

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Annual Report 2009



NORWEGIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Established in 1977

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee is a non-governmental organisation that works to promote respect for human rights, nationally and internationally. Its work is based on the conviction that documentation and active promotion of human rights by civil society is needed for states to secure human rights, at home and in other countries.

The work of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC) is based on the Helsinki Declaration, which was signed by 35 European and North American states at the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) in 1975. The declaration states that respect for human rights is a key factor in the development of peace and understanding between states.

Main focal areas of the NHC are the countries of Europe, North America and Central Asia. The NHC works irrespective of ideology or political system in these countries and maintains political neutrality.

HOW WE WORK

HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING AND REPORTING

Through monitoring and reporting on problematic human rights situations in specific countries, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee sheds light on violations of human rights. The NHC places particular emphasis on civil and political rights, including the fundamental freedoms of expression, belief, association and assembly. On-site research and close co-operation with key civil society actors are our main working methods. The NHC has expertise on election observation and has sent numerous observer missions to elections over the last two decades.

SUPPORT OF DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES

By sharing knowledge and with financial assistance, the NHC supports local initiatives for the promotion of an independent civil society and public institutions as well as free media. A well functioning civil society is a precondition for the development of democracy in a society.

EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

Through education and information about democracy and human rights, international law and multi-cultural understanding, we work to increase the focus on human rights violations. Our aim is to influence both public opinion and governments in human rights matters.

INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES

Through participation in international processes, meetings and conferences, the NHC seeks to influence governments and international organisations to make human rights a priority

PERSPECTIVES:

On New Year's Eve, Russian police arrested a number of representatives of the opposition who were trying to carry out a demonstration in Moscow. Among the 50 arrested was the 82 year old human rights activist Liudmila Alekseyeva, leader of the Moscow Helsinki Group. She had joined the crowd in order to defend the right of Russians to demonstrate.

These New Year arrests are only one among many examples of how Russian authorities are exerting heavy pressure on human rights groups in the country. The situation has become more difficult for the opposition and for non-governmental organizations. Throughout 2009 a number of human rights activists, lawyers and journalists were murdered. These men and women were all characterised by a willingness to challenge the system by documenting and criticising human rights violations.

Stanislav Markelov, Natalia Estimirova, Zarema Sadulayeva and Alik Dzhabrailov are among those who were murdered in 2009 because of their work in defending human rights.

In their 2009 Annual Report, Human Rights Watch pointed to the fact that a stronger pressure is being exerted on human rights activists in a number of countries, including Russia. Part of the reason could be that human rights organisations appear to have become more efficient in their work to reveal violations and their perpetrators.

They are conceived as a threat to authoritarian regimes.

"Today, activists are capable of exposing abuses most anywhere in the world, shining an intense spotlight of shame on those responsible... that effectiveness has spawned a reaction, and that reaction grew particularly intense in 2009." (HRW Annual Report 2009, page 1).

For many years, the NHC has been an active and critical voice in terms of the difficult human rights situation in Russia. We have particularly worked on the problems facing human rights defenders in the country, and the violations that have taken place in and around the conflicts in Chechnya and elsewhere in the North Caucasus. We believe it is important to support those forces in Russia that are oriented towards human rights and democracy.

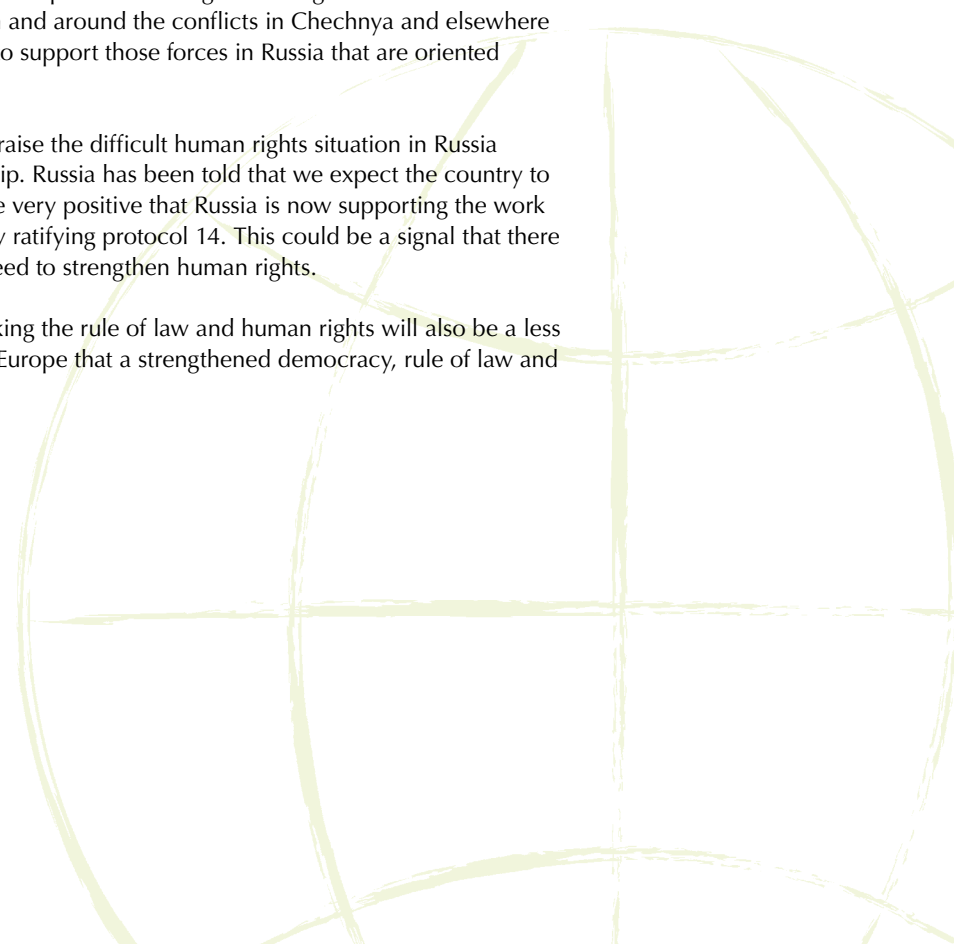
It is important that Norway shows a willingness to raise the difficult human rights situation in Russia during meetings with the Russian political leadership. Russia has been told that we expect the country to live up to its international obligations. It is therefore very positive that Russia is now supporting the work to develop the European Court of Human Rights by ratifying protocol 14. This could be a signal that there are forces in the Russian leadership who see the need to strengthen human rights.

A society with weak democratic institutions or lacking the rule of law and human rights will also be a less stable country. It is in the interests of Norway and Europe that a strengthened democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights are developed in Russia.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bjørn Engesland". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Bjørn Engesland,
Secretary General



The NHC Secretariat



Bjørn Engesland
Secretary General. Member of the board of the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, member of the board of trustees of the Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights. Head of the Norwegian Human Rights House.



Anders Nielsen
Information officer. Responsible for the EEA grants information portal www.ngonorway.org.



Mina Skouen
Project co-ordinator of the NHC human rights education programme. Responsible for programmes in North Caucasus, the Balkans and Norway.



Lene Wetteland
Project co-ordinator, Central Asia programme.

OTHER STAFF:



Aage Borchgrevink
Advisor, focus on Russia. Member of the board of the NGO Russian Justice Initiative, the Netherlands.



Csilla Czibalmos
Project assistant, human rights education programme.

Anne Marit Austbø
Advisor. On leave in 2009.

Nebojša Tašić
Regional co-ordinator of Human Rights Schools in the Western Balkans, Beograd.



Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal
Deputy Secretary General. Responsible for the work of the NHC in Central Asia, Turkey, Armenia and Rwanda. Key competence in the field of international criminal courts and justice.



Ole B. Lilleås
Advisor, focus on Western Balkans. Co-ordinator of the Norwegian NGO forum for Human Rights.



Olga Shamshur
Project assistant, election observation project and human rights education programme.

Adela Galešić
Regional co-ordinator of Human Rights Schools in the Western Balkans, Sarajevo.

Zuzanna Godzimirska
Project assistant.



Fernanda Zubillaga Nilsen
Head of administration, responsible for office management and finance.



Inna Sangadzhdiyeva
Project co-ordinator, focus on Russia and Belarus.



Vanja Bentsen Kleven
Co-ordinator for EEA grants.

Elena Mamadnazarova
Project co-ordinator at the NHC Central Asia office in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Elena Saenkova
Project co-ordinator, Murmansk office.



Berit Nising Lindeman
Head of information. Advisor, focus on Central Asia, Belarus, Ukraine and Azerbaijan. Key competence in election observation.



Enver Djuliman
Head of the NHC human rights education programme. Responsible for all education programmes, focus on the education programmes in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.



