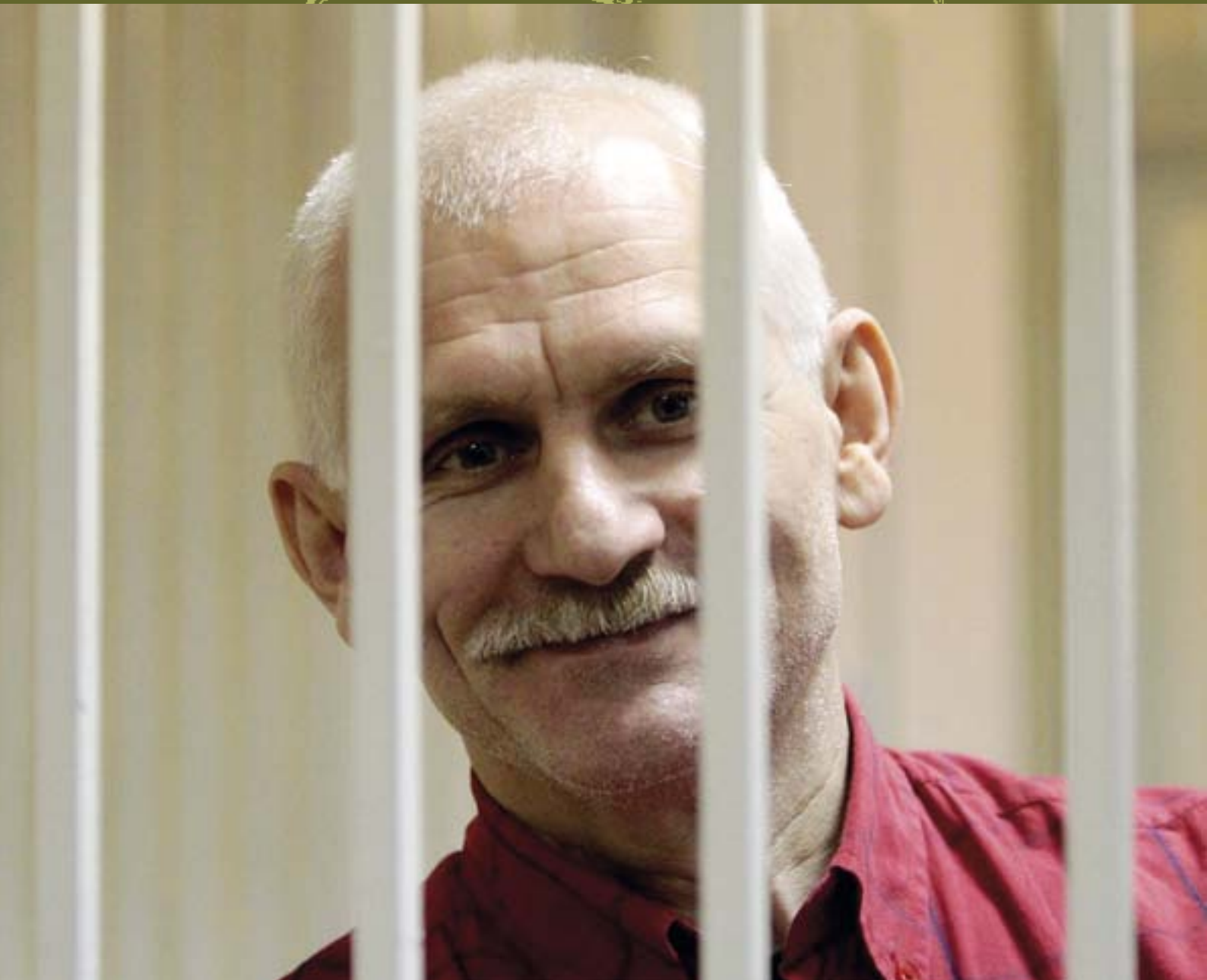


Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Annual Report 2011



[NORWEGIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE](http://www.norwegianhelsinkicommittee.org)

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Established in 1977

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC) 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 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.

The 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 NHC 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 in 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 a free media. A civil society that functions well is a precondition for the development of democracy.

