a heinous way to spread hate against the LGBT community in Macedonia. Personally I have felt its effects so many times and how hate speech in the media translates into violence. For this reason I have been forced to hide and to leave my home and city on several occasions.”*

– Bekim Asani, President of LGBT United Tetovo and Roma Rights Activist



Bekim Asani

### BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA CASE STUDY: ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE TO AN OPPRESSIVE LAW

ANALYSIS BY ENA BAVCIC, PROGRAMME OFFICER FOR BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

**The Name of the Law:** Law on Public Peace and Order in Republika Srpska; Bosnia and Herzegovina

### WHAT HAPPENED?

In January 2015 Republika Srpska (an entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina) adopted a law defining social networks as a “public space”. The definition is deliberately vague and permits the placing of different types of social networks and Internet portals in the public sphere. Problematic provisions of this law relate to penalising those for “defamation of politicians” as well as social media invitations for peaceful protests and other public gatherings through social networks. The law followed an illegal raid of the web portal klicks.ba in Sarajevo. The raid was organised with an aim to find audio material that indicated that an MEP to Republika Srpska Parliament had the intention of buying off politicians. Soon after the raid, a person who wrote derogatory remarks on a politician's Facebook profile was arrested under the law.



Ena Bavic

### How is Civil Rights Defenders addressing this issue?

Civil Rights Defenders gathered both media representatives and human rights organisations in Republika Srpska to openly condemn the law and asked for its immediate revocation. As a follow-up Civil Rights Defenders and our partners submitted a request to the Constitutional Court of Republika Srpska demanding that the Court assess the constitutionality of the Law on Public Peace and Order, especially the definition of public space, and Articles penalising invitations to public gatherings and images of the politicians, and other officials.

### What is Civil Rights Defenders planned follow up on this law?

Civil Rights Defenders have condemned this law, asking for its withdrawal by the Assembly of Republika Srpska. Currently we are waiting to see if the complaint submitted will have a positive outcome. If not, we plan to exhaust all legal remedies in Bosnia and Herzegovina and fight this law. We are also working in parallel with human rights defenders to prevent such laws in the future. 📌



**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 4 juni 2015  
Statement today: Russian authorities must protect attacked human rights defenders in #Chechnya <http://goo.gl/0qRIQq>

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 10 apr. 2015  
This year's winner of the Civil Right Defender of the Year Award @RadioFreeAsia <http://goo.gl/YkjwEU> #Vietnam #HRD #Defendersdays

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 22 apr. 2015  
We create an environment that remains when the international community has left, says @roberthardh #ebaseminar

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 10 apr. 2015  
Diana Nyman talks about the need to include the Roma when working with Roma issues. #defendersdays

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 15 apr. 2015  
We condemn the politically motivated court case against Rasul Jafarov and demand his release. <http://goo.gl/HGgzva> #Azerbaijan #FreeRasul

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 2 mars 2015  
Involve the Cubans in the EU-Cuba negotiation: @Ertigo and @AGRodiles from @PorotraCuba in New Europe [http://issuu.com/neweuropenewspaper/docs/new\\_europe\\_print\\_edition\\_issue\\_1112/9?e=9254342/11653537](http://issuu.com/neweuropenewspaper/docs/new_europe_print_edition_issue_1112/9?e=9254342/11653537) ...

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 11 feb. 2015  
Thank you so much everybody who followed our seminar online today, you can still watch it here: <http://bambuser.com/channel/civilrightsdefenders> ...

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 13 mars 2015  
Joint #statement - "Assaults and Arrests must Cease Against Student Protesters in Myanmar" <http://www.civilrightsdefenders.org/news/assaults...>

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 10 apr. 2015  
Women need support and not victimization says @Mozn at #defendersdays

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 9 apr. 2015  
When I traveled to Azerbaijan I got the feeling I was in Belarus says @Ales\_Bialatski #defendersdays

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 11 feb. 2015  
Before I left Burma, I had never head the word #Rohingya says @drzarni, we (the burmese) have been blindfolded on this issue. #Myanmar

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 9 feb. 2015  
Don't forget to sign up! Seminar on the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar and the first democratic elections in 25 years: <http://goo.gl/uJ1RGK>

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 10 apr. 2015  
No positive change in #Cambodia says @boreyopen Land rights aren't respected. #defendersdays

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 5 maj 2015  
Statement today: Russian authorities must protect attacked human rights defenders in #Chechnya <http://goo.gl/0qRIQq>

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 10 apr. 2015  
The award now stands on the empty chair. Quynh is with us on Skype, her passport is confiscated. #defendersdays

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 10 apr. 2015  
Keynote speech by @ForstMichel who underlines the importance of human rights defenders #defendersdays

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 26 jan. 2015  
Court Upholds Wrongful Verdicts against Housing Rights <http://www.civilrightsdefenders.org/news/cambodian-court-upholds-housing-rights-defenders/> ...

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 10 apr. 2015  
Also here we have an empty chair on stage for absent and imprisoned friends and colleagues. #defendersdays

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 19 jan. 2015  
Enforced Disappearance in Laos of Sombath Samphone Must be Addressed <http://www.civilrightsdefenders.org/news/open-letter-to-un-members-address-the-disappearance-of-sombath-somphone-at-upr-review/> ...

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 10 apr. 2015  
Civil Rights Defender of the Year Award #defendersdays <http://goo.gl/0qRIQq>

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 10 apr. 2015  
Read our statement about the repression against the ladies in white in Cuba <http://goo.gl/R0hM3v> #Cuba #ddhh @EstadodeSats @AGRodiles

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 10 apr. 2015  
#LGBT activist in #Serbia? Apply to our Summer School 1-12/6. CV+motiv. letter to hrdschool@civilrightsdefenders.org

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 12 feb. 2015  
Good news! RT @guardiannews: Al-Jazeera English journalists released on bail from Egyptian prison <http://d.gu.com/8WTTph>

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 11 feb. 2015  
The way the Rohingya issue has been presented is at best misleading, at worst downright untruthful, says @drzarni #Myanmar

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 5 maj 2015  
Interventions from politicians, media owners and the government. Read our first Media Indicators report on #Kosovo <http://goo.gl/3ZSmXi>

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 12 juni 2015  
1st day of @BakuGames2015 marks his 315th day in prison. #freerasul #hrd #Azerbaijan #Baku2015 <http://goo.gl/VqTq0d>

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 21 maj 2015  
Harassment and assaults of activists continue in #Vietnam amidst flurry of international visits. Read our statement: <http://goo.gl/dlrxjN>

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 19 maj 2015  
Government of #Cambodia should heed domestic and international outcry over draft NGO Law: <http://goo.gl/ffQINNI>

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 2 juni 2015  
CivilRightsDefenders Retweetade Human Rights Watch Together with @hrw among others, we call on #Cambodia govt to drop draft NGO law.

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 7 juli 2015  
Crackdown on Civil Society in Cuba Continues to Forsen Despite Warnings <http://www.civilrightsdefenders.org/featured/crackdown-on-civil-society-in-cuba-continues-to-worsen-despite-warnings/> ... via @crdefenders

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 13 juni 2015  
Today we celebrate! We just received 9 million SEK from @PostkodLot to create Human Rights Lab <http://goo.gl/7wup0Q> (in swedish)

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 13 juni 2015  
Read about today's attack in #Chechnya against Committee Against Torture: <https://www.facebook.com/civilrightsdefenders/photos/a.16683769002.0765.29369.128452209259793839450212759506/?type=1&theater> ...

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 2 juni 2015  
5000 days in jail today. #freedawit

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 3 juni 2015  
Civil Rights Defenders - Myanmar: Drop Charges Against Student Protesters <http://www.civilrightsdefenders.org/news/drop-charges-against-student-protesters/> ... via @crdefenders

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 22 juni 2015  
Cambodia Must Withdraw Deeply Flawed NGO Law <http://www.civilrightsdefenders.org/news/cambodia-must-withdraw-deeply-flawed-ngo-law/> ...

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 3 juni 2015  
Published in EL PAIS : Lack of Solidarity of Latin American Governments Towards the Cuban People <http://www.civilrightsdefenders.org/news/published-in-el-pais-lack-of-solidarity-of-latin-american-governments-towards-the-cuban-people/> ... via @crdefenders

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 3 juni 2015  
Cambodia Must Withdraw Deeply Flawed NGO Law <http://www.civilrightsdefenders.org/news/cambodia-must-withdraw-deeply-flawed-ngo-law/> ...

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 3 juni 2015  
Cambodia Parliament Passes Draconian NGO Law. It target civil society, grassroots and human rights watchdogs. Additional measures expected.

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 3 juni 2015  
Remembering the Victims at the 20th Anniversary of the Srebrenica Genocide <http://www.civilrightsdefenders.org/news/remembering-the-victims-at-the-20th-anniversary-of-the-srebrenica-genocide/> ... via @crdefenders

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 19 apr. 2015  
Today, @crdefenders releases a report on vulnerable EU citizens' rights in Sweden: <http://bit.ly/1QgK0dk> #EUgovt #crdefenders

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 19 apr. 2015  
Leyla Yunus prominent human rights defender from Azerbaijan released from prison on medical grounds. #leylayunus

**CivilRightsDefenders** @crdefenders 19 apr. 2015  
Human Rights Defenders Continue to Suffer in Burma

# SNAPSHOTS OF OUR WORK 2015 >>

For over 30 years Civil Rights Defenders has defended peoples' civil and political rights. We empower and support human rights defenders at risk on four continents. The impact of our work has seen the organisation strengthen protection against discrimination in several countries, support independent media as an alternative to state sponsored propaganda, empower marginalised groups, train and equip human rights defenders at risk with the world's first security alarm system and help thousands of people seek access to justice for breaches of their human rights.





**SWEDEN**

Civil Rights Defenders welcomes LGBT defenders from the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe to partake in one of the largest pride parades in Northern Europe. The week was filled with opportunities to network, attend workshops, seminars and above all to let one's hair down in a relaxed and liberal environment.