Ivar Dale
Advisor, focus on Central Asia.

Vugar Gojayev
Project co-ordinator in Baku, Azerbaijan

Organisation

The organisational components of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee are the annual meeting, the board and the council. The annual meeting is our highest organ, and consists of members of the council and the board. The board holds monthly meetings, where decisions relevant to NCH strategy, principles and financial dispositions are made. The Secretary General heads the secretariat, and is responsible for the daily operations of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee.

BOARD

Chairperson: **Morten Bergsmo**, Senior Researcher, International Peace Research Institute (PRIO).

Vice Chairperson: **Ragnhild Astrup Tschudi**, Human rights advocate with a special focus on Russia and Eastern Europe.

Hauk Lund, Executive director, Hauk Lund Consulting A/S.

Julie Wilhelmsen, Research fellow, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).

Kari Schage, Management Consultant, Resources Global Professionals.

Eirik Moen, Secretary General of the International Democrat Union.

Raymond Johansen, Secretary General of the Norwegian Labour Party.

COUNCIL

- President:**
Kristin Clemet (2010)*
- Vice President:**
Bjørn Jacobsen (2011)
- Frode Bakken (2010)
 - Trond Bakkevig (2012)
 - Peter Batta (2010)
 - Jo Benkow (2012)
 - Tor G. Birkeland (2010)
 - Anne Marit Bjørnflaten (2010)
 - Helge Blakkisrud (2011)
 - Bernt Bull (2011)
 - Nils Butenschjøn (2011)
 - Tor Bøhler (2010)
 - Juni Dahr (2012)
 - Ole Drolsum (2010)
 - Grete Faremo (2011)
 - Arne Fjeld (2010)
 - Dankert Freilem (2012)
 - Grethe Fossum (2010)
 - Bjørn Cato Funnemark (2011)
 - Fredrik Grønningsæter (2010)
 - Bernt Hagtvet (2011)
 - Hans Morten Haugen (2012)
 - Bjørn Hoelseth (2011)
 - Leiv Hovelsen (2011)
 - Anniken Huitfeldt (2010)
 - Ingunn Jordheim (2012)
 - Ellen Juul-Andersen (2011)
 - Knut Kloster jr. (2012)
 - Berit Kvæven (2012)
 - Arne Liljedahl Lynngård (2010)
 - Inge Mannsåker (2011)
 - Eigil Nansen (2010)
 - Mette Newth (2010)
 - Manuela Ramin Osmundsen (2012)
 - Pål Erik Plaum (2010)
 - Victor Roddvik (2012)
 - Jan Tore Sanner (2012)
 - Anne Julie Semb (2012)
 - Marianne B. Skou (2012)
 - Erik Solheim (2012)
 - Lars Petter Soltvedt (2010)
 - Atle Sommerfeldt (2012)
 - Bjørn Stordrange (2012)
 - Michael Tetzschner (2012)
 - Ane Sofie Tømmerås (2011)
 - Linn Ullmann (2010)
 - Kåre Vollan (2010)
 - Maria Warsinski (2011)
 - Svein Wilhelmsen (2011)
 - Stein Ivar Aarsæther (2012)
- *Election year

Content

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee	2
Perspectives	3
The NHC secretariat	4
Organisation	5
I The year 2009 in retrospect	6
Human rights defenders unwanted	6
Norway on the agenda	7
Human Rights Education Summit in Drøbak	7
ACTIVITIES, BY COUNTRY	8
The Russian Federation	8
Belarus	9
Ukraine	10
SOUTH CAUCASUS	11
Armenia	11
Azerbaijan	12
Georgia	13
Turkey	14
Greece	14
CENTRAL ASIA	15
WESTERN BALKANS	18
II Human Rights Education	19
III Human Rights in Norway	22
IV Co-operation and International Processes	23
V EEA Grants	26
VI Information	27
VII Information Technology	27
VII Finances	27

The year 2009 in retrospect

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee has a strong national and international commitment, with widespread activities in many countries. Our main focus is the human rights challenge in eastern Europe, but we also aim to be active human rights defenders in our own country, Norway. Through our expertise and the wide-ranging networks of our staff we follow developments closely, take action on urgent matters and have an extensive range of project activities. The focus is determined by our planning and decisions, but also by current events. In 2009, three major areas of our attention, concern and activity were the precarious situation for human rights defenders in Russia, the human rights situation in Norway and consolidating the international co-operation related to our human rights education programmes.

Human rights defenders unwanted

For a long time human rights defenders in Russia have been exposed to harassment, legal impediments and violence, creating an image of a Russia where human rights activity is unwanted. The violence took another serious and violent turn in 2009 when several tragic killings targeted at human rights defenders. On 15 July, Natalia Estemirova, a leading fellow worker of the Human Rights Centre Memorial in Grozny, Chechnya, was kidnapped and killed. Her death caused Memorial to close down their activities in Grozny for security reasons. Estemirova was one of our cherished contacts in Chechnya, who willingly shared insights about the situation on the ground. She was also the one who alerted us when endangered activists were in need of assistance from us for international protection. After her death, victims

no longer know where to turn. In 2009 NHC continued to underline the need for international institutions to offer special protection of those who stand at the frontline for defending human rights.

Far less dramatic, but nonetheless a development raising concern, is the repeated refusals of visas for entry into the Russian Federation to foreign human rights NGO activists. The NHC was targeted as well, and as many as four representatives of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee were refused entry to Russia in 2009. Two of them were also refused entry into other former Soviet republics in 2009. The Norwegian authorities, as well as the United Nations and the OSCE, raised concerns on our behalf.

Natalia Estemirova



In 2009, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee had a particularly active year of human rights in Norway. Following up on the public hearing on the Norwegian ethnic minority Romani /Travellers carried out in 2008, the NHC published a report in April on Norway's policies in light of Norway's international obligations. The report argued that the government should establish a truth commission to investigate and make known the abusive policies carried out in the past, but concluded that current policies are well founded in Norway's obligations to respect the rights of its national minorities. In the past, no other minority in Norway has been targeted with such intensity with brutal and systematic measures to make their cultural and linguistic community extinct. This includes heartbreaking forced separation of Romani children from their parents and their maltreatment in institutions. In

November, the government announced that it would establish a committee to investigate past policies, to a large extent in response to the report published by the NHC.

For the first time Norway went through a Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council, and the NHC was very active in following up by shadow reporting and lobbying member states to challenge Norway on key problem areas. 2009 was an election year in Norway, and we invited 28 international specialists from 14 former Soviet Union countries to observe the elections to the parliament ('Stortinget') in September. As a result, we issued a report detailing findings and recommendations for Norwegian electoral processes. In 2005, a similar project contributed to amendments to the Norwegian Election Act.

Norway on the agenda



Election observation

After our 15 years of human rights education activities, the NHC gathered our international partners for the first time for a Forum Summit in Drøbak. The intention of the week-long event was to bring the programmes closer together and let them share with each other the experience gained throughout the years of working in the human rights education field in co-operation with the Norwegian Helsinki Committee. As a result, international contact and co-operation across the programmes has flourished. Lessons from work with the divided societies in the Balkans became a starting point for respective work in North Ossetia and rebuilding of trust between young activists in North Caucasus. Belarusian organizations shared knowledge and experience at a later seminar for prison employees and officials from Russia. The Ukrainian academic approach has proved an important resource to other programmes when it

comes to persistent development of methodology, knowledge and interest for new target groups and international partnership.



Human Rights Education Summit in Drøbak

Attendants at the summit in Drøbak

Activities, by country

The Russian Federation

Developments in Russia are pivotal for all of the former Soviet republics, and the NHC has a firm commitment to the promotion of human rights in Russia. Even though President Dmitry Medvedev employs a slightly different rhetoric related to democracy and human rights than his predecessor Vladimir Putin, real improvements are hard to detect. An exception is some improvements to the NGO legislation in July. The year started badly with the killing of the prominent lawyer Stanislav Markelov in Moscow on 19 January. Freelance journalist from Novaya Gazeta Anastasia Baburova was shot dead in the same attack. Markelov was well known as a defender of the victims of human rights abuses in Russia, especially those of the conflict in Chechnya.

In October Maksharip Aushev, the owner of the internet site www.ingushetia.org, was killed.

In Dagestan and Ingushetia, the insurgency and death toll increased. The situation is reflected by more than 120 decisions by the European Court of Human Rights by the end of 2009, in which the state of Russia is held responsible for human rights abuses in the North Caucasian republics.

The freedom of assembly is suppressed. Some 500 demonstrators were detained while participating in public mass gatherings, mostly deemed illegal by the authorities. On 31 December, Ludmila Alexeeva, an 82 year-old head of Moscow Helsinki Group was among the detained while she demonstrated in support of article 31 of the Russian Constitution, which guarantees the freedom of assembly.