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

As with our educational work, the NHC seeks to influence governments and international organisations through participation in international processes, meetings and conferences to make human rights a priority.

PERSPECTIVES:

Terror at home

On Friday 22 July 2011, at around 3.30pm, as our staff were about to leave the office for the weekend, a powerful explosion rocked central Oslo. A huge plume of smoke rose from the site of the impact, the government buildings in Grubbegata, not many streets away. The images of death and destruction in the streets seemed unreal, as if cut and pasted from some of the conflict zones in Europe and Central Asia where we have documented war crimes and human rights violations over the last 20 years.

And yet the bomb attack on the government buildings was only the beginning. A few hours later a lone terrorist was detained by the police after massacring 69 people, mostly children, at the Labour Party's youth camp on the lake island of Utøya. These were the most terrible attacks in Norway since the end of the Second World War and struck people from all over the country. The twin spectres of extremism and terrorism which continue to haunt Europe, had appeared on our doorstep.

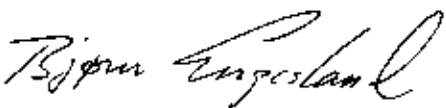
While Norway was unable to prevent the attacks, and not prepared to react quickly to the unfolding disaster, the strong fibres of Norwegian civil society were thrown into sharp relief that evening. The heroism of local people and tourists near Utøya, who spontaneously organized a rescue operation on the cold lake will also form part of our history. Many lives were taken on the island. Perhaps equally many were saved by people in small boats, who risked their lives saving children swimming away from the killer.

The attacks posed some fundamental questions to Norwegian society regarding freedom of speech, the powers of the police and the so-called multicultural society. Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg immediately stated that Norway would respond with "more openness, more democracy," and those words struck a chord. It appears that Norwegian society was strong enough not to respond to terror with measures that would go against the foundations of our democracy: Human rights values.

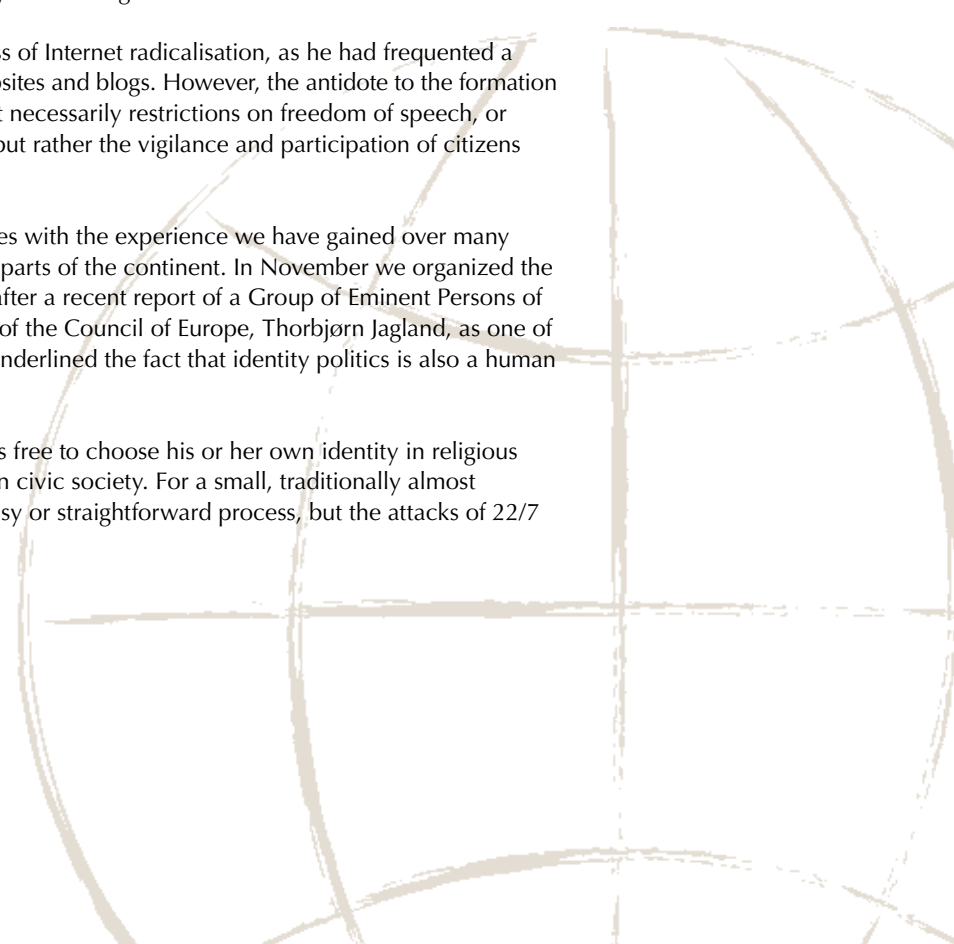
It seemed that the killer had gone through a process of Internet radicalisation, as he had frequented a number of extremist, so-called counter-jihadist websites and blogs. However, the antidote to the formation of self-reinforcing hate-cells on the Internet, is not necessarily restrictions on freedom of speech, or far-reaching powers of surveillance for the police, but rather the vigilance and participation of citizens in the public debate at all levels.