*Photo: Naida Kucukalic*

**SWEDEN**

Defenders' Days 2015 attracted human rights defenders from four continents for four days of interactive training, lectures and networking. The event culminated in awarding Vietnamese blogger Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh the Civil Rights Defender of the Year Award.

*Photo: Åke Ericson*



**SWEDEN**

Johanna Westeson, Legal Adviser at Civil Rights Defenders, hosts a seminar on the long anticipated report published on vulnerable EU citizens' rights in Sweden. The report published by Civil Rights Defenders highlights the state's responsibilities and is based on binding international human rights standards, Swedish Law and EU Law.



**TANZANIA**

November 2015 Natalia Project training in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania with Kenyan participants and Martin Fallman, Protection Officer at Civil Rights Defenders.



**SERBIA**

Over 50 students from all over Serbia successfully graduated from the Human Rights School created by Civil Rights Defenders. The school was developed to strengthen young Serbian human rights defenders in their specific areas of work over a period of seven months.

*Photo: Vesna Lalic*



**RUSSIA (NORTH CAUCASUS)**

John Stauffer, Legal Director and Inna Buktynovich, Programme Officer for Eastern Europe and Central Asia meet with partners in the North Caucasus.



- Rasul Jafarov, human rights defender, founder and leader of the NGO Human Rights Club and the "Sing for Democracy" campaign.
- Jailed since 2 August 2014, on politically motivated charges of illegal entrepreneurship, tax evasion and abuse of official power.
- On 17 March Rasul Jafarov was pardoned and released from prison after 593 days behind bars. Civil Rights Defenders has avidly campaigned for his release and the release of all human rights defenders being held in prison in Azerbaijan.



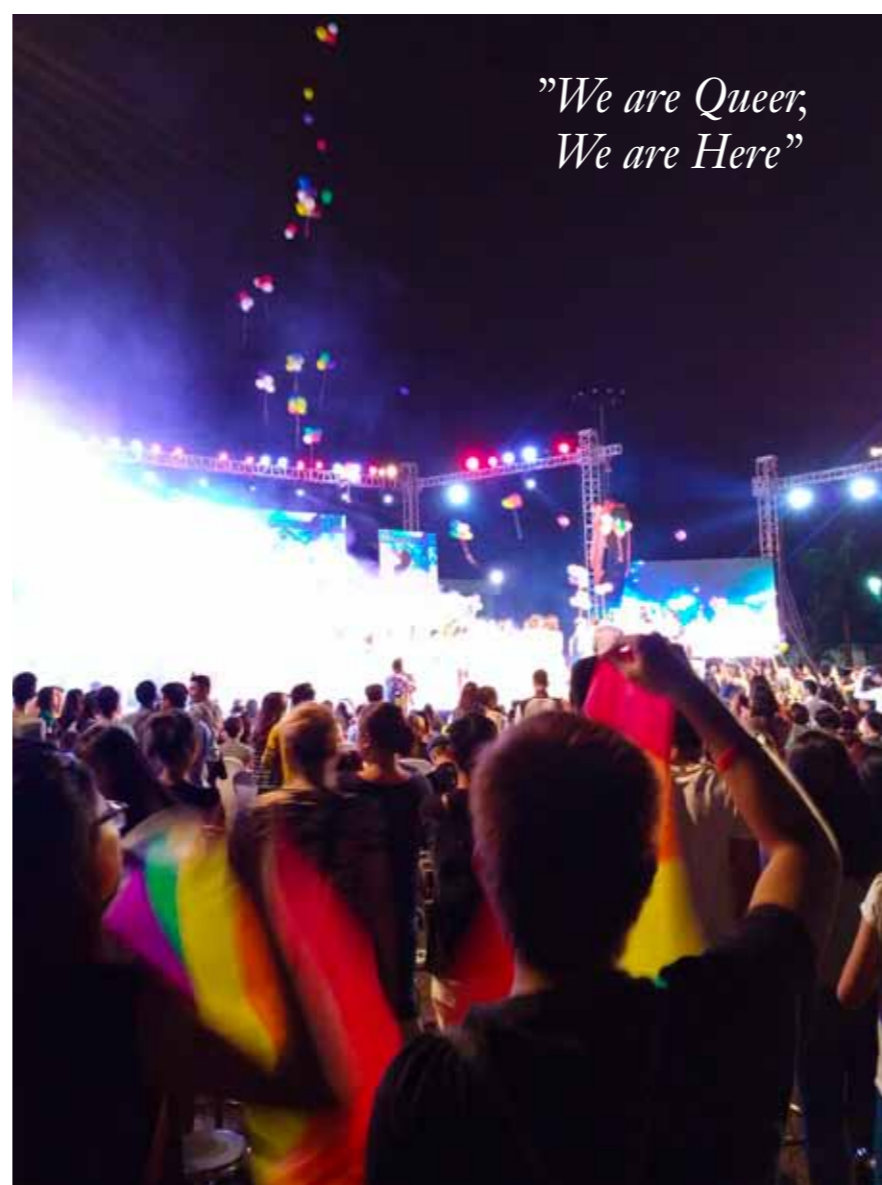
Abdessattar Ben Moussa, one of 2015's Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, visited Civil Rights Defenders' office in Stockholm to discuss the human rights situation in Tunisia and globally.



**CUBA AND COLOMBIA**

From Left to Right: Roberto Guerra Perez, Ricardo Sanchez Tamayo (Hablemos Press), Daniel Cerqueira (Due Process and Law Foundation) Erik Jennische (Civil Rights Defenders) at the Dejusticia premises in Bogotá, Colombia, discussing how Cuban human rights organisations can use the Colombian experience of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

*Photo: Krizna Gomez*



**CAMBODIA**

Civil Rights Defenders participated in public assemblies in December to celebrate International Human Rights Day.

*Photo: LICADHO*

**VIETNAM**

With the theme "We are Queer, We are Here", Viet Pride 2015 reflected "the cultural change that is happening in Vietnamese society – the wrestling between freedom of expression and conformity, between individuality and collectivity," says Tam Nguyen, Director of Viet Pride, Vietnam. Civil Rights Defenders has supported the event for the past three years.



**RUSSIA**

Queerfest St. Petersburg 2015. On 17 September, the seventh International Queerfest kicked off in St. Petersburg. The ten day long festival gathered over 2,500 spectators, who visited the events or watched the festival online. Civil Rights Defenders has supported the festival since its very beginning in 2009.

*Photo: Svetlana Kolosova*



**MYANMAR**

Brittis Edman, Programme Director and Shaivalini Parmar, Programme Officer for Southeast Asia Department at Civil Rights Defenders travelled to Myanmar to meet with civil society groups and witness the landmark elections.





Fred Taikon hoists the Roma flag on International Roma Day, proudly looked on by the participants who attended Defenders' Days.

Photo: Ake Ericson

## HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS STRONGER TOGETHER

# DEFENDERS' DAYS

On a blustery morning on 8 April 2015 in the magnificent Stockholm archipelago, something memorable occurred. The Roma flag was hoisted outside of Djurönäset, the impressive venue for Defenders' Days Conference, to commemorate International Roma Day.

*"I was very glad to be the one to hoist the Roma flag in front of all the Roma present during International Roma Day on 8 April 2015, when Civil Rights Defenders organised Defenders' Days. 8 April is a day celebrated by Roma across the world in solidarity with each other and other oppressed people."*

– Fred Taikon. É Romani Glinda, Sweden

Witnessed by over 150 human rights defenders from 30 countries and representing four continents, all were touched by this remarkable event that celebrated

Roma culture while also highlighting the issues that this marginalised community often faces.

Dedicated to supporting, training and empowering human rights defenders at risk, Defenders' Days Conference is now in its fourth year and an unforgettable fixture on the human rights calendar.

The conference has become all the more important as the space for civil society continues to shrink in many of the regions that Civil Rights Defenders is present. Repressive legislation, travel bans and imprisonment has meant that the development of a forum like Defenders' Days is essential for human rights defenders to network in order to discuss on-going trends and

challenges but above all to develop solutions in a safe environment.

To demonstrate our solidarity with those who could not attend, an empty chair was present at all panel discussions and lectures to serve as a reminder to the precarious nature of the work of human rights defenders and to honour them.

Stockholm provides a safe, interactive space where human rights defenders at risk receive training to equip themselves with the necessary tools to carry out their vital work – such as strategic litigation, video campaigning, corruption research, LGBTQ Networking in a Hostile Environment, Shadow Reporting as a



150 participants from 30 countries, representing four continents attended Defenders' Days Conference 2015. At Defenders' Days the participants have the opportunity to network with top experts. Photo: Ake Ericson

Strategic Tool and International Legal Mechanisms – and provides activists with opportunities to network and seek advice from industry experts, UN Special Rapporteurs and above all, each other.

Defenders' Days prides itself on being inventive and keeping up to date with the numerous challenges facing human rights defenders as their predicaments can quickly change. A new element at the 2015 conference was the creation of a Digital Security Clinic, where participants could meet and speak with digital security experts and get practical support to suit their needs.

Networking was one of the key elements to facilitate

the coming together of participants to share experiences, build partnerships, establish and formalise cooperation with national and international colleagues and learn from peers.