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee continued to feel the resistance from the Russian Federation, and experienced increasing problems obtaining visas to visit Russia in connection with our activities. Head of the education department, Enver Djuliman, was fined for the second time in March, allegedly for overstepping the conditions of his visa. The NHC filed complaints to the court, but lost in all three available instances: the Murmansk regional court, the Murmansk Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation on 20 November. Our colleague Svetlana Gannushkina in Moscow made attempts to register invitations for Secretary General Bjørn Engesland with a view to obtaining a visa. However, on 27 November Gannushkina was informed by FSB that neither Bjørn Engesland nor Enver Djuliman was welcome in the Russian Federation. In addition to Bjørn Engesland and Enver Djuliman, Ivar Dale and Mina Skouen have previously been denied entry into Russia. The NHC raised the visa problems with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Demonstration outside the Russian embassy in Oslo after the killing of Stanislav Markelov and Anastasia Baburova

Although the anti-terror operation in Chechnya was officially terminated on 16 April, terrorist attacks continued vigorously. Human rights violations, including the use of torture, were rampant. The rule of Ramzan Kadyrov does still not offer any security for the inhabitants, and it has become even more dangerous to be a human rights defender in the region. On 15 July, Natalia Estemirova, a leading fellow worker of the Human Rights Centre Memorial in Grozny, Chechnya, was first kidnapped and then found killed. Oleg Orlov, chairman of human rights NGO Memorial, accused the president of the Chechen Republic of being responsible for the murder of Estemirova. Kadyrov, in its turn, started a lawsuit against Memorial, and Memorial decided to close their office in Chechnya, due to the lack of security. Zarema Saidullaeva, a leader of the humanitarian organisation Save the Generation, was killed together with her husband in Chechnya in August.

Ludmila Alexeeva



Svetlana Gannushkina





Grigory Yavlinskiy and Bjørn Engesland



Svetlana Gannushkina, Grigory Yavlinskiy and Bellona leader Frederic Hauge

ACTIVITIES

The difficulty in obtaining visas for the NHC stopped several of the planned visits to the Russian Federation. However, the NHC continued to follow up the human rights situation, in particular through our broad network of partners in Russia.

In June 2009, the NHC arranged the seminar “Will the financial crisis open up for a democratic development?” in partnership with environmental NGO Bellona. Svetlana Gannushkina, leader of the organisation “Civic Assistance Committee” and the former leader of the liberal party “Yabloko”, Gregory Yavlinsky, contributed to the seminar.

Asylum seekers from the North Caucasus represent one of the largest groups of asylum seekers in Norway. Despite the declining security situation in the North Caucasus and recommendations from the UNHCR, the asylum applications of the people from this region are largely rejected by the Norwegian Immigration Authorities. In 2009 the NHC continued to give assistance and expertise on the situation in the North Caucasus to the lawyers in the cases where we consider applicants need protection.

Belarus under President Alexander Lukashenko is still characterised by a concentration of power and authoritarian rule, suppression of independent media and NGOs, arbitrary arrests and harassment of opposition forces. The Norwegian Helsinki Committee continues its active involvement for the improvement of the human rights situation in Belarus, including support for civil society.

The European Union and Norway have prolonged the suspension of the visa sanctions against most Belarusian senior officials. At the same time, the EU notes that Belarus has failed to make any significant progress in the sphere of human rights. The Belarus-EU rapprochement through the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement is put on hold await-

ing Belarusian authorities’ proven commitment to improve its practices in the field of human rights. While all political prisoners were freed in 2008, four new prisoners, Mikalaj Autukhovich, Uladzimir Asipienka, Yury Lyavonau and Artsiom Dubski, were convicted in 2009 for criminal activity. However, as the cases brought against them were motivated by their civil society activity, they are considered to be political prisoners. Our partner NGO, Nasha Viasna, tried again in August to become registered, but failed. The authorities used formal pretexts for the refusal, which was expected. However, the NGO For Freedom, led by former presidential candidate Alexander Milinkevich, was registered, as the only NGO of its kind for several years. The freedom of assembly is still severely

Belarus



Belarusian civil society leaders in panel discussion



Anatoly Lebedko and Andrei Sannikov



Berit Lindeman and Alexander Kazulin

restricted, and several rallies were forcefully disrupted by police and special Ministry of Interior forces. The media faced another restriction when a new law came into force in April forcing all media outlets to re-register. In December, renowned journalist Iryna Khalip received several threats to her life in connection with an article she published in the Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta.

Head of NHC's education department, Enver Djuliman, was refused entry into Belarus in October. It is likely that this denial stems from decisions made by the Russian Federation concerning his entry into Russia.

ACTIVITIES

In March we visited our partners in Belarus to follow up on the developments in the country. In addition, we also participated in The VI Congress of Belarusian Non – Governmental Organisations and Initiatives.

In May we hosted prominent opposition politicians and NGO representatives to discuss the invitation by the European Union to join the Eastern Partnership in a seminar *The Belarus Road Map to Europe – the Road to Democracy?* Among the speakers were leader of the United Civil Party Anatoly Lebedko, presidential candidate and freed political prisoner Alexander Kazulin and Charter97 Chairman Alexander Sannikov. All speakers highlighted the importance of conditional rapprochement to Belarus, consistently insisting on democratic reforms. They feared for increased economic co-operation at the expense of human rights.



Innovative Theatre group Belarus Free Theater

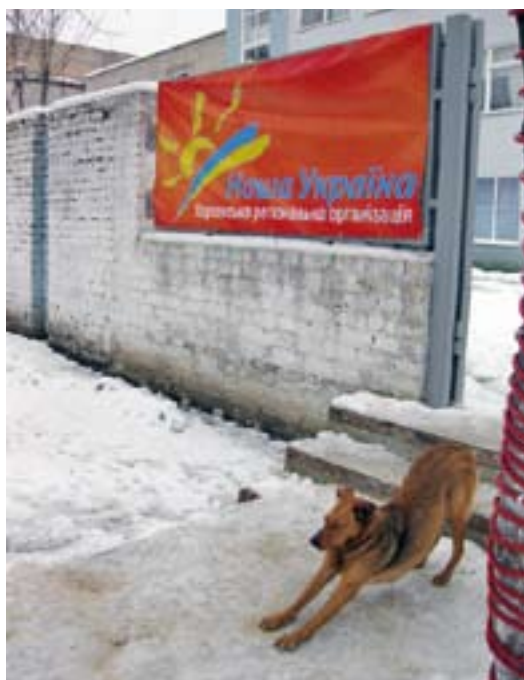
The NHC issued or supported several statements concerning events in Belarus. In February we condemned the use of force against youth during a protest action on Valentine's Day, February 14. We also protested on several occasions, together with Human Rights House Foundation, over the harassment and criminal charges against Belarusian Helsinki Committees activist Leonid Svetik. In July, we expressed regret that the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus established criminal responsibility for activities of unregistered civil organisations, particularly in view of the fact that in particular independent human rights organisations fail to register despite repeated attempts. The NHC also participated with speakers at seminars organised in Norway by the think-tank Civita and by the Young Liberals.

Ukraine

PROJECT SUPPORT

- › Kharkiv Public Committee for Human Rights Defence: Conducting public actions to improve human rights in Ukraine.

The fifth and last year as President for Orange Revolution leader Victor Yushchenko was dominated by the financial crisis and a deep recession. The political deadlock that had lasted since 2005 continued, and Yushchenko's promise of euro-integration seemed further away than it had been for several years. As the end of his term neared, one could conclude that the Orange Revolution had failed to deliver on many of its promised reforms. However, compared to pre-revolution Ukraine, Ukrainians do experience more respect for fundamental freedoms like freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and of association. Human rights activists were, however, concerned that these de facto freedoms were not sufficiently secured in the still unreformed legislation. Corruption in society, including in the courts system, is still widespread, and ill-treatment in detention is a problem yet to be resolved.



Still big challenges after the Orange Revolution

South Caucasus

Since the disputed presidential elections of 19 February 2008, the excessive use of police force and the state of emergency that followed, a negative trend related to Armenia's human rights record has prevailed. The government followed up these events by putting hundreds of people on trial and many were sentenced to up to five years' imprisonment for violence against a government official, whereas no policemen have been investigated or charged with excessive use of force. Calls from local and international human rights groups to allow for international investigations into the way the popular protests were handled by law enforcement forces have been ignored by the government.

The freedom of the press and of assembly have been severely restricted following these events. Several human rights activists, for example Harshaluys Hakobyan, were arrested, and the journalists Hrach Melkumian, Edik Baghdasarian, Argishti Kivirian and others were assaulted and beaten.