For us, it was important to respond to the challenges with the experience we have gained over many years working against extremism and hate in other parts of the continent. In November we organized the conference "Living Together in Diversity", named after a recent report of a Group of Eminent Persons of the Council of Europe and with Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland, as one of the keynote speakers. The conference and report underlined the fact that identity politics is also a human rights issue.

We need to arrive at a point where the individual is free to choose his or her own identity in religious and cultural terms, and still remains firmly rooted in civic society. For a small, traditionally almost mono-ethnic country like Norway, this is not an easy or straightforward process, but the attacks of 22/7 showed that there is no other way.



Bjørn Engesland,
Secretary General



The NHC Secretariat



Bjørn Engesland
Secretary General.



Aage Borchgrevink
Senior Advisor, focus on Russia and Georgia.



Csilla Czimbalmos
Project manager of the human rights education programme.



Usam Baysaev
Project co-ordinator, Natalia Estemirova Documentation Centre.

STAFF ABROAD:



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



Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal
Deputy Secretary General. Focus on Central Asia, Turkey, Armenia and Rwanda. International criminal courts and justice.



Ole B. Lilleås
Senior Advisor, focus on Western Balkans. Co-ordinator of the Norwegian NGO Forum for Human Rights, UN Human Rights Council. IT administration.



Olga Shamshur
Project co-ordinator, EEA grants and Natalya Estemirova Documentation Center.



Anne Marit Austbø
Advisor, focus on Russia. From November.



Meirgul Kudabayeva
Administrative Officer at the NHC representative office in Central Asia in Almaty, Kazakhstan (from August).



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



Inna Sangadzhieva
Project manager, focus on Russia and Belarus.



Ivar Dale
Advisor, focus on Central Asia and Georgia.



Vanja Bentsen Kleven
Co-ordinator for EEA grants project.



Parvina Abduvakhobova
Project co-ordinator at the NHC Central Asia office in Almaty, Kazakhstan (Until October).



Berit Nising Lindeman
Head of Information, Senior Advisor. Focus on Belarus, Ukraine and Azerbaijan.



Enver Djuliman
Head of the human rights education programme.



Lene Wetteland
Advisor and Programme Manager, focus on Central Asia and Armenia.



Elena Saenkova
Project co-ordinator, Murmansk office.



Anders Nielsen
Information Advisor. Also responsible for the EEA Grants information portal www.ngonorway.org.



Mina Skouen
Project manager of the human rights education programme.



Ilya Udmelidze
Project co-ordinator, Natalia Estemirova Documentation Centre.

Organisation

The organisational components of the NHC 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 NHC strategy, principles and financial matters are made. The Secretary General heads the secretariat, and is responsible for the daily operations of the NHC.

BOARD

Chairperson: Morten Bergsmo

Senior Researcher, University of Oslo; Visiting Professor, Georgetown University; and Visiting Fellow, Stanford University.

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.

Eirik Moen

Secretary General of the International Democrat Union.

Kari Schage

Management consultant, Resources Global Professionals.