We are constantly reminded of the repressive laws, discrimination and threats that many of our colleagues face as they challenge totalitarian and corrupt regimes to bring about human rights freedoms often taken for granted in many parts of the world. It is therefore essential that a forum such as Defenders' Days is an annual event to continue to reinforce our commitment to human rights defenders from the four corners of the world. 📌



Sandra Ntebi

*"In Uganda, to love is a crime because the 'wrong sexuality' is prevalent to such an extent that I have been threatened to be murdered. The only safe place for me is outside my country or to be forced into biding. Defenders' Days reinforced my belief in humanity and without it I would have lost all hope in activism completely. At Defenders' Days I could share with other people. It also gave me the strength that I should not give up but rather fight to the end for what I believe in."*

– Sandra Ntebi, Human Rights Defender and LGBT Activist from Uganda

## SNAPSHOT OF DEFENDERS' DAYS

CREATED IN 2013 BY CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS TO EMPOWER HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK

Four Recipients of the Civil Rights Defender of the Year Award, presented to an exceptional and courageous human rights defender at risk:



2013: NATAŠA KANDIĆ

Founder of the Humanitarian Law Center, Serbia



2014: ALES BIALIATSKI

Head of human rights organisation Viasna, Belarus



2015: NGUYỄN NGỌC NHƯ QUỲNH

Coordinator of the Vietnamese Bloggers' Network, Vietnam



2016: INTIGAM ALIYEV

Imprisoned Human Rights Lawyer, Azerbaijan

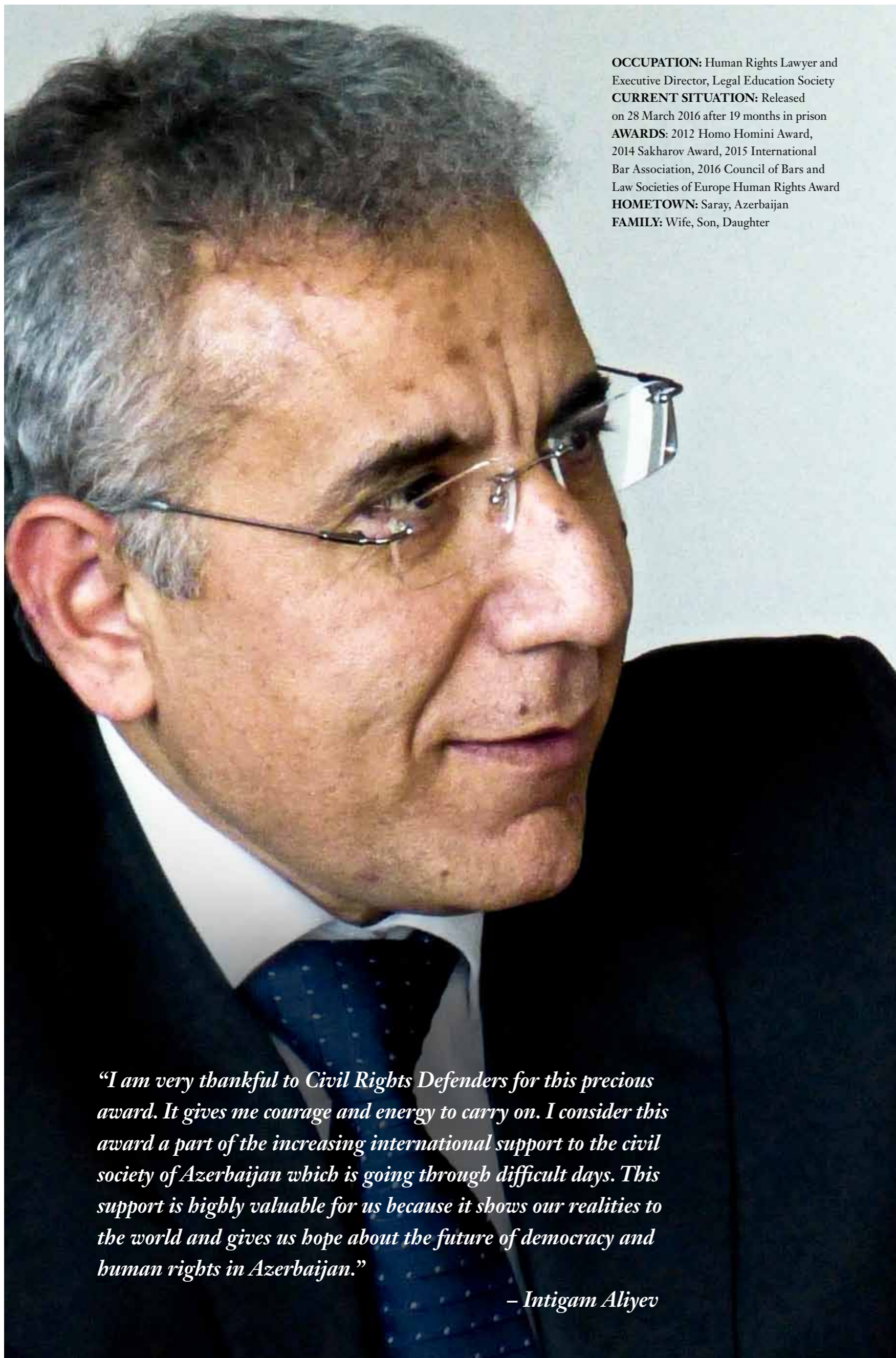
### THE AIM OF THE CONFERENCE:

- Strengthen human rights defenders at risk in their vital work;
- Support cooperation, networking and exchange of knowledge;
- Strengthen the recognition and highlight the situation of human rights defenders at risk.

### 2015 CONFERENCE:

- 250 participants
- 150 human rights defenders
- 30 countries, four continents represented





**OCCUPATION:** Human Rights Lawyer and Executive Director, Legal Education Society  
**CURRENT SITUATION:** Released on 28 March 2016 after 19 months in prison  
**AWARDS:** 2012 Homo Homini Award, 2014 Sakharov Award, 2015 International Bar Association, 2016 Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe Human Rights Award  
**HOMETOWN:** Saray, Azerbaijan  
**FAMILY:** Wife, Son, Daughter

*“I am very thankful to Civil Rights Defenders for this precious award. It gives me courage and energy to carry on. I consider this award a part of the increasing international support to the civil society of Azerbaijan which is going through difficult days. This support is highly valuable for us because it shows our realities to the world and gives us hope about the future of democracy and human rights in Azerbaijan.”*

– Intigam Aliyev

INTIGAM ALIYEV

# CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDER OF THE YEAR AWARD



For his courage, dedication and enormous contribution to improving the human rights situation in Azerbaijan by advocating for justice on behalf of those whose rights have been violated, Civil Rights Defenders is honoured to present Intigam Aliyev, winner of the 2016 Civil Rights Defender of the Year Award.

One of Azerbaijan’s most respected human rights lawyers, Intigam Aliyev has been defending individuals and organisations in Azerbaijan for two decades, including some high profile activists persecuted by the authorities. Since 1999, Intigam heads the Legal Education Society (LES), which provides human rights education, trains lawyers and prepares cases for litigation.

A mentor for a new generation of young lawyers and an expert on the European legal system, he is the author of 20 books and over 100 academic articles on legal topics and has taught civil and human rights law at a number of universities. Along with other human rights activists, he was jailed in 2014 as part of a nationwide crackdown against human rights defenders, journalists and government critics.

On 8 August 2014, Intigam was arrested and charged with tax evasion, illegal entrepreneurship and abuse of power entailing grave consequences. Intigam denied the allegations and said that his arrest and trial were politically motivated attempts to prevent him from exposing corruption, bringing further cases against the Azerbaijani government and continuing his human rights activities with the LES. He has submitted a number of applications to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) that challenge the fairness of his trial.

Intigam was sentenced by the Baku Grave Crimes Court on 22 April 2015 to seven-and-a-half years in prison. After serving 19 months, on 28 March 2016, the Supreme Court of Azerbaijan commuted Aliyev’s sentence to a five-year suspended term and he was conditionally released. Intigam is on probation including a five-year travel ban and a three-year work ban.

Shortly after his release, Intigam Aliyev affirmed his commitment to the fight for human rights in Azerbaijan: “I am going through a mix of emotions. I won’t speak about the decision. Of course I am happy to be free because it is not the time to be resting. It was unjust of me while people outside [in freedom] were busy working in difficult conditions. That is why my release is important. I will now take over some of the cases. But I am also sad because some of my friends are still in jail, and I would be happy to give up my freedom for theirs. In general, however, things are moving ahead and I have no doubts that they will be released soon. Azerbaijan will

be freed soon too. Despite all the repression and pressure, the Azerbaijani community continues to fight for democracy and freedom. This gives me a lot of hope. And it gave me a lot of hope in jail when we received support from our friends, comrades and the international community. It showed this community’s passion for freedom and that it is impossible to suffocate it with arrests and pressure. I would like to thank all of you!”

We spoke with Intigam’s son Necmin Kamil about his father’s work, imprisonment and the struggle for human rights in Azerbaijan.



Photo: Aziz Karimov

**Congratulations to your father, Intigam Aliyev. What was his reaction when you told him he had won the Civil Rights Defender of the Year Award?**

On behalf of my father, I would like to express his deepest gratitude to Civil Rights Defenders for this recognition of his work. I informed my father about the award by phone (while he was in prison), and he was very happy and honoured to hear about this wonderful news. This award will give him encouragement and strength in these difficult days. He told me that this award is a huge support to the civil society of Azerbaijan and considers this award an appreciation of the efforts of all political prisoners in the country.

**What motivates him to keep fighting for human rights?** My father dedicated his tireless and selfless work to the promotion and protection of human rights, and sacri-

ficed his freedom for the freedom of others – just because it is important for him to stand strong for what he believes in, no matter the circumstances. In his final speech at his trial, he said that the arrest can take away his freedom, but not his desire to be free. What motivates him in these difficult days is his desire to build a society where everyone is free and equal before the law. Therefore, no punishment can break his fighting spirit.

**How has your father’s arrest and imprisonment affected your family?**

There are always challenges. We have been aware that being a human rights defender is dangerous in our country.

His arrest was quite expected for the whole family. We continue to support him and we know that having his family close to him and supporting him makes him even stronger. Knowing that he is strong enables us to cope with any difficulties ourselves.