Torture and abuse in prisons and military institutions continue to be rife.

ACTIVITIES

The NHC observed the elections for Mayor in Yerevan on 31 May 2009. The NHC had a base with one of our partners, the Civil Society Institute,



Polling station

which at the time was running an election hotline. Several shortcomings during the elections were noted, along with severe incidents regarding limitations on the freedom of the press and assembly during the campaign period. A significant police presence prevented any large-scale demonstrations.

In December 2009, the Armenian psychiatrist and head of psychiatric institutions in Yerevan, Anaida Gevorgyan, visited Norway to study conditions in Norwegian psychiatric institutions. The visit was part of long-term efforts by the NHC to facilitate contacts between Norwegian and Armenian authorities on ways to improve conditions in closed institutions.

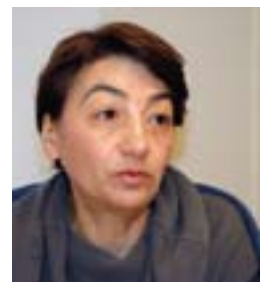
Elections for Mayor in Yerevan



Armenia

PROJECT SUPPORT

- Armenian Helsinki Association: Monitoring of the situation with human rights and administration of justice in Armenia
- Armenian Helsinki Committee: Monitoring freedom of conscience and of religious organisations in Armenia
- Caucasus Media Institute: Teaching journalists to report politics, economics and social issues
- Civil Society Institute: Torture prevention in Armenia
- We for Civil Equality: Information activities on rights of sexual minorities (LGTB).



Anaida Gevorgyan

Azerbaijan

The Azerbaijani government, headed by President Ilham Aliyev, continues to tighten its grip over society by means of human rights violations. In March a controversial and hastily called referendum adopting as many as 41 constitutional amendments was carried out in an atmosphere of intimidation of voters. The central amendment was also the most controversial one, and removing the two-term limit for the Presidency means that incumbent Ilham Aliyev now may be President for life, although through regular re-election. Several other of the adopted amendments gave reason for concern, most notably an addition to the article regarding the right to personal immunity, now stating that "no-one shall be followed, filmed, photographed or recorded without consent". As the practice of impeding journalism and incrimination of critical journalists is already a serious concern, this addition opens up to further abuse.



Rafto prize 2009 laureate Malahat Nasibova. Photo: Lind & Lunde 2009

PROJECT SUPPORT

- Institute for Peace and Democracy: Monitoring the Judicial system. Assistance to civil society and the mass media.
- Human rights and electoral initiatives: Raising awareness of the European Court of Human Rights and its complaint mechanism.

The persecution of media representatives continued relentlessly throughout the year. The prisons filled up as at least eight journalists were convicted on criminal libel or defamation charges. Other journalists were subjected to violence, incidents never investigated seriously by the authorities. Editor Novruzali Mammadov died in prison, his death most likely caused or accelerated by lack of care. In July the two bloggers Adnan Hajizade and Emin Milli were arrested for hooliganism, and in November convicted to two and two-and-a-half years' imprisonment after a court case. The case was widely condemned, nationally and internationally, and may be viewed as a warning towards any young debaters in society. Editor Eunullah Fattullayev, who has been sentenced to two-and-a-half and eight-and-a-half years in prison and who filed a case with against the European Court of Human Rights, was charged again at the end of the year. On 29 December, 0.223 grammes of heroin was found on Fatullayev, who has never been known to abuse drugs. The incident may be viewed in connection with the case with the European court, expected to be heard in 2010.

IDP settlement



Human rights defender Leyla Yunus faced criminal charges for libel for publishing facts presented at a court trial, but the charges were later dropped. In the exclave of Nakhchivan, serious repression of ordinary people was documented, including several cases of forced commitment to psychiatric institutions of persons who had protested against injustice.

Although Azerbaijan received a lot of negative reactions, amongst others by the OSCE, Council of Europe and the UN Torture Committee, the government consistently defies any criticism.



Studying the amendments to the Constitution

ACTIVITIES

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee attempted to observe the referendum, but received its usual refusal from the Central Election Commission. However we were present in the country and met with a number of representatives of society, including ordinary voters. The NHC issued a statement in which we expressed serious concerns, both about the subject for the referendum and the process under which it was carried out.

The NHC nominated journalist and human rights defender Malahat Nasibova from Nakhchivan for the 2009 Rafto prize for her activities in reporting on and supporting the victims of the repressive regime in the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan. She received the award in Bergen in October. The NHC actively participated in debates and professional expertise during the event. The committee also published the first comprehensive report about the grave human rights situation in the exclave, entitled *Azerbaijan's dark island*.

The NHC nominated the journalist Natiq Gavadly of the opposition newspaper Bizim Yol, imprisoned editor Ganimat Sahid and his brother, the imprisoned satirical journalist, Sakit Sahid, both from the newspaper Azadliq, for the Freedom of Expression Foundation/ZEIT Stiftung's press prize for 2009. As a result, Gavadly and the newspaper Azadliq received the prizes in Oslo in May 2009.



Sheki



IDP settlement



Meeting with a regional politician

Liberal Party leader Lala Shovket



The NHC, alone or together with several other international NGOs, issued several statements in connection with the developments in Azerbaijan. We protested at the criminal charges against Leyla Yunus, made a statement in connection with the anniversary of the killing of critical editor Elmar Huseynov and expressed concern over proposed

amendments to the NGO law, which would increase pressure against NGOs. We also protested against the sentencing of the two bloggers, Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade. The NHC was also active in the media in Norway and internationally, commenting on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan.

In Georgia, political tensions continued throughout 2009 in the aftermath of the August 2008 war in South Ossetia. The NHC continued to work with our main partner in the country, the Human Rights Centre, on documenting human rights violations around the conflict zones and also worked with victims in need of international relocation and protection. During a visit to Tbilisi in 2009, the NHC also met with local organisations to discuss human rights developments in the country.

In the framework of a project on war crimes in Georgia, a representative of the NHC also travelled to Tbilisi to hold training on accountability and ways for non-governmental organisations to present their findings nationally and internationally, and to evaluate the work being done to process materials collected during the autumn of 2008. These findings have been delivered to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and presented to the EU committee investigating the South Ossetia war. We also held meetings with our counterparts in Russia on co-operation on collecting data and presenting it to local courts.

Georgia

Tbilisi



PROJECT SUPPORT

- › Human Rights and Documentation Centre

Turkey

The NHC has had activities in Turkey almost from the start of the organisation in 1977, focusing on freedom of expression, freedom of religion, prevention of torture, plus women's and minority issues.

During the year the NHC entered into dialogue with Kurdish political parties on the current reform processes in Turkey, gradually granting more linguistic and cultural rights to the Kurdish population. However, when it comes to political rights, policies remain restrictive. The Kurdish Workers

Party (PKK) remains outlawed as a 'terrorist organisation', and any political party suspected of having ties to it will be prosecuted and closed down if found guilty.

The NHC proposed a project which would look into this and other aspects of the current politics around the 'Kurdish problem', but was unsuccessful in finding a financial partner during the year.

The NHC also took part as an expert witness in asylum cases brought before Norwegian courts.

Greece

In October 2009, a fact-finding trip of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Norwegian Organization for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) and Aitima resulted in a report detailing the practice of illegal deportations of asylum-seekers from Greece and the danger this represents in the wider context of European member states and the concept of non-refoulement.

The report, *Out the Back Door: The Dublin II Regulation and illegal deportations from Greece*, found that persons returned to Greece from European countries under the Dublin agreement risk being deported without ever having their cases assessed by competent asylum authorities. Illustrated by a number of disturbing cases documented by the NHC and their partners during their research, the report concluded that serious violations of European asylum law are taking place and that returns to Greece should be halted until real improvements are made in the Greek system.

Spread widely in our own networks, the published report was also presented to the Europe office of the UNHCR in Brussels and as well as at a press conference in Athens.

Beyond the actual report, the NHC were also highly engaged in the topic of Dublin returnees throughout the year, commenting in the media on worsening conditions for this group of asylum seekers due to policy decision on the side of the Norwegian immigration authorities. Together with



Refugee camp in Patras

NOAS, we issued press releases expressing disappointment at what we feel is an irresponsible attitude towards those at serious risk of refoulement if returned to Greece. We also raised the issue in the Norwegian media.

Through a combined seminar and exhibition in May at the Nobel Peace Centre we also raised the issue of asylum seekers in Greece and the Norwegian responsibility towards them. *Unfair and Inefficient? – The Dublin II and the right to asylum in Europe* brought together Norwegian politicians and international experts in the field of asylum law for a discussion on this topic, as well as for the opening of the exhibition of Linda Bournane Engelberth's moving photographs from Greek asylum camps. The exhibition, with texts provided by NHC, was called "Waiting Room", and was open through August.