Sylo Taraku

Head of Unit, National Directorate for Immigration, previously Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers, Norwegian Refugee Council and NHC.

Ragni Ramberg

Lawyer at Østgård Wikasteen, roles in the Labour Party (Arbeiderpartiet) and formerly Youth Labour Party (AUF).

COUNCIL

President:

Kristin Clemet

Vice President:

Anne Marit Bjørnflaten

- Frode Bakken
- Trond Bakkevig
- Peter Batta
- Tor G. Birkeland
- Helge Blakkisrud
- Kjell Magne Bondevik
- Bernt Bull
- Nils Butenschøn
- Tor Bøhler
- Juni Dahr
- Ole Drolsum
- Bente Erichsen
- Arne Fjeld
- Dankert Freilem
- Grethe Fossum
- Bjørn Cato Funnemark
- Steinar Gil
- Fredrik Grønningsæter
- Bernt Hagtvet
- Hans Morten Haugen
- Anne Holt
- Morten Høglund
- Torbjørn Røe Isaksen
- Bjørn Jacobsen
- Ingunn Jordheim
- Knut Kloster jr.
- Berit Kvæven
- Arne Liljedahl
- Lynngård
- Eigil Nansen
- Mette Newth
- Manuela Ramin Osmundsen
- Pål Erik Plaum
- Viktor Roddvik
- Jan Tore Sanner
- Per Saxegaard
- Anne Julie Semb
- Marianne B. Skou
- Guro Slettemark
- Lars Petter Soltvedt
- Atle Sommerfeldt
- Bjørn Stordrange
- Michael Tetzschner
- Magne Ove Varsi
- Kåre Vollan
- Maria Warsinski
- Svein Wilhelmsen
- Stein-Ivar Aarsæther

Content

Norwegian Helsinki Committee	2
Perspectives	3
The NHC secretariat	4
Organisation	5
I The year 2011 in retrospect	6
Ales Bialiatski, major defender of human rights in Belarus given a prison sentence	6
Denial of war crimes committed in the Western Balkans	7
Kazakhstan: Reopening of NHC representative office, strikes and killings in the West	8
ACTIVITIES, BY COUNTRY	9
The Russian Federation	9
Belarus	11
Ukraine	13
SOUTH CAUCASUS	14
Armenia	14
Azerbaijan	15
Georgia	17
Turkey	17
CENTRAL ASIA	18
WESTERN BALKANS	21
II Human Rights Education	25
III Human Rights in Norway	28
IV Co-operation and International Processes	31
V EEA Grants	33
VI Information	34
VII Finances	34

I

The year 2011 in retrospect

The NHC 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. With the kind support from Fritt Ord Foundation we were able to have a particular focus on freedom of expression related questions throughout the year. In 2011, three major areas of our attention, concern and activity were the arrest and conviction of our close partner Ales Bialiatski, our engagement to defend the understanding of the war crimes in Srebrenica and important events in Kazakhstan, including social unrest in the city of Zhanaozen, west Kazakhstan.

Ales Bialiatski, major defender of human rights in Belarus given a prison sentence

Ales Bialiatski, the head of the well-known human rights organisation Viasna in Belarus was in October sentenced to four-and-a-half years in prison and confiscation of property for tax evasion. The NHC called the verdict “a shame for Europe”, and demanded his immediate release.

Viasna is Belarus' main human rights organisation, and is known to provide legal and material assistance to the victims of the regime's abuse. The organisation has been the main source of information about the human rights violations that for years have intensified in what is called ‘Europe’s last dictatorship’. As a reprisal for their work, Viasna has for years been denied registration and their activities have been forced underground.

With no legal registration in Belarus and with restrictive legislation aimed at stopping activity by human rights organisations, Bialiatski was forced to open accounts abroad in order to receive funding from international donors. This was the only way the work could be carried out, with financial support from, among others, the NHC. The case against him became possible when Belarusian authorities got access to information about Bialiatski’s bank accounts in Vilnius with the assistance of the Lithuanian authorities as well as from Polish bank accounts. Lithuania later apologised deeply for sharing the information with Belarus.