**Your father has said that his trial was a politically motivated attempt to prevent him from bringing further cases against the Azerbaijani government and from continuing his activities with the LES. Can you talk a little about this?**

My father was carrying out many activities. Apart from the NGO work and work as a lawyer, he was also teaching critically minded activists and human rights defenders. As a legal expert for many local and international institutions such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE, he was a passionate advocate for judicial reforms in Azerbaijan. Normally, he should be commended by the government for his struggle to make the country a better place to live, but instead, he has faced imprisonment because the authoritarian regime of Azerbaijan considers these activities a challenge to its existence. The main motive behind my father’s arrest was to prevent him from bringing politically sensitive cases to the ECtHR. He was not only submitting the cases but also following the implementation of the judgments and challenging the government in

Strasbourg. Even in prison, he continued to win cases at the ECtHR. Due to this fact, he faced strict censorship in prison.

**What can the international community do to support your father and other prisoners of conscience?**

We need the international community to increase pressure on the Azerbaijani authorities to end political repression of critical voices. Western governments and institutions should stop business as usual with Azerbaijan and consider serious steps against the government which may also include possible sanctions against those who are responsible for the crackdown on civil society. The cases of Azerbaijani prisoners of conscience must be told every day and everywhere until the government realises that it is damaging to keep these people behind bars. ♣





Robert Hårdh, Executive Director Civil Rights Defenders

Photo by Vesna Lalic

At Civil Rights Defenders, innovation is key to providing realistic solutions for human rights defenders at risk who work in some of the most repressive societies in the world. As conditions continue to deteriorate in many of the regions in which we work, it has become all the more crucial to develop innovative solutions to empower those who devote their lives to standing up against oppression. We are proud not only to have made significant strides in technological advancement to enhance both the physical and psychological security of human rights defenders at risk, but to empower young, up-and-coming human rights lawyers and defenders.



*“Since the beginning of 2015, the Belarusian authorities have taken a number of actions aimed at intimidating, harassing and even accusing me of committing criminal offences. After becoming part of Natalia Project, the pressure from the authorities has stopped, and now I can fully continue my work to defend human rights. I think that being aware of such serious international support, the authorities will find it difficult to organise new provocations against me, as these will immediately be known by the world.”*

– Leonid Sudalenska, Head of the Gomel Centre of Strategic Lawsuits, Belarus

#### NATALIA PROJECT

- Launched in April 2013
- World's First Security Alarm System for Human Rights Defenders At Risk
- Based on three principles: 1. Observe 2. React 3. Engage
- An electronic device that sends a pre-programmed text alarm if activated or forcibly removed
- Distress signals are sent from the device via Global System for Communications (GSM) and Global Positioning System (GPS). Uniqueness lies in the ability of distress signals to reach everyone simultaneously, increasing the chances of saving lives
- Volunteers can get involved and react once the signals reach social networks such as Facebook and Twitter
- Over 70 human rights defenders included in Natalia Project



#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE EMPATHY CAPTCHA

Civil Rights Defenders built a CAPTCHA to demonstrate humanity through empathy rather than robotic numbers when you sign up to a website, while simultaneously highlighting injustice in the world. It has received worldwide attention and acclaim.



## HUMAN RIGHTS INNOVATION INITIATIVE

BY CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS

### PUSHING BOUNDARIES: THE HUMAN RIGHTS INNOVATION INITIATIVE

With over 30 years' experience empowering, advocating and supporting human rights defenders and civil society organisations, Civil Rights Defenders is intent on taking innovation within the NGO sector to the next level. We are currently creating the Human Rights Innovation Initiative (HRII), an international hub for innovative solutions to empower and support human rights defenders in their vital work. Our presence and reach on four continents provides us with an in-depth and often unique understanding of exactly the kind of support human rights defenders need the most.



New solutions will be developed and subsequently nurtured through the establishment of an international and cross-sectored council comprising of expertise from a variety of sectors: academia, business, civil society and entrepreneurs. This will be followed by the implementation of innovations by Civil Rights Defenders and its partners.

#### WE SPOKE TO ROBERT HÅRDH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS ABOUT HRII.

**What was inspiration for the creation of the HRII?**  
Following the death of our colleague, the Chechen human rights defender Natalia Estemirova, Civil Rights Defenders felt that we are often one step behind in protecting the life and well-being of activists at risk and we had a strong desire to change that. With the introduction of Natalia Project, we could really see the potential in bringing people from different fields together and using innovation to come up with solutions

to problems that courageous activists like Natalia are facing on the ground.

*Natalia Project, the world's first security alarm system for human rights defenders at risk, has been a significant technological advancement in the NGO world. Are there other projects you would like to see come to fruition through the HRII?*

I guess the best projects are still there to be invented but I believe that the most important thing is to connect people with real problems on the ground to people that have the intellectual, financial and technical means to come up with solutions to these problems. And I believe that Civil Rights Defenders has the right capacity to do exactly that.

*The vision of the HRII will see widespread collaboration between experts from a varied background to come up with the most innovative solutions to assist human rights defenders at risk. What is your goal in terms of what the HRII can achieve to support this vision?*

Our goal is challenging, yet very simple: to present ideas that could become important tools in protecting human rights defenders at risk and making their important work more effective. The more ideas that are developed, the better.

#### INNOVATING THROUGH EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

Civil Rights Defenders has recognised the importance of innovation through education and strives to bring real life experience to young human rights defenders and human rights lawyers through simulations and training. By focusing on a young generation of human rights defenders, we aim to impact the societies in which they live by equipping them with the necessary tools to advocate for human rights.



Team Lannung from Denmark winners of the Trans European Moot Court.

#### MOOT COURT COMPETITION: BRINGING THE CLASSROOM TO LIFE

The Moot Court aims to educate and train final year law students from law faculties across the Balkan region in the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

After a regional final, the competition then develops to a Trans European Moot Court Competition where the winners of the Balkan region meet the winners of the Nordic region in Strasbourg. The students get to apply European Human Rights law in writing but also through oral proceedings before the European Courts of Human Rights (ECtHR). In a real life setting, with a distinguished Panel of Judges from the highest courts, the students are provided with an overriding sense of authenticity during the proceedings.

**Team Lannung from Copenhagen, Denmark were the 2015 winners of the Trans European Moot Court Competition, narrowly beating Team Iustitia from Niš, Serbia.**

*“As I consider myself a fighter for human rights, this opportunity had a significant impact on my development as a future lawyer. This experience was crucial for my studies and helped me expand my horizons. Being an advocate for women's rights, I have found myself motivated in this case, which helped me to reach my full potential. I am very appreciative and hope to be a part of ECtHR's law practice one day.”*

– Nemanja Radevic, participant from Team “Iustitia” Niš, Serbia

#### HUMAN RIGHTS SCHOOL

Civil Rights Defenders' commitment to enhancing capacity building by educating young human rights defenders kicked off in 2015 with the launching of the Human Rights Defenders School in Serbia.

Developed to strengthen Serbian human rights defenders in their specific areas of work over a period of seven months, the Serbian cities of Belgrade and Niš hosted the school, where prominent human rights experts, representatives from the international community and experienced human rights defenders lectured and trained. Over 50 students successfully graduated in December at a ceremony held in Belgrade and hosted by Robert Hårdh, Executive Director of Civil Rights Defenders.

Meet Aleksandar Mihajlovic, student at the inaugural Human Rights Defenders School organised by Civil Rights Defenders. Currently Aleksandar is a PhD student at the Faculty of Law, University of Niš.

*What were your impressions of the Human Rights School and what was the most innovative aspect of your time there?*

This school was a great experience for a lawyer like me interested in working with human rights. I was privileged to learn from human rights experts from Serbia and all around the world. I am sure that I will successfully implement the new knowledge acquired into my future professional work. The participants were not just lawyers and so the school provided a good space for discussing and sharing different opinions on a wide variety of topics taught at the school.



Aleksandar Mihajlovic

*What subjects were you taught and how will you take what you have learned into the future?*

The advantage of the school was the fact that we covered so many different aspects of human rights protection regarding minority rights, such as LGBT rights, Roma rights and other vulnerable social groups but also transitional justice and war crimes. The knowledge which I have acquired gives me renewed power and energy to change my local community, spread new ideas and be ready to react to human rights violations.



# TOOLS OF OPPRESSION

Human rights defenders around the world work under incredibly difficult circumstances and endanger their lives to help victims of human rights abuses obtain justice. Here we highlight the work of brave individuals working to combat impunity and strengthen the rule of law.

Extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and intimidation have been and continue to be committed by Russian federal forces, as well as by local law enforcement in the North Caucasus republics. In collaboration with Memorial Human Rights Centre, Civil Rights Defenders monitors human rights violations and provides legal aid to victims and their family members. We work actively with other non-governmental organisations, with the governments of European Council members and with the media to raise awareness about abuses that take place and put pressure on governments.

In the break-away territory of Transnistria in Moldova, human rights defenders are subject to daily threats of harassment and ongoing persecution. The work of human rights defenders is viewed subversive, and as an attempt to undermine the security of the local regime and de facto administration. We have, together with our partner Promo Lex, raised concerns regarding the situation of human rights defenders by pursuing complaints on behalf of victims of grave human rights abuses and their family members at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and by ensuring concrete follow-up to ECtHR judgments.



Vadim Pogorletsky



Irina and Eduard Eltsov

<< Through intermediaries, Vadim Pogorletsky stayed in contact with a Promo Lex lawyer throughout his five-plus years in Transnistrian detention centres and prison. During this time, it was out of the question for the lawyer to visit him.

< Irina and Eduard Eltsov are happy to be together at last, after seven years of separation due to Eduard's imprisonment. Eduard is a cardiologist and treated his co-prisoners in jail. When the prison administration found out about it, they forbid him to give medical assistance, but he continued to do it secretly.

## FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE IN MOLDOVA

Torture, inhumane prison conditions and arbitrary arrests – this is the reality for many people in Transnistria who happen to cross paths with the powerful in this self-proclaimed territory of Moldova. Often, their only hope rests with brave civil society organisation Promo Lex, a partner of Civil Rights Defenders, who fights against impunity by bringing attention to such injustices through the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

“There is absolutely no rule of law here”, says Vadim Pogorletsky. He should know – he has been actively involved in civic activism in Transnistria and also an editor of two papers in the region. Finally the pressure became so intense that he had to flee, he says. He lived in Russia for a while, but as the human rights situation began to deteriorate he was forced to uproot and move on again.