Refugees living on the beach



Afghan asylum seeker in Patras

Seminar Nobels Peace Center



Central Asia

With increased international, including Norwegian, attention on the Central Asian states, one would think that this results from improved social and political conditions in the region. Sadly, the human rights situation in Central Asia is in fact worsening, and the republics in the region appear neither committed to improvement nor open to criticism from inside or outside the country.

Along with the increased efforts from Norwegian businesses, most notably Statoil in Kazakhstan and its efforts to establish in Turkmenistan, Norway has established its embassy in Astana, to be opened formally in February 2010. This has already contributed to more public attention in Norway towards the region and the NHC took part in the discussions in several different fora.

Kazakhstan has seen a positive development in the economic sphere, and was in 2009 preparing its chairmanship of the OSCE for 2010. Despite the upcoming chairmanship, the human rights situation in Kazakhstan worsened, in particular in the legal sphere. Whereas a controversial draft law on religion was rejected at the last minute, another controversial Internet law was approved. Civil society and the media are not allowed to fill the functions they should in a democratic society. The outspoken and respected human rights activist Evgeny Zhovtis was imprisoned. Zhovtis was involved in a car accident where he killed a young pedestrian, and was sentenced to four years' imprisonment in a flawed trial with indications that the process was politically biased.

Demonstration for human rights in Kyrgyzstan



Human rights defender Evgeniy Zhovtis in court

In **Kyrgyzstan** presidential elections were held in July 2009. Thus, the incumbent president Bakiyev continues leading Kyrgyzstan away from the "island of democracy", as it was once called. The freedom of assembly is severely limited; there have been physical attacks on journalists and political figures; and several human rights activists have been arrested, denied entry or deported. Persecution against Moslems under the cover of anti-terrorism continues, and international educational institutions like the OSCE Academy have had their licenses revoked.

Tajikistan is struggling with providing even basic assistance to its citizens because of bad governance on all levels. Civil society, the media and even the private lives of citizens are kept under strict control through restrictive legislation. The already challenged economy was hard hit by the financial crisis. Many labour migrants have returned home without money or prospects for work, contributing to an atmosphere of dissatisfaction.

Uzbekistan remains one of the most repressive regimes in the world. Over the last few years there has been increasing pressure on religious groups under the pretext of anti-terrorism policy. Human rights activists, members of the opposition and believers are routinely imprisoned, the use of torture is common, and civil society operates under near impossible terms. While most international humanitarian and human rights organisations have been forced to leave the country, Western diplomacy and investment is increasing, apparently unconditional of improvements in the human rights field.



Uzbekistan's president
Islam Karimov

When Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) left the country in December 2009, it meant international



Tashkent

NGOs are no longer present in **Turkmenistan**. No international human rights activists are allowed to enter the country, and several Turkmen citizens, including students, are put on blacklists and banned from leaving the country. Despite increased contact with multinational oil and gas companies, there is no improvement for the citizens. Most opposition politicians have left the country.



Andrey Zatoka

Gulgeldy Annaniyazov, a Turkmen dissident with political asylum in Norway who was imprisoned after he returned to Turkmenistan the summer of 2008, remains behind bars and has been held incommunicado ever since his arrest. According to reports, he has been sentenced to eleven years' imprisonment under unknown charges. The environmentalist Andrey Zatoka was arrested in October 2009. He was sentenced to five years in prison, but was released in November on condition that he give up his Turkmen citizenship and leave the country immediately.

ACTIVITIES

The representative office in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, is closed following NHC Central Asia representative Ivar Dale's deportation. The issue of Dale's deportation and his status as persona non grata in Kyrgyzstan has been raised with the Kyrgyz authorities on several occasions and on all levels, including through the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, in the OSCE Permanent Council for the second time, and in bilateral meetings. The question remains unresolved, however, and Dale is banned from entering Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation.

The NHC was present with one observer at the presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan in 2009. However, the NHC observer was denied accreditation, and the denial of accreditation was likely linked to the difficulties faced by the NHC in the country in 2008.

A representative office is now in the registration process in Almaty, Kazakhstan, with one representative based there to oversee the process and start creating a network. The representative has followed and reported from the trials against the

Bazar in Ishkasim in Tajikistan



Polling station in Bishkek





Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon

human rights activist Evgeniy Zhovtis. The NHC was actively involved in the process for the release of environmentalist Andrey Zatoka, by writing letters to international institutions as well as to the Turkmen government.

In February 2009, the NHC published a documentary on Turkmenistan made by the freelance journalist Simon Ostrovsky on assignment for the NHC. Filming inside one of the most inaccessible countries in the world is extremely difficult, and the documentary gives a valuable look inside one of the most repressive regimes in the world. The documentary is accessible on www.youtube.com and www.nhc.no.

The NHC has developed two advocacy documents together with activists from Turkmenistan and several international human rights and transparency organisations – A “Common Vision”, targeting multinational companies which aim to invest in Turkmenistan, and an “NGO Access Letter” encouraging Turkmen authorities to let international NGOs access the country. The documents have been shared widely with institutions with interests in Turkmenistan.

The process for the release of the Turkmen dissident Gulgeldy Annaniyazov also continued in 2009, most recently at the ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw in October. The NHC has had a presence on Norwegian radio and in newspapers, through interviews, comments and statements on the situation in the Central Asian countries.

Several NGOs in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have received support for small projects through our small grants fund. In Kyrgyzstan, development of civil society through activist training and a critical radio station have been prioritised. In Kazakhstan, the new media law has inspired NGOs to work on improvements in the



Delegation visit to Astana with Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights.

freedom of expression, as well as monitoring of prisons and the rights of prisoners with HIV/AIDS. In Tajikistan, four projects aimed at improving the freedom of the press were finalised in 2009.

The NHC has coordinated a project with the Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights, Forum 18 News Service, Norwegian Mission to the East and the Oslo Coalition for Freedom of Religion or Belief, aimed at improving the freedom of religion in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. In November, the NHC and the Oslo Coalition travelled to Almaty for interviews with religious minority groups. The groups described problems and presented recommendations. In December, a delegation from the Oslo Centre and the NHC travelled to Astana for meetings with Kazakh officials, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Kanat Saudabayev. It raised problems in the sphere of freedom of religion. A report of the project findings is written and will be used to highlight the situation in 2010.

Statue in Pamir Mountain in Tajikistan



Western Balkans



Monitoring human rights for persons deprived of their liberty, Helsinki Committees of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Norway, Sokolac, March 2009.

PROJECT SUPPORT

Project co-operation with partner committees in the Western Balkans has been the most important work in 2009. In particular projects have involved monitoring, reporting and consciousness-raising in the field of human rights in Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro.

- Albanian Helsinki Committee for human rights
- Helsinki Committee for human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Helsinki Committee for human rights in Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Helsinki Committee for human rights in Macedonia
- Helsinki Committee for human rights in Montenegro.

In 2009 international attention in the Western Balkans was focused on the trouble spots of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the dividing nationalist politics grew in intensity and paralyzed the county's institutions further, a situation unlikely to change at least until the elections to be held in November 2010. Serbia is divided in the question of its political future. The goal of EU membership remains popular, but the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia has warned against a backlash of conservative forces, driven by supporters of Milosevic's policies of the 1990s. In Albania political fronts hardened following tightly fought parliamentary elections in June. Macedonia's name dispute with Greece continued to hamper the prospects of European-Atlantic integration. Montenegro held uncontested parliamentary elections in March, while Macedonia had a presidential election in the same month. Security concerns for human rights activists and journalists remained a serious concern in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

Transitional justice is still a key concern and priority area for the NHC. As the case against Radovan Karadzic was about to get underway at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Ratko Mladic and Goran Hadzic have still not been apprehended. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the work to address the huge backlog of cases moves forward slowly. The extension of the presence of international judges and prosecutors at those chambers of the State Court of BiH, which deals with war crimes and corruption, was highly politicised and was only adopted at the end of the year by the intervention of the High Representative. It remains a problem that few cases have been delegated to lower courts and that the capacities of lower level courts to deal with such cases has not been developed in areas such as witness protection.

Denial of war crimes committed by one's own ethnic kin and a rejection of findings of international and domestic courts remain regional problems. Although regional co-operation has improved, much remains to be done; especially the lack of extradition agreements between the countries provides de facto immunity from prosecution for many alleged perpetrators. With respect to reconciliation the NHC has noted with dismay that nationalistic sentiments are on the rise among youth in the region.

ACTIVITIES

A delegation from the NHC took part in monitoring conditions for persons deprived of their liberty, which is part of our project co-operation with the



The mosque in Fazlagica Kula, Bosnia and Herzegovina, burned down in December 2008. The area has a tradition of harassment of Muslim returnees. (Photo: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska).