Ales Bialiatski is the jewel in the Belarusian human rights work, and no-one can quite fill his role. At the same time, Viasna is a strong organisation with dedicated staff determined to continue its work. In 2011 Viasna celebrated its 15th anniversary. Over



Ales Bialiatski outside the Norwegian Storting

the years Viasna has become the most prominent of the human rights organisations in Belarus, with efficient work ranging from reporting, election observation, anti-death penalty campaigns and extensive assistance to victims of human rights abuse. The anniversary also marked 15 years of intense persecution from the authorities. Ales and the Viasna staff have been detained and threatened countless times and lost registration after zealous auditing of formalities. The illegality of the liquidation

of Viasna was officially confirmed by the UN, which stated that its members had the right to re-registration and compensation. The verdict against Bialitaski also forced Viasna out of their offices, the premises that had become a landmark for human rights activism in Belarus.

Ales Bialiatski received the NHC's Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award in 2006 and has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize several times, including the 2012 award. The NHC's Berit Lindeman was denied entry into Belarus to monitor Ales' trial.



Ales Bialiatski receiving the Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award in 2006

In May 2011 Ratko Mladić, the former Bosnian Serb general, was finally arrested and brought to the Hague to answer for his role in the crime of genocide and other appalling crimes that his army committed during the 1992-95 war. To many ethnic Serbs, especially in Bosnia, Mladić is nevertheless still considered a war hero. Such attitudes are a major impediment to reconciliation in the region. The NHC has worked for years to provide information in Bosnia, Serbia and Norway about the crimes of the past in accordance with facts established by international and domestic courts.

On 26 April, the month before Mladić's arrest, the Norwegian Public Broadcaster, NRK, aired a documentary on the Srebrenica genocide called "A town betrayed". The NHC publically protested against the documentary and submitted a complaint against NRK for violating the Code of Journalists Ethics to the Norwegian Press Complaints Committee, maintaining that the programme contributed to falsification of history. One of the programme makers explained to the media: "Many think of Srebrenica as a new Holocaust in Europe, in which 8,000 people were executed. In reality this was part of extensive acts of war. We show how Mladić acts as a general who has to take control of an area ... To us this seems an extremely chaotic situation, not like planned ethnic cleansing".

The NHC complained about instances of biases and mistakes in the film contradicted key findings of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the International Court of

Justice. The NHC maintained that it has been established beyond reasonable doubt by the ICTY that Bosnian Serb forces killed between 7,000 and 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys in July 1995; that the victims were either civilians or prisoners of war; that the massacre and the subsequent cover-up operation were planned and well-organised; and that it was no less serious a crime than genocide.

The Press Complaints Commission found the programme to be in violation of the part of the code of ethics requiring journalists to "Be critical in the choice of sources, and make sure that the information provided is correct. In the opinion of the Commission, the film conceals, overlooks or omits some basic facts that belong to every story about the war in Bosnia. In particular the Commission finds it unacceptable from the perspective of journalistic ethics that the programme does not mention the verdicts from the courts in The Hague, ICJ and ICTY."

In 2010 the NHC called for the Norwegian authorities to recognise formally the genocide in Srebrenica in a manner similar to a resolution passed by the European Parliament and parliamentary resolutions passed by assemblies in other countries. In 2011, the Norwegian government expressed such recognition in a White Paper to the Storting (Parliament) which passed it. However, the public debate over the documentary demonstrated that we still find attitudes and support for relativisation and even denial of war crimes, also in Norway, 16 years after the end of the war.

Denial of war crimes committed in the Western Balkans

Genocide in Srebrenica



LEFT: Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery

RIGHT: Mourning the victims of the genocide

Kazakhstan: Reopening of NHC representative office, strikes and killings in the West

In late March 2011, the NHC officially re-opened its Central Asia office, now located in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Friends and colleagues from the human rights community in Kazakhstan were present at the opening. For the NHC, the office involves a return to a permanent presence in a region where we have been engaged in the promotion of democracy and human rights for a number of years.

While Kazakhstan has long held an image as the most stable of the Central Asian republics, the developments around the striking oil workers in the west of the country brought underlying problems to the surface during the autumn of 2011. Since May, workers held protests in the city of Aktau and particularly in the small town of Zhanaozen, both in the Mangistau Province of Kazakhstan. The protests were initially connected to salary levels.