“First on my mind I just wanted to visit my parents in Transnistria. But when I passed the border with Ukraine, even before entering Transnistria, I was kidnapped”, he told Civil Rights Defenders when we met in Tiraspol, the region's capital.

He was accused of attempted murder, illegal arms possession, and being involved in the arms trade and

sentenced to five years and three months in prison. “My relatives got in touch with Promo Lex and Alexander Zubco collected documents on the case. Alexander took care of my entire defence – here and on an international level”, he says regarding one of Promo Lex leading lawyers.

“The lawyers in Transnistria are afraid of doing anything. In my case, the attorney I was provided with was married to the investigator”, he said. Now Vadim is hoping to have redress in the ECtHR in the case filed by Promo Lex. “Alexander says the fact that I am a journalist might speed up the process”, Vadim says.

In contrast to Vadim, elderly couple Irina and Eduard Eltsov had not had a history of opposing the de facto authorities. This all changed one evening when four strangers accosted Irina on the street. The young men demanded money from her. She was able to call her husband, who came to her rescue. He was able to help his wife, but in the process accidentally killed one of the attackers. This cost him seven years of his life.

“The court refused to take into account that I acted in self-defence. They claimed that I killed him for private reasons, although we had never met before. The reason is obvious – the father of one of the attackers works for

the security service”, says Eduard.

“They arrested and kept me in a basement for six months, although they are only allowed to do so for ten days. The conditions in these basements are inhumane – it is all done in such a manner so that people should confess. The investigator told me ‘Come on confess, and everything will be fine’ but I refused”, recalls Eduard.

In the meantime, Irina contacted Promo Lex, who filed a complaint with the ECtHR, assisted her in getting medical treatment for Eduard and put her in touch with an organisation that provided psychological support.

Despite the hardship that the couple have experienced, Irina is optimistic about the road ahead and has seen how Promo Lex has actively helped others: “We hope that the European Court will make a positive decision now. After us, there have been 26 similar cases in court and people have started to talk about the problems. Now the authorities are a bit more aware that someone is watching them and so the conditions have become a little better. Why do you think they don't let Promo Lex into Transnistria anymore?”



“My colleagues and I were threatened, beaten, maimed, kidnapped and discredited, and most of it continues to this day. Despite all this, we still stand strong. We have chosen our own path. We are still alive and we will continue our fight for human rights.” – Magomed Mutsolgov

## DISAPPEARANCE OF HIS BROTHER MADE MAGOMED RISK HIS LIFE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Magomed Mutsolgov, 42, is a respected human rights defender in Ingushetia in the North Caucasus region of Russia. He is leader of MASHR, a human rights organisation which provides legal advice and assistance free-of-charge to the population of Ingushetia and monitors the human rights situation in the North Caucasus.

He first became involved in human rights after his younger brother Bashir was abducted in broad daylight in their home town of Karabulak in 2003 by armed masked men whom Magomed subsequently succeeded in identifying as Russian Federal Security Service and Interior Ministry personnel. Bashir was taken to the Russian army base at Khankala near Grozny in neighboring Chechnya, after which he disappeared without a trace.

Magomed sought help from Civil Rights Defenders' partner Memorial to find his brother. Upon entering Memorial's offices, he saw an entire wall covered with photographs and lists of 1,927 Chechens who had disappeared during 1999–2000. Magomed said that he decided on the spot to do all he could to prevent the same thing happening on such a scale in Ingushetia. He has suffered many losses – two of his relatives were killed in 2008 – and survived many attempts to intimidate or kill him. Despite these threats, he continues his fight for human rights.

Because of his outspoken criticism of State-sponsored human rights abuses, he has been harassed for many years. He is regularly subjected to various threats, both tacit and in public. In 2012, when Civil Rights Defenders brought two Swedish MPs to Ingushetia, the president of the republic voiced threats against Magomed during a meeting with us. Since then, the repressions against dissidents have increased all over Russia, and so has the pressure against Magomed and MASHR.

In November 2015, regional authorities carried out a search on the office and home of Magomed during which office equipment and documents were confiscated.

The searches were conducted without any court-order. The authorities later claimed that they had found child pornography on Magomed's computer, but no charges have been presented.

Civil Rights Defenders believes that this forms part of a regular pattern of continuous pressure against Magomed and MASHR emanating from their human rights work and critical opinions against the authorities' actions and policies. We have repeatedly expressed concern about the pressure put on Magomed and urge the government of the Russian Federation to immediately contribute to an environment in which human rights defenders can work safely, in accordance with the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

“The legality of the actions of the authorities have raised questions as there is no on-going criminal case against Magomed Mutsolgov. Civil Rights Defenders demands that the authorities adhere to principles of rule of law in the investigation and that Magomed receives a fair trial if charged. The long pattern of harassment and the way the searches were conducted suggest the accusations are politically motivated”, says Joanna Kurosz, Programme Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia at Civil Rights Defenders.

**WE CAUGHT UP WITH MAGOMED TO DISCUSS HOW THIS ON-GOING INTIMIDATION AFFECTS HIM AND HIS HUMAN RIGHTS WORK.**

**Was 2015 particularly difficult for you as a human rights defender in the North Caucasus? How so?**

My organisation and I have been systematically discredited in recent years, so we are used to difficulties. However, 2015 was particularly difficult because besides regular harassments, pressure and defamation, an armed raid was carried out against us. Our office, my house and the house of my younger brother were surrounded by 30 law enforcement officers with masks, armed with automatic weapons. They held me, my parents and sister, my wife, our three children, my brother and his family at gunpoint for almost seven hours. They confiscated

all of our archives and case-related documents. The security forces have tied our hands and they hinder our human rights work by their illegal actions.

Security forces tried to legalise their actions with the court ruling, and although the ruling allowed only a search, police confiscated all our equipment and documents. I am certain that regional authorities, who many times have demanded that I stop my human rights and journalistic work, and for my brother to resign from his position in the political party, are behind this outrage. All these years, security forces have never had a legally-grounded claim against our organisation.

**There is a lot of legislation in Russia which hampers the work of human rights defenders. How have these laws disturbed your work?**

Indeed, Russia has adopted a number of laws, which contradict our Constitution and international laws Russia has committed to. This legislation seriously affects activities of NGOs and has created the conditions under which human rights work becomes almost impossible. That is the reason why many NGOs have been and are in the process of liquidating.

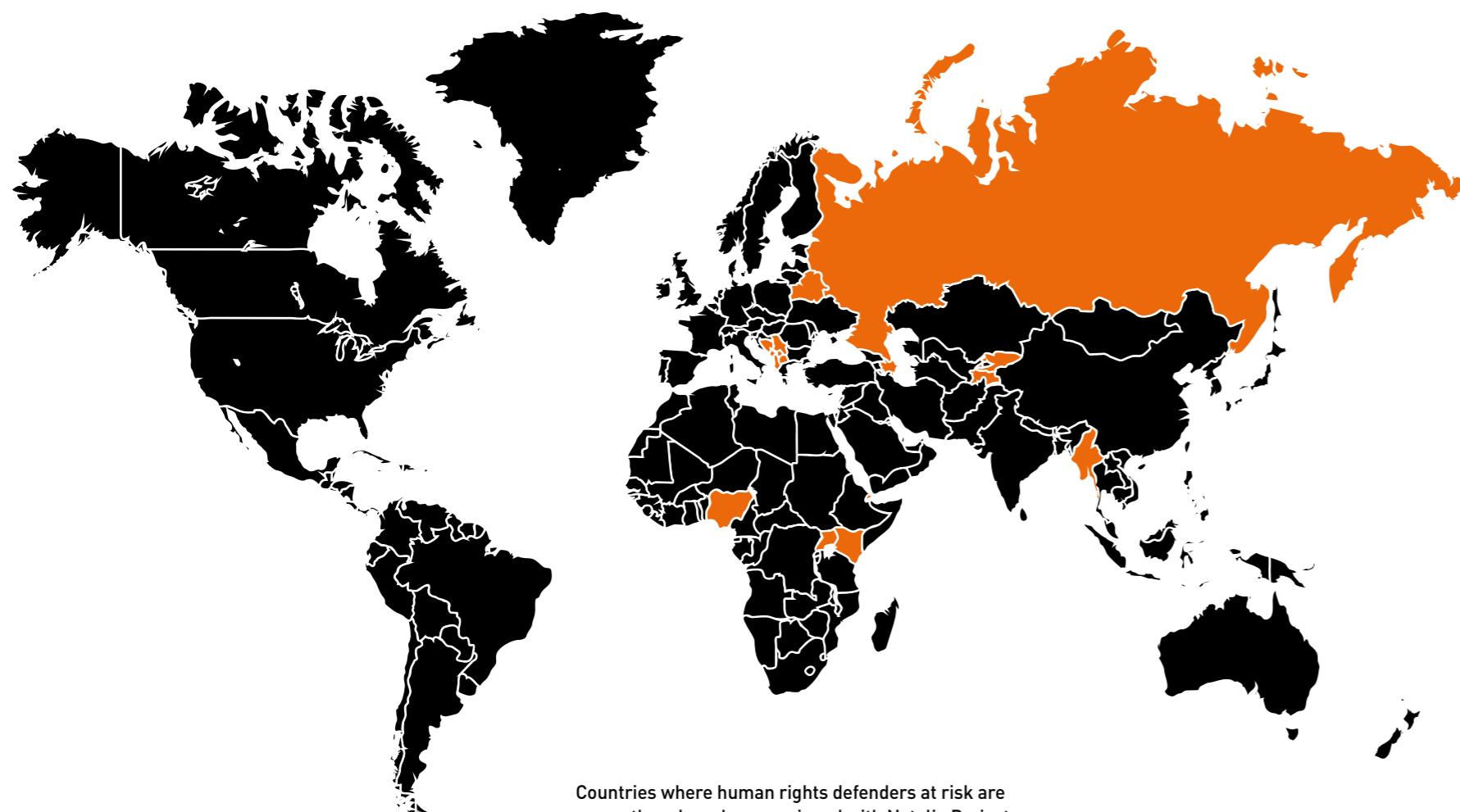
**Employees of MASHR have been subjected to on-going harassment and intimidation by officials. How does this continuous pressure affect you?**

It is true, my colleagues and I have been through many challenges. In one way or another we have always been subjected to pressure: we were threatened, beaten, maimed, kidnapped and have been discredited, and most of it continues to this day. However, despite all this outrage against us, we still stand strong. We have chosen our own path. No one forced us to devote our lives to fight for human rights and vocalise violations against rights of our fellow citizens; no one promised us a cloudless future. We are still alive and we will continue our fight for human rights and that is the most important. 🗨️



# EMPOWERING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK IN A PROACTIVE WAY

It is often difficult to comprehend the number of societies in the world where a person can be assaulted, imprisoned or even murdered simply for uncovering the truth, for fighting against corruption, for promoting gay rights or for merely advocating for a better society where people can exercise their basic freedoms. Through bespoke training Civil Rights Defenders strive to equip human rights defenders with the tools to support and empower them in their work.