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in BaH. The delegation met with national and international stakeholders in the fields of prisons and human rights standards, as well as transitional justice. The NHC Secretary General Bjørn Engesland made a follow-up visit in October.

A delegation from the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska visited Norway in June 2009. The delegation met with a number of Norwegian actors in the reconciliation and transitional justice field to learn from experiences and explore possible partnerships. The delegation also met with Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials.

Secretary General Bjørn Engesland visited Serbia in October to follow up on our co-operation with the Helsinki Committee in Serbia.

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. In October the NHC addressed the OSCE HDIM with a statement on transitional justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The address, which was supported by both the Helsinki Committee in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Helsinki Committee in Republika Srpska, BiH, was part of NHC advocacy for implementation of the plan for processing war crimes cases in the country.

Mitrovica is still a divided city



Human Rights Education

The primary goal of our human rights education is development of democratic societies where people actively participate in the advancement of a human rights culture and where the achievement of individual rights goes hand in hand with international standards, and where the conflicts are solved through an open dialogue, securing a peaceful coexistence.

Our human rights education programme focuses on four main areas:

1. HR education as a means to developing strong civil society and free media
2. HR education as a condition for the attainment of individual rights, plus individual capability/opportunity when it comes to actively participating in society
3. Work on rebuilding trust and reconciliation after conflict, in order to secure lasting peace and peaceful coexistence.
4. Monitoring of the situation with regards to human rights education, with the aim of influencing the commitment of the individual states in this area

The year 2009 was marked by intensive activity through our existing partnerships, also involving new target groups and partners. Thousands of new people became engaged in our work, and we believe we have indeed contributed to strengthening human rights culture in the areas in which we work.

BARENTS PROGRAMME

The Barents programme is a joint project involving a number of governmental and non-governmental actors in Finnmark, Norway, on one side, and in the Russian cities of Murmansk and Arkhangelsk, as well as the Karelian Republic, on the other. The intention is to contribute to a positive development in the region and to enhance partnership across borders. The programme has existed since 2000.

In 2009, 70 students and 25 teachers received training in human rights and methods used in peace studies. An exciting development for the work of the NHC in general has been our success in facilitating dialogue between journalists and human rights activists in the region. The participants of this event expressed their wish to create more arenas for such interaction. Notwithstanding the practical difficulties connected with work in Russia, our department has also managed to organise educational programmes for prison employees and officials, where they learn how they can comply with the international standards in their prisons. We have also initiated work aimed at training the members of commissions responsible for monitoring the conditions in closed institutions.

UKRAINE PROGRAMME – “LET US UNDERSTAND HUMAN RIGHTS”

Our involvement in the region begun in 2007 and has been developed into co-operation between the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (UHHRU), the youth organisation M' ART and 15 other organisations. The project grew rapidly into a programme, which in the year 2009 ensured the training of over 300 students, human rights activists, journalists, teachers and members of the Ministry of the Interior's human rights monitoring group.

Through the initial training in human rights, the participants have been able to expand their involvement in other directions, such as human rights monitoring, work with disabled people, project development and activism.

Conference in Kiev



All activities are planned and carried out both locally and on the regional level, in order to support the build-up and development of civic society in the whole country. Sixteen youth groups are now working on human rights projects all across Ukraine to pass this knowledge on locally. Results and conclusions of the work done through our programme became the basis for the Human Rights Education Conference in Kiev, which gathered over 150 people. More information about the conference is available at: www.edu.helsinki.org.ua

PROGRAMME FOR HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN BELARUS

The programme Human Rights education in Belarus started in 2006 and continued to develop as a partnership between the NHC and several Belarusian organisations. Since then, many journalists, young people, teachers and human rights activists have participated in human rights schools and seminars. The young activists who have undergone the training and are now working with their own projects, and have thus incurred the responsibility to promote democratic development and change. In Belarus this is challenging, often connected with risks of government interference and arrests of activists and repercussions against relatives. For this reason, it is important for the citizens to know their rights and how to defend themselves in legal ways. For security reasons, much of the programme is carried out outside the borders of Belarus.



Role play at a human rights school

WESTERN BALKAN

In the Western Balkan, the NHC and our partners provided human rights education to more than 550 young people in 2009. The same youngsters have in turn organised peer education about

Build bridges not walls.
Photo: Youth group of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina

This year we have focused on the crimes of the recent past in Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo. Witnesses at the time address them with stories of their war experience. They also send a strong message, such as from one of the mothers of Srebrenica encountering the youngsters, while grieving at her family's grave: "Make sure that this will not happen again to anyone." In April we brought policy-makers in Mostar together with pupils from one of the 32 ethnically divided schools in the city. The young people had a clear and united message: "We do not want to be separated anymore – we did not create this division, and it is you who need to deal with it!"

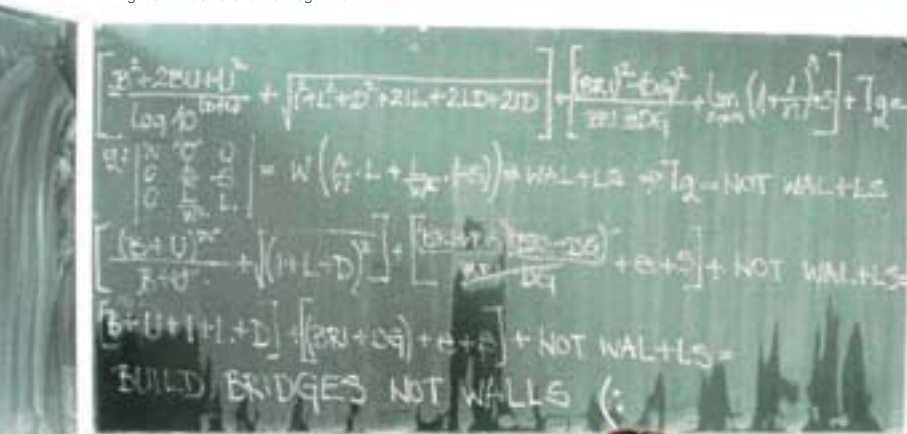


Youth attending a human rights school in Mostar

human rights and activities touching upon sensitive and controversial issues such as the rebuilding of trust after war crimes, the rights of sexual minorities and hate speech and crimes towards the Roma. More than 20,000 people have been part of these activities. In a situation where the region is moving towards a more nationalist orientation, one of the few opportunities that the young have to interact and bond across borders is through our programmes.

NORTH CAUCASUS

The security situation in the North Caucasus deteriorated in 2009. In particular, the situation for human rights activists has become more dangerous and exposed. An atmosphere of intimidation and apathy is evident, even among the young population, and few have the courage to stand up and support the activists by opposing the government





Training at a human rights school. Photo: Youth group of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Montenegro

propaganda that human rights defenders are enemies of the state. In co-operation with the Civic Assistance Committee, more than 60 young people have been educated in human rights and tolerance. This has been our contribution to increasing the support for human rights in the population, aiming at more assistance to the activists themselves. The participants learn what their rights are and how they can protect these and the rights of others. They have been developing as activists by providing urgent health care in the mountainous regions, by educating future professionals on corruption, by working with their peers on understanding concepts of tolerance and much more.

SUMMIT IN DRØBAK

In June the NHC gathered all our international partners for the Forum Summit in Drøbak. The intention of this one-week event was to bring the programmes closer together and let people share with each other the experience gained throughout the years of working in the field of human rights education. As a result, international contact and co-operation across the programmes has flourished. Lessons from work with the divided societies in the Balkans became a starting point for respective work in North Ossetia and rebuilding of trust between young activists in the North Caucasus. Belarusian organisations contributed with knowledge and experience from the prisons in their country, which they later shared at the seminar for the prison employees and officials from Russia.

The Ukrainian academic approach has proved an important resource to other programmes when it comes to persistent development of methodology, knowledge and interest for new target groups and international partnership. While the difficulties in obtaining visas to Russia faced by the employees of the NHC have made our work in this country challenging, the meeting in Drøbak opened new possibilities and ways to ensure that our activity in Russia can keep its vitality and high quality. It also demonstrated that the results achieved in various countries acquire a new dimension when put into an international perspective. Thus, similar experiences from the regions marked by conflict and human rights violations aid other programmes to

PUBLICATIONS:

- The book *Build bridges, not walls* is translated into Russian
- *Manual for Organizing of Human Rights Schools* is published in Belarusian
- *Handbook Teaching Youth Human Rights* is published in Ukrainian.



Russian version of the book 'Build bridges not walls'.

Building bridges



Human Rights in Norway

The NHC was actively involved in activities related to Norwegian human rights protection in 2009. We published several reports and engaged in the protection of refugees and asylum seekers in our country. For the first time since the establishment of the UN Human Rights Council, Norway was scrutinised through the Universal Periodic Review, and the NHC was a central NGO partner for submitting a written report about main human rights concerns in Norway to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Repeating our successful project from 2005, we invited international partners to Norway to observe the Norwegian parliamentary elections in September.



State Secretary Raimo Valle and Bjørn Engesland

PROJECT ON THE ROMANI PEOPLE/TRAVELLERS

The NHC concluded a project on Norwegian policies on one of the national minorities in Norway, the *Romani people* or *Travellers*, by publishing an extensive report (in April) on Norwegian policies both in the past and the present. The report evaluates these policies in light of Norway's international human rights obligations at the time. The project also included public hearings and seminars, as well as dialogues with individuals and organisations of the Romani people.

The report concluded that even though current policies are well founded in Norway's international obligations to respect and protect the rights of its national minorities, further strengthening of these policies is necessary in order to correct past abuses.

The report argued that the government should establish a truth commission in order to investigate and make known the abusive policies of the past which almost succeeded in destroying the Romani people as a distinct cultural and linguistic community. No other minority in Norway has been targeted with such intensity and systematic use of brutal measures, such as taking children away from their parents and enforced sterilisation of members of

the group. Even though policies have shifted and supportive measures have been put in place, the future survival of the Romani culture and language remains uncertain.

In an important breakthrough, in November 2009 the Government announced that it would establish a committee to investigate past policies and their consequences for the group, referring to the NHC report as one of the reasons for setting up the committee.

The NHC took part in several seminars and discussions on Norwegian policies in the area, among others the 2009 Falstad seminar.

INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION IN NORWAY

In September 2009, The NHC hosted an international election observation mission (IEOM) of the election to the Norwegian *Storting*. Twenty eight election experts and NGO representatives from 12 CIS countries monitored as short-term observers the voting process on the election day, September 14 2009.

A follow-up of a very successful observation project in 2005, this event was aimed to put together participants' earlier election observation experience with an introduction to elections in a developed democracy. All the mission members were selected on previous merit and commitment to promoting democracy in their respective home countries, and among serious actors in the region. The project was thus also designed to facilitate the establishment of a sound contact network. The observers represented the following countries: Armenia (2), Azerbaijan (3), Belarus (2), Georgia (1), Kyrgyzstan (3), Kazakhstan (2), Moldova (2), Abkhazia (1), Russia (4), Tajikistan (2), Turkmenistan (2), Ukraine (2) and Uzbekistan (2).

Election observers in front of Stortinget



All the observers were, in addition, trained in Norway. The group received two days of training from various specialists in the field of Norwegian election law and practices, as well as election observation practices in general. The programme also included meeting with representatives of the youth wings of the largest political parties in Norway, receiving an introduction to the role of the electronic media in Norwegian election campaigns, plus a visit to *Stortinget* and Oslo City Hall.

Having obtained the initial training, the 14 teams observed the voting in a total of 120 polling stations distributed throughout the Oslo area, in Bergen, Tromsø, Trondheim and Karasjok, as well as Eidsvoll, Drammen and Ski. The observers all came from OSCE member states and the observation was also based on the methodology and standards of the OSCE.

The election observers also tested a new tool for reporting observations via the internet and using SMS, and entered findings into the website www.norwayvotes.org.

The main findings of the election observation were presented at a press conference on Tuesday 15 September 2009, and later put in a report.

The observers were impressed by the high level of trust between the voters and the election administration, and some of the observers concluded these elections were probably the first truly democratic elections they had observed. They added that the Norwegian example clearly demonstrated the supreme importance of the public confidence and implementation of the law over the quality and detail of the law itself. The observers did, however, make some suggestions to improve the security of the voting. Among the recommendations the observers made were to seal all ballot boxes and to have enough ballot boxes at each polling station in order to avoid emptying full ballot boxes during the course of the polling day. The recommendations also included that voters should sign directly in the voters' registers, and not only be crossed out by the polling station functionary.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

During the year, the NHC continued to work on a co-operative project with the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (NCHR) to evaluate Norwegian legislation and practice on freedom of religion in light of Norway's OSCE commitments.

Two international experts, Professor Kjell Åke Modéer and Professor Hanne Petersen, had been assigned to conduct the evaluation. During the year several exchanges between the NCHR, the NHC and the two experts took place. A report

resulting from the project was published in January 2010, *Believing in Norway, Beliefs in Norway: A "Humanitarian Great Power" under Globalization*.

REFUGE FOR PRISONERS IN GUANTÁNAMO

A letter was sent to the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jonas Gahr Støre, in April from the NHC together with Amnesty International Norway and several international human rights organisations. The bodies again urged the Norwegian Government to agree to offer refuge to some of the men currently detained in Guantánamo and who need humanitarian protection. The letter also expressed hope that the Norwegian government would act to encourage other European countries to provide similar support and thus work towards the closure of the facility. Unfortunately, in the autumn it became clear that Norway would refuse the call to receive any of the prisoners cleared for release.

THE WAR IN GAZA

At the beginning of January, the NHC sent a letter to Israel's Ambassador to Norway asking the Israeli Government to stop the warfare on the Gaza Strip and to allow for necessary humanitarian aid to reach civilians impacted by the conflict. The letter pointed out that both the Israeli Defence Forces and Hamas are under international obligation to take steps to minimise the impact on civilians, and that the lack of secure hiding places and questionable military gains may make the Israeli attacks unlawful and punishable under international law. The NHC also urged Israel to become a State Party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and ensure that core international crimes would not go unpunished. The NHC also supported proposals to convene an international conference modelled on the CSCE in the Middle East region and asked Israel to allow for media and human rights reporting from the conflict zones. The NHC also supported and participated in a large-scale torch procession in support of the victims of the war at the beginning of January.



Guantánamo.
Photo: Carlos de Vega

Press conference
after the election



IV

Co-operation and International Processes

The NHC is a member of several national and international networks of human rights organisations. Each year, our representatives participate in a range of international meetings and conferences. We strive to be a key player among organisations and forums dealing with human rights issues, our goal being to influence international organisations and states to protect human rights and promote human rights issues.



ORGANISATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE)

The Human Dimension Implementation Meeting is the single most important annual OSCE event focusing on human rights and democracy in Europe, North America and Central Asia. Representatives of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee participated in the October 2009 conference, with interventions on the situation for women in prisons in Turkmenistan; and the need for Bosnia and Herzegovina to deal in an efficient manner with the many criminal cases following the violations of international criminal law from 1992-1995. In addition, the NHC organised a side-event on the situation regarding human rights in Turkmenistan.



Geneva

NGO FORUM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The NHC served as the secretariat of the forum in 2009. It presided at meetings of the Forum and took part in and organised activities. Forum activities included issuing and lobbying for 10 written recommendations to the Government of Norway regarding Norwegian membership of the UN Human Rights Council. This was in addition to submitting a written report to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on human rights in Norway and the Universal Periodic Review of Norway by the UN Human Rights Council. Another important activity was the facilitation of information exchange and co-ordination between Norwegian human rights NGOs, and between them and the Norwegian authorities.

UNITED NATIONS

In addition to interventions on behalf of the Norwegian NGO Forum on Human Rights to the United Nations' bodies, the NHC took part as observer at the Norwegian UN Delegation during the UN General Assembly. We also participated in the work of the UN Human Rights Council at Geneva, inter alia to lobby in favour of the recommendations concerning Norway and a number of other countries and issues.

HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE

The NHC, represented by Secretary General Bjørn Engesland, has since 1999 participated in the official Human Rights Dialogues held by the Norwegian Government with China, Indonesia and Vietnam. The efficiency of the human rights dialogues, especially the one with China, has frequently been questioned. Even though the dialogue with China is challenging and it may be difficult to see concrete results, the NHC believes that such dialogues provide a forum for discussion and the possibility to raise important issues and

concrete cases directly with the governments of the countries they concern. The 2009 dialogues were held from 27-29 April with Indonesia, with Vietnam from 14-15 May, and the dialogue with China from 16-17 December. All dialogues were held in Oslo.