Countries where human rights defenders at risk are currently or have been equipped with Natalia Project Security Alarm system:

- |                        |            |
|------------------------|------------|
| Albania                | Kyrgyzstan |
| Kosovo                 | Azerbaijan |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | Uganda     |
| Serbia                 | Kenya      |
| Montenegro             | Nigeria    |
| Macedonia              | Myanmar    |
| Russia                 | Tajikistan |
| Belarus                |            |

## EMERGENCY FUNDING AND SECURITY TRAINING

Civil Rights Defenders has over 30 years' experience working in repressive countries, empowering and supporting human rights activists. The impact of our work can be most profoundly felt through the Human Rights Defenders At Risk Programme.

In 2015 alone, through our Emergency Fund, it was possible for Civil Rights Defenders to provide 17 protection measures for human rights defenders in the regions of East and Horn of Africa, Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe. These protection measures have facilitated the immediate relocation of human rights defenders whose lives and freedoms were under threat from the authorities.

Civil Rights Defenders organised 14 security trainings involving 129 human rights defenders from Kenya, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Uganda, Serbia, Cuba, Myanmar and Belarus. Breaches in security by state authorities is one of the biggest threats to human rights defenders who often lack the resources or practical knowledge to safe guard their computers, equipment and offices, but most importantly, their personal safety.

For many years Civil Rights Defenders has implemented bespoke security training to human rights organisations and in 2015 we took it one step further by developing a Security Management Training which was conducted in Yangon, Myanmar. This training provides a more holistic approach to security focusing on the daily routines of human rights organisations by developing an acute awareness of security issues to which they could be exposed. The training includes a security inventory, a risk assessment and risk management plan for the NGO but most importantly, concrete recommendations that are needed to enhance security going forward.

*"This form of training is important in providing NGOs with an holistic approach to security and with tools to create security plans within their organisations. In most cases human rights defenders have little time and resources to deal with the risks that they are facing in their daily operations. The training gives them the possibility to reflect on risks and threats, and to develop and put in place some basic security routines that hopefully will prevent many risks from materialising."*

– Marie Manson, Programme Director for Support to Human Rights Defenders At Risk

### NATALIA PROJECT

#### – BREAKING NEW GROUND

Slobodan Stojanovic is one of Serbia's most prominent and best known LGBT activists. For over 20 years he has been a human rights advocate, actively campaigning for equal rights and acceptance of the LGBT community in Serbia and the Western Balkans. Throughout his quest he has been exposed to death threats as well as physical and verbal abuse. Despite the extreme hazards associated with his work, he continues with his activism.

Slobodan is the leading figure of Belgrade Pride Organisation, which has been marred over the years with violence and hatred. In 2010, the parade was attacked by extremists, and has been banned on several occasions out of security concerns, often at the last minute. Last year there was a ray of light on the horizon as the parade went ahead without any attacks or significant problems.

However, hate speech against Slobodan continues and in 2015 Civil Rights Defenders invited him to become part of Natalia Project, the first security alarm system for human rights defenders at risk.



Slobodan Stojanovic

*"To be a gay activist in Serbia means being exposed to many different forms of hate speech and violence. Over the years I have unfortunately learned that one of the most important goals for haters is to spread fear as they attempt to make us fragile. Besides contributing to a sense of physical protection, Natalia Project also has an impact on my inner well-being and reminds me of the fact that there are people out there who respect me, appreciate what I am doing and want to offer whatever support they can."*

– Slobodan Stojanovic



Digital Security Training in Kampala, Uganda 2015.

In 2015, Natalia Project expanded in scope and influence from its initial pilot phase when it was launched in April 2013. After the murder of brave human rights defender Natalia Estemirova, who was brutally murdered in the North Caucasus in 2009, Civil Rights Defenders was intent on developing a security alarm system for human rights defenders at risk: "Civil Rights Defenders was also determined to develop a solution so that the same fate would be less likely to befall other human rights defenders. A simple push on the alarm will activate the alarm, alerting colleagues and the world to an assault or kidnap", says Marie Manson, Programme Director for Support to Human Rights Defenders At Risk.

Once activated, a signal containing the exact GPS location of the person who activates the alarm is sent via mobile phone network to the headquarters of Civil Rights Defenders in Stockholm. It is also received by designated persons in the vicinity of the human rights defender who are then in a position to react to the situation immediately. This ability to react in such situations can literally be the difference between life and death.

Since Natalia Project was implemented in April 2013, over 70 human rights defenders at risk have been equipped with the security alarm system on three continents. The project has now been implemented in Central Asia and continues to expand in the East and Horn of Africa, Southeast Asia and the Western Balkans.

The human rights defenders included in the programme – which also includes intense security training to complement the functionality of the alarm – come from all spectrums of the human rights world: LGBT activists, human rights lawyers, anti-corruption activists, environmental justice activists and journalists.



Joel Ogada

### JOEL OGADA

Organisation: Malindi Rights Forum  
Country: Kilifi County (Coastal Area), Kenya

#### What work do you do?

I am a farmer and became a human rights defender after an investor in the area illegally claimed my land. This farm belonged to my father and represents what I would pass to my children. After seven years of lengthy court processes, the investor offered me 10,000 Kenyan Shillings (88 EUR) for my farm. I refused his offer. Shortly after that, an orchestrated campaign began to evict me and other farmers from our land. I decided to stand up for my rights and join hands with other farmers whose land was already taken or threatened in the same way as mine. During the process, I was falsely accused of arson amongst other things and convicted to seven years in prison; this sentence was reduced to two years after I had served one year in prison. There are two pending cases against me. When I was in prison, my farm was vandalised and demolished.

#### What is it like to be a human rights defender in Kenya?

Being a human rights defender is difficult in Kenya. Human rights defenders don't get enough support to educate and defend themselves. They might be in a position to defend others' rights if they had that support. Sometimes the government doesn't support you when you try to defend your rights.

#### What are the dangers and security threats you face in your everyday work?

Hooligans are hired by powerful individuals and are the main source of threats for us currently. They have destroyed my house previously, and now even my family can't return and live in peace.

#### How will Natalia Project enhance your personal security?

What I gained during Natalia Project training changed my mind. The device was the most interesting thing for me. I wish I had known about Natalia Project before. Now I can get assistance and everybody will know if something untoward happens to me.







# SEISMIC CHANGE THROUGH THE BALLOT BOX

2015 was an intriguing year as millions of people exercised their right to vote. After almost 50 years of despotic military rule, 23 million voters representing 84% voter turn-out headed to the polls in Myanmar for landmark elections, which took place largely without allegations of fraud, misconduct or violence. In December, eyes turned to Venezuela as the voters came out in force to enact change in a country riddled by crime, corruption and shortages. Little changed in Azerbaijan and Belarus as the totalitarian regimes that have ruled with an iron fist for decades cemented their power in parliamentary and presidential elections.

## MYANMAR ON THE MOVE

Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory, securing a parliamentary majority to select Myanmar's next president. THE PEOPLE OF MYANMAR HAD VOTED FOR CHANGE.

However, there is still no effective civilian control of the military, which continues to exercise significant autonomy, enjoys institutionalised immunity and is constitutionally empowered to take over the government in a "state of emergency", despite an NLD parliamentary majority.

Twenty-five percent of parliamentary seats are reserved for the military, allowing them an effective veto over any constitutional change. The military will still hold control over key ministries, including both Border Affairs and Home Affairs. Other critical issues, including obvious bias within the Union Election Commission, the disqualification of many Muslim candidates, and the orchestrated disenfranchisement of over three million voters, including the Rohingya minority group and others, challenges the very integrity of this election.

**Interview with Shaivalini Parmar, Programme Officer for Southeast Asia at Civil Rights Defenders, who was on the ground during the Myanmar elections:**

*Can you describe the atmosphere leading up to the day of the elections?*

The euphoria in the lead-up to and on election day was tangible. People were out in unprecedented numbers to cast their ballots and long queues formed outside polling stations. It was the first time the people of Myanmar had a real opportunity to vote in 25 years, and given the 84% voter turnout it was evident that people didn't want to miss the opportunity. Many of our partners actively participated in the electoral process through voter education and trainings, and by commenting on the elections and human rights issues. Sadly and indicative of the difficulties ahead, a large number of voters, most of whom are Muslim Rohingya, were disenfranchised.

*Did human rights defenders, especially Civil Rights Defenders partners, view the results as a catalyst for change or is there still scepticism?*

Our partners are justifiably sceptical about the process. They know that the military is far from willing to relinquish all control over government affairs. They have repeatedly vocalised distrust in the system, and are aware that the military still holds effective control over constitutional amendments and key ministries. Despite the limitations, there was an overwhelming consensus among our partners that civil society members were willing to work within the confines of the system.

*Some of Civil Rights Defenders' partners work with minority groups such as the Rohingya, who were not allowed to vote in the elections. Do they feel that this was a fair and free election in light of this?*

Voter disenfranchisement challenged the legitimacy of this election, during which almost 3 million people lost their right to vote, including the Rohingya. Many of our partners believed that the systemic exclusion of the Rohingya and other religious minorities stood as a direct threat to the very integrity of the elections. They were worried that their exclusion was part of a broader campaign to appeal to a growing contingency of ultra-nationalist and ultra-militant monks.



Myanmar elections see Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD party win by a landslide victory.

## LUKASHENKA: BELARUS ON A LEASH

President Lukashenka secured his fifth term in office during the Presidential elections in October 2015 with a landslide victory of 83.5%. He has governed Belarus unchallenged since 1994 going to great lengths to terrorise all opposition while strangling civil society under a raft of draconian laws that curtail freedom of expression, association and assembly. In the 2015 elections, veteran leaders were unable to stand in opposition as they were not permitted to register and not one of the three other candidates allowed to run in the elections received more than 5% of the vote.

*"Arbitrary arrests and pressure on activists and human rights defenders is still continuing. It is difficult to expect any improvement in human rights after the elections. The release of political prisoners before the elections is an important positive step but unfortunately not a sign of systemic change for the better. Increasing repression is the more likely scenario after the elections."*

– Natalia Mankouskaya, Belarusian Human Rights Centre Identity

Joanna Kurosz, Programme Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia at Civil Rights Defenders travelled to Belarus for the elections and to meet with civil society activists.

*What were your impressions of the general mood among human rights defenders that you met regarding the Presidential elections?*

On one hand they were not very positive, as nobody expected anything positive from the elections. Civil society and the political opposition are still traumatised after the 2010 Presidential elections that took place in an atmosphere of heightened tensions and were followed by a wave of repressions during which Belarus' leading human rights defender, Ales Bialiatski and a number of opposition politicians, were imprisoned. Although released, none of the strong opposition candidates were allowed to run in the 2015 elections.

On the other hand, many Belarusian human rights defenders are people who don't give up easily. They have been fighting for a long time and they know that the road to democracy and respect for human rights is a long one.

*What type of future does Belarusian civil society have under the Lukashenka regime?*

They will continue fighting for increased respect for human rights and probably face an undemocratic regime for a long time into the future. Their focus is to continue

documenting abuses and reaching out to the population to convince them of the benefits in respecting human rights. The regime has understood the value that new people joining civil society organisations bring, so they are targeting those who have shown the first signs of dissent.

*"For example when the KGB spots a student at a demonstration for the first time, they invite him for a 'preventive discussion' at the university. It is an uphill battle, but every person that joins civil society or becomes more democratically minded is a success for our colleagues in Belarus."*

– Joanna Kurosz, Programme Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia at Civil Rights Defenders

## AZERBAIJAN: ALIYEV'S TYRANNY

Dozens of human rights defenders – including journalists, bloggers, activists and an opposition leader whose release has been ordered by the European Court of Human Rights – all remain incarcerated in Azerbaijan. Such is the atmosphere that greets the last remaining vestiges of civil society in a country that has ruthlessly cracked down on all dissenting voices. With no surprises, the ruling party of Ilham Aliyev once again won the parliamentary elections, which were boycotted by all the main opposition parties.

Civil Rights Defenders is part of an international campaign to have all human rights defenders released from prison, almost all who are incarcerated on politically motivated charges including the 2016 Civil Rights Defender of the Year, Intigam Aliyev (see page 26).

## VENEZUELAN VENT WITH THEIR VOICES AND VOTES

Food queues, criminality and corruption spurred on Venezuelan voters to cast their votes on 6 December 2015 leading to the opposition winning in a landslide victory. The opposition Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) won 112 seats out of 167 in the National Assembly while the governing Chavista party, United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) together with its allies took just 55. The PSUV had previously won all nationwide elections since Hugo Chavez won the presidency in 1998.

Civil Rights Defenders has been following the situation closely. Erik Jennische, Programme Director for Latin America, kept an eye on proceedings as the world witnessed a dramatic shift in legislative power: "After the election of Nicolás Maduro as Hugo Chavez' successor in 2013, widespread street protests in 2014 and the sharp decrease in oil prices led to the country into a phase of deteriorating political and economic crisis. The chavista political project had lost its credibility and the people clearly voted for change."

However, huge challenges remain according to Jennische. "The Venezuelan government has launched a widespread attack on basically all civil and political rights during the last decade. They have passed laws, decrees and constitutional amendments that limit the independence of the judiciary, the National Assembly, civil society and the media. It has continuously accused human rights defenders, opposition leaders and journalists of conspiracy, and sent elected politicians to prison without a trial. As the next presidential elections are not scheduled until 2018, there will be a very tough fight for power. This could lead to even further pressure on human rights defenders in an already very violent context, so it is essential that we continue to monitor developments and support the work of the Venezuelan human rights community." ♣





*Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an oft-used phrase, but what does it mean exactly? Issues related to social responsibility and sustainability are gaining more and more importance in today's economic climate and business goals are inseparable from the societies and environments within which they operate. CSR is a concept and a process that integrates social and environmental concerns in business operations and a company's interactions with its stakeholders. The United Nations Global Compact – launched in 2000 and in which Civil Rights Defenders is a part – asks companies to embrace, support and enact a set of core values in the areas of human rights, labour standards, the environment and anti-corruption.*

A garment worker in Bangladesh in 2013.

## CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:

# WHAT DOES IT TAKE?



Milka Pietikainen  
Head of Corporate Responsibility at Millicom

Millicom has joined Civil Rights Defenders to support human rights work both in Sweden and abroad under a new three-year partnership agreement from 2015-2017. Known as TIGO to its telecommunications customers, Millicom's support will be used to continue our work to empower human rights defenders at risk. We spoke with **MILKA PIETIKAINEN**, Head of Corporate Responsibility at Millicom about their commitment to be a socially responsibly company.

### Why did Millicom choose to partner with Civil Rights Defenders?

I think we share a very pragmatic and action-oriented approach. Too often civil society and the private sector are put on opposite sides of an issue when in fact we share many common goals. By partnering with Civil Rights Defenders, Millicom is seeking better understanding of key human rights issues in our operating markets and what we as a company ought to do about them. I believe that in Civil Rights Defenders we have a critical friend who will not be shy about being direct, and who sees that there are insights and connections that we can offer.

### How do you incorporate respect for human rights into the culture of your company?

It starts with high level policy commitments which are communicated across the business so it is clear for everyone what we as a company stand for and so that we can be held accountable. For senior management to walk the talk and lead by example is another crucial factor within the organisation. Ultimately, respect of human rights has to be embedded into the core processes of the company – this is the only way to make it sustainable and part of everyday business. This is my job, to review and understand what impacts we may have and to redesign our processes to address these.

### What are the main challenges you face in ensuring ethics are maintained in your global business?

Training people on policies and implementing process updates are huge and continuous tasks within global businesses that involve many languages, ways of working, and most importantly, different contexts. A clear voice from the top, together with frequent reminders of our policies and Code of Conduct helps us overcome such challenges. It then comes back again to integrating ethical ways of working into everyday business. If a supply chain manager knows that to be able to sign on a new supplier, they need to complete an ethics review, it will be done.

### What are the main areas of human rights violations that concern you, and how do you work to address them?

Our key concerns are around freedom of expression and access to communication. But we also have more traditional concerns about labour rights within our supply chain, particularly relating to health and safety provisions and the potential for child labour. On these we have a lot of activity and long-term plans in place. A new area that we hope to work on more, together with Civil Rights Defenders, is around land rights relating to the building of telecommunications infrastructure.



Gustav Lovén  
Social Sustainability Manager at H&M

In 2014, Civil Rights Defenders received support under a three-year partnership agreement with H&M to fund on-going human rights work to empower, support and protect human rights defenders at risk. We caught up with **GUSTAV LOVÉN**, Social Sustainability Manager at H&M, about the importance of the business community's support of human rights.

### How does H&M see Civil Rights Defenders as a valuable partner?

H&M takes a clear stand for human rights and has teamed up with Civil Rights Defenders to support their commitment and hard work to defend human rights. The general state of human rights is not what we would like it to be if we look at the world today. Our aim is to do our part to contribute by respecting and promoting human rights throughout our business and more broadly beyond that. Partnering with Civil Rights Defenders is one part in this and their strong expertise is also of value to us as it helps us strengthen our work.

### The majority of textile industry workers are women. What protections do you provide for them?

Our suppliers employ 1.6 million people around the world of whom around 60% are women. Women's rights are a key priority in our human rights program. A job at a textile factory is often their first chance of formal employment and earning an income of their own, and it has the potential to play an important role in women's independence. It is very important that women have good working conditions and workplaces where their rights are respected. Discrimination or harassment because of gender is unacceptable but something that is sadly a reality for women globally. We have a strict Code of Conduct that applies to all suppliers who manufacture our products which includes requirements that no employee shall be discriminated against, that we under no circumstances accept the use of humiliating or physical punishment, and no employee shall be subject to physical, sexual, psychological or verbal harassment or abuse.

### What opportunities do other large corporations have to contribute to human rights improvements around the world? What advice do you have for them?

There is no doubt that companies have a great opportunity as well as a responsibility to respect human rights. You first need to assess and understand what human rights risks your company faces and know how they can best be addressed. I strongly recommend opening up for dialogue and partnership with other stakeholders, including civil society. We also see business benefits in integrating a human rights perspective and it seems unlikely that companies will be able to continue operations without a strong commitment to human rights in the long run. There is a growing interest from employees, customers and investors to see companies engage and contribute to sustainable development, and for this, respecting human rights is at the core.

Civil Rights Defenders' Executive Director **ROBERT HÄRDH** shares his view about what CSR means in the 21st Century.

### What does corporate social responsibility mean to Civil Rights Defenders?

For us, it means that we help companies embrace their responsibility to respect human rights. We are critical when needed but we do not hesitate to use our expertise and our network to help those companies that want to make a difference. We do this by steering them in the right direction and strengthening their skills internally, as well as within the environments they operate.