THE NORWEGIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

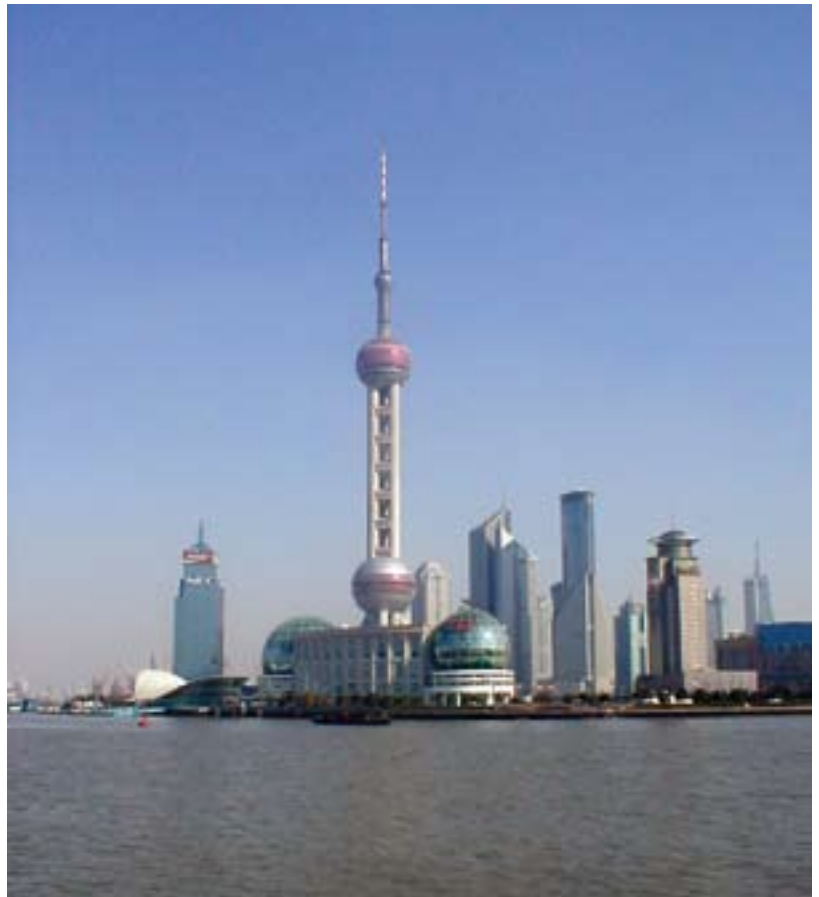
The NHC has close ties with the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights. We regularly provide briefing lectures for election observers headed to missions in areas where the NHC has key competence. Secretary General Bjørn Engesland is also a member of the board of the Centre for Human Rights. This year we co-operated with the Centre on the publication of a report concerning Norwegian legislation and practice on freedom of religion.



Bazar in multicultural Oslo

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

The NHC remained active on international justice issues, providing comments and viewpoints to the media and taking part in seminars and discussions on issues related to the operation and set-up of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the two UN ad hoc courts for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, as well as other internationalised jurisdictions.



Shanghai

The NHC is a member of both the international NGO coalition for the ICC (CICC), and the Forum for International Criminal and Humanitarian Law (FICHL), taking an active part in some of its activities.

It was involved in monitoring Norway's domestic efforts on prioritising and prosecuting international criminal cases in the Norwegian courts. Norway adopted legislation and established investigative and prosecutorial capacity to try persons suspected of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in 2008. So far, it has only processed a few cases.

EURO-MEDITERRANEAN HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee is an associate member of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network. It consists of more than 80 human rights organisations, institutions and individuals in 30 countries in the European/Mediterranean region.

DARE

The NHC is also member of the Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe (DARE) Network, which consists of 37 members from 23 European countries.

EEA Grants

In 2005 the Norwegian Helsinki Committee was assigned a project by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to take the main responsibility for coordinating and distributing information for bilateral partnership under the NGO funds and EEA Grants/Norway Grants.

The EEA Grants contribution of EUR 1.3 billion aims to reduce social and economic disparities, strengthen civil society and enhance bilateral relations between beneficiary states and the donor states Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. The beneficiary countries are the 10 new EU membership states, together with Spain, Portugal and Greece. Through this project the NHC collaborates with the Ministry, the Norwegian embassies in the beneficiary countries, as well as the Financial Mechanisms Office in Brussels.

The 19 NGO Funds established in 12 of the beneficiary countries provide vital support to a young civil society in central and eastern Europe, cornerstones in modern democracies. At the end of this five-year period from May 2004 to April 2009, 1,000 NGO projects are already being implemented. Efforts to strengthen democracy and human rights, to fight discrimination and to improve the integration of disadvantaged groups are key areas of support.

MAIN ACTIVITIES 2009

In 2009 the main focus of the project was to gather and publish experiences and results from the bilateral projects under the NGO Funds. The NHC wrote an extensive evaluation report with all the central inputs from Norwegian civil society and from our own experience with the work as an EEA Grants/NGO Fund co-ordinator.

The central experiences and findings were further presented at several seminars and meetings with Norwegian NGOs and with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. An overview of approved bilateral partnerships is published at the web portal www.ngonorway.org. The NHC has also functioned as an advisor for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cases regarding civil society in the beneficiary countries.

In November 2009 the NHC participated in the conference Grantmakers East Forum in Berlin, and assisted in a workshop arranged by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We also wrote a report from the conference; it was distributed to all the Norwegian embassies in the beneficiary countries.

INTERMEDIARY CONFERENCE

On 16 and 17 June 2009 the NHC, together with the Financial Mechanism Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organised a conference for the intermediaries. Representatives from all the Funds' managers attended the conference, in addition to representatives from Norwegian partner organisations and other Norwegian stakeholders.

The conference was arranged with the intention of gathering the Fund's managers in order to exchange experiences and lessons learned, as well as enhance the dialogue with representatives from Norwegian civil society. A report with the main findings was produced and distributed to the intermediaries after the conference.

INFORMATION

In 2009 the Norwegian Helsinki Committee NHC contributed information about the NGO funds and the EEA grants through:

- The web portal www.ngonorway.org
- Newsletters
- Lectures at seminars, meetings and conferences
- Contact with Norwegian organisations.

The NGO Norway Information Portal (www.ngonorway.no) carries news about the NGO funds, and contributes to bilateral partnerships. The web portal consists of:

- A database of Norwegian NGOs
- Information and news about the NGO funds
- Links to relevant documents
- An overview of projects with Norwegian partners.

Workshop



Funds' managers intermediary conference in Oslo

Information

MEDIA CONTACT

As an independent human rights organisation, we consider it imperative to maintain high visibility and communicate our points of view to the general public, the media and directly to the Norwegian authorities. A significant aspect of the activities of our information department is therefore to communicate the work of the NHC and its views to the media and the general public.

The NHC subscribes to a service from Meltwater news that tracks media appearances. In 2009 the NHC or its advisors were registered with 675 mentions in the Norwegian electronic media. Here it should be noted that this figure refers only to electronically published articles and reports. Material in printed publications is not taken into account, but these represent an additional source of visibility. Additionally, NHC representatives are frequently used as commentators and experts on radio and TV programmes. We have also been mentioned on numerous occasions in Russian language and other international media.

The NHC has set the agenda for several important human rights questions in 2009.

WEBSITE

The information department communicates the work of the NHC through its own website and publications. In the course of 2009, the NHC published 108

relevant news articles on www.nhc.no, in addition to other postings. On average, the NHC website was visited 837 times per day in 2009.

PUBLICATIONS

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee published two printed reports in 2009:

➤ *Out the Back Door: The Dublin II Regulation and illegal deportations from Greece.* The report was co-authored with the Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) and the Greek NGO, 'AITIMA'.

➤ *Azerbaijan's Dark Island: Human rights violations in Nakhchivan.*

Additionally, the NHC published the following reports electronically in 2009:

➤ *Norsk romani-/taterpolitikk: Fortid, nåtid, fremtid*

➤ *Believing in Norway, beliefs in Norway: A "Humanitarian Great Power" under Globalization.* In co-operation with the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights. Authored by Kjell Å Modéer and Hanne Petersen.

The publications can be downloaded from www.nhc.no, or purchased from the NHC information department on request.

MEMBERSHIP

As of the end of 2009, the NHC had 578 individual members.



VII Information Technology

Thanks to the generous support of **InMeta Consulting** and **Microsoft Corporation** NHC took a leap forward in IT in 2009. The highly welcome donations of consulting hours and software was put to use in 2009 and has improved the efficiency and security of the NHC's operations and provided an excellent platform for further system development. The NHC is very grateful for this kind and significant contribution to its work.

Finances

Total spending in 2009 was NOK 36.4 million, out of which project support for partners constituted NOK 25.5 million. Total income was NOK 36.5 million. Unspent project funds of NOK 17.2 million were transferred from 2008, while NOK 14.9 million was carried forward to 2010.

The NHC's donors are primarily the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Freedom of Expression Foundation (Fritt Ord), Open Society Institute, National Endowment for Democracy and the Barents Secretariat. Gifts, members' contributions etc. provided an income of NOK 163,400.

VIII



Women in a settlement for internally displaced persons in Azerbaijan

NORWEGIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE

Kirkegata 5, N-0153 Oslo
Telefon: (+47) 22 47 92 02 - Fax: (+47) 22 41 60 76
www.nhc.no