### How do you choose your donors and partners?

We try to practice what we preach and so therefore it is natural that we are part of the United Nations Global Compact, just as we want our partners to be. The same applies to the perception of sustainability and credibility, that there is a genuine desire to change things for the better and to actively strive to contribute to these changes.

### How has respect for human rights become a business imperative?

People are a lot more aware today. Employees and customers make demands, and companies are obliged to contribute to positive development. Most modern, forward-looking companies have recognised this. Together we have every opportunity to create large improvements but in order for that to be possible, it is not enough that companies strengthen their work in this area. It is also that we as human rights defenders should not be afraid to cooperate with these companies, while retaining our integrity, just as we have done with progressive states and governments over the years.



# HUMAN RIGHTS TRADE OFF IN CUBA

For several years, Cuba has begun to emerge from self-enforced political and economic isolation. The government's principal tools to bring Cuba in from the cold has manifested itself through on-going processes to re-establish full diplomatic relations with the US and the establishment of negotiations on political dialogue, cooperation and a trade agreement with the European Union.

Cuba's human rights record is abysmal. When the Cuban government signed International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) in 2008 it was the first time the government appeared to recognise the importance of basic human rights. However, at the same time it also claimed that there was no real need for change in the country's political or judicial system. Since then the covenants have not been ratified and no reforms have been implemented as far as civil and political rights are concerned.

In 2014, Civil Rights Defenders together with our partner Estado de Sats in Cuba developed a platform on how the EU should conduct negotiations with the Caribbean island. Throughout 2015, Civil Rights Defenders, Estado de Sats, The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) and two dozen other European and Cuban organisations campaigned to Federica Mogherini of the European Commission regarding four specific demands on what should be included in the agreement regarding human rights and what Cuba should be obliged to do before the agreement is signed:

**The Platform calls for three principal demands in the content and structure of the agreement:**

- The EU must formally invite Cuban civil society to comment on the agreement during the negotiation process and ensure adequate space for civil society throughout the implementation of the agreement.
- The agreement with Cuba must be written in the same tone regarding human rights protection as the one between the EU and the countries of Central America. In the latter, the promotion of peace, democracy and respect for human rights was at the core.
- That European businesses investing in Cuba must be allowed to hire their own staff, and are not required to use personnel proposed by the Cuban state employment agency. Furthermore, employees of foreign companies should also have the possibility to form independent unions.

**And advocates for what must be achieved before the agreement is signed:**

- The Cuban government must ratify and start implementing International Covenants on Human Rights that it signed in 2008. Cuba must also immediately halt the arbitrary arrests, repression and violence against human rights defenders, and offer an amnesty to all political prisoners.

Concerning the establishment of new diplomatic relations with the US and a future agreement with the EU, Human Rights Defenders in Cuba remain divided on whether they are positive or not. In late 2015 Civil Rights Defenders caught up with two of our partner organisations regarding their views on these historical agreements.



Photo: Claudio Fuentes

**ANTONIO G. RODILES** is the Coordinator of Estado de Sats, a forum created in 2010 by a group of young artists, intellectuals and professionals, to encourage debate around social, cultural and political issues in Cuba. Rodiles has emerged as one of Cuba's strongest proponents for democratisation, claiming that human rights should be the main tool for change.

**ELIZARDO SÁNCHEZ SANTA-CRUZ** is the Director of The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN), founded in 1987, and is one of Cuba's most recognised human rights defenders.

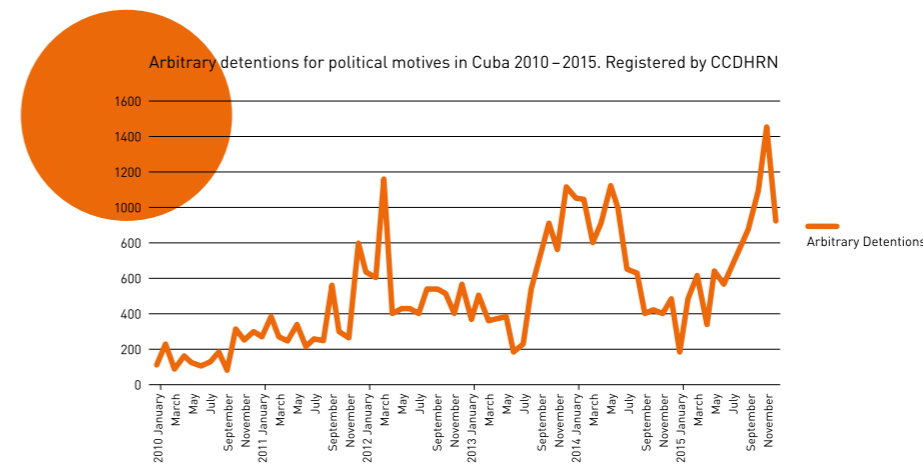


Photo: Claudio Fuentes

**NEW RELATIONS WITH THE US: TOOL FOR CHANGE OR NOT?**

In relation to the re-establishment of political relations with the US, Elizardo Sánchez and the Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) are of the belief that economic sanctions and other policies aimed at isolating Cuba have only strengthened the totalitarian Cuban regime.

"We were very positive regarding the re-establishment of political relations because we have never agreed with the economic sanctions imposed by the US", Elizardo Sánchez says.



Antonio Rodiles agrees: **"The violence and repression of the regime against independent journalists, human rights defenders and dissidents has notably increased."**

In contrast, though, Antonio Rodiles has been against the process from the beginning: **"The set of economic sanctions known as 'the embargo' should be used by the US government to press the Cuban regime to make changes."**

He also mentions that since the beginning of the negotiations, the US embassy in Havana has reduced its support to human rights organisations. For example, the US Embassy first denied a US visa to human rights activist and graffiti artist Daniel Maldonado known as "El Sexto", but after considerable international pressure, reconsidered and approved it.

**EU BURYING THEIR HEAD IN THE SAND REGARDING HUMAN RIGHTS**

As the European Union and Cuba enter the final phases of negotiations on the bilateral agreement, it is unclear how human rights might manifest. The Cuban authorities are keen to open up their economy to foreign investment in order to reap the benefits after years of economic isolation. Yet, they continue to oppress critical voices and public protests, as well as all initiatives for dialogue and cooperation between Cuban civil society, foreign governments and international organisations.

Regarding the negotiations with the EU, Elizardo Sánchez is pessimistic: **"EU diplomats in comparison with their counterparts in the US have not achieved anything significant in terms of human rights, even though they have been negotiating with the Cuban regime since 2008"**.

The US managed to secure the release of 53 political prisoners when negotiating for renewed dialogue with Cuba. Nevertheless, during 2015 a handful of them were sent back to prison without the US taking any action on their part.

According to Elizardo Sánchez, the EU needs to take a stand in favour of the Cuban people: **"The Cuban people need visible and effective solidarity from the EU so that the Cuban regime puts an end to human rights violations and political repression and releases political prisoners."**

*"EU diplomats do not pay attention to the massive and constant abuses committed by the Cuban government and they receive the testimonies of Cuban civil society as mere formalities", says Elizardo Sánchez.*

According to Antonio Rodiles, Estado de Sats are not demanding anything different than what the EU has already negotiated with other Central American countries. Human rights and democracy should be the central objective of the agreement and it should include mechanisms to monitor the implementation of the UN Covenants on Human Rights.

He also explained that for both the re-establishment of political relations with the US and the cooperation agreement with the EU, Estado de Sats demands that the Cuban government ratify and implement the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as well ensuring that the rights enshrined in the Covenants are fully exercised.

**JOINT LOBBYING EFFORTS AT EU LEVEL: A ROCKY ROAD AHEAD**

Civil Rights Defenders and Estado de Sats began an intense lobbying effort within EU structures in 2014. A hearing proceeded in 2015 in the European Parliament attended by Elizardo Sánchez and Erik Jennische, Programme Director for Latin America at Civil Rights Defenders, to hear concerns regarding the content of the agreements. Antonio Rodiles was restricted from traveling by the Cuban authorities and could only attend through a video link. Furthermore, a letter was sent to Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, together with over two dozen European and Cuban organisations demanding four aspects of the negotiation process and the future agreement.

In its response, the EU Foreign Ministry of the European External Action Service (EEAS), stated that:

**"The conclusion of the negotiations is not subject to specific political concessions or commitments by any Party."**

In other words, the EU will not demand anything from Cuba before signing the agreement. The EU strategy is to use the agreement as a "platform for constructive dialogue on all issues, including those that are raised in relation to respect of human rights, fundamental freedoms and promotion of democracy". Civil Rights Defenders will have a busy year ahead as negotiations between Cuba and the EU proceed. 📌

*"If the EU signs this kind of broad agreement with Cuba, it will open the door to other totalitarian governments to demand negotiations on cooperation and trade benefits. That could reduce the power of the EU to have a positive impact on human rights. It is an important task for Civil Rights Defenders and our partners to ensure the perspective of human rights defenders become a core part of the agenda when the EU and its individual countries negotiate with repressive governments."*

— Erik Jennische, Programme Director for Latin America at Civil Rights Defenders

**HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS UNDER CONSTANT PRESSURE IN CUBA**

Ailer Gonzalez Mena of Estado de Sats and her family were threatened by the Cuban authorities in December 2015. The security police visited her father and told him they had evidence that Ailer was meeting with the "Cuban-American mafia members of congress". They asked him if he and his wife "were currently able to receive bad news", the father having recently undergone heart surgery.

**"The supposedly bad news would be that something is going to happen to me", said Ailer Gonzalez Mena in an interview with Civil Rights Defenders.**

The security police also demanded to know whether Gonzalez Mena's daughter, who is currently residing with the parents, held the same political beliefs as she did. This is just one of the many examples of the ongoing harassment and intimidation that human rights defenders and civil society organisations face from the authorities in Cuba today.



Ailer Gonzalez Mena

Photo: Eddy Rodriguez