In May, lawyer and trade union activist Natalia Sokolova became the first to be arrested in connection with these strikes, and on 7 August she was sentenced to six years' imprisonment for "inciting social discord". The decision was widely criticised by international trade unions and human rights groups. The protests, however, continued with an increasing police presence in Zhanaozen, where workers held continuous protests on the town square. The NHC was among several organisations to visit the town in the autumn of 2011 to observe the situation.

Tragedy struck on 16 December, when clashes broke out between strikers and police. While the exact string of events remains unclear, the world was shocked to see the images of police and security forces shooting and killing fleeing protesters. The government has amended the number of deaths several times, the last figures ranging between 14 and 17 killed in the clashes, as well as one unrelated death. A total of 64 were wounded in Zhanaozen. While the government launched its own investigation into the events, the nature of the tragedy is such that the conclusions reached by this



Bjørn Engesland at the opening of the NHC office in Almaty

Natalia Sokolova



investigation is likely to be considered untrustworthy by local human rights groups and observers, who continue to demand a broad investigation involving international experts and civil society. This also regards the many reports of ill-treatment of detainees in the town while it was under military lockdown after the shootings. While the government detained some government officials in the region, a clear investigation to establish the identity of those actually firing shots and the responsibility for giving the order to shoot has not been carried out in a satisfactory manner. Instead, authorities seemed to place the main responsibility on opposition groups and journalists.

In a broader sense, the events in Zhanaozen also marked the beginning of a more open crack-down on the opposition in Kazakhstan, which is accused of having somehow provoked the tragedy. As the new year began, central opposition figures such as Vladimir Kozlov of the unregistered Alga political party were arrested, possibly facing years in prison under charges of inciting social discord. The editor-in-chief of the Vzglyad newspaper, Igor Vinyavskiy, was similarly arrested, accused of conspiring to overthrow the government. The charges against him, however, relate to leaflets of a political nature found in his car in 2010. Security services carried out raids on editorial offices, confiscating technical equipment. Demonstrations in Almaty and elsewhere in the country were carried out in spite of political leaders being placed under administrative arrest.

Lene Wetteland and Parvina Abduvakhobova



NHC meeting workers on strike in Zhanaozen



Workers on strike in Zhanaozen

Activities, by country

2011 will be remembered in Russia for the largest demonstrations and protests since the 1990s, and the revived engagement by civil movements in political transformation of the country. Social media were used widely to inform and mobilise civil engagement; to a certain degree similar to democratic waves sweeping across the Arab world and to protest movements in the West such as Occupy Wall Street. However, national factors and events were what mainly triggered increased popular engagement. Rigging of the 4 December Duma elections, several instances of lawless actions by authorities, failed police reforms, conviction of activists such as Taisia Osipova, the Khimki forest campaign, the Article 31 demonstrations, and the failed investigations of the murders of Anna Politkovskaya and Natalia Estemirova all contributed to this increased engagement. Over 4,000 activists were arrested during or immediately after taking part in demonstrations.

Riots during nationalist protests on Manezhnaya Square in Moscow in December 2010 and racist attacks in various Russian cities led to increased concerns of nationalism and racism being on the rise. However, the number of victims of racially motivated attacks was lower in 2011 than in previous years. According to the SOVA Centre for Information and Analysis, an NHC partner, 37 people were killed on race grounds in 2011. The Centre also indicated that the police and prosecution services were more active in 2011 than before in fighting violent racism.

A positive development was the conviction of ultranationalists Nikita Tikhonov and Yevgenia Khasis, both linked to a banned ultranationalist group, Russky Obraz, for the murders of human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and journalist Anastasia Baburova. The acquittal on 14 June in Moscow of the Head of Memorial Human Rights Centre, Oleg Orlov, was another victory for human rights defenders. He had been charged with defamation against the Chechen President, Ramzan Kadyrov.

Strong public reactions were caused by the second conviction of Mikhail Khodorkovsky in December 2010 to six more years' imprisonment in a trial that violated international free trial standards. A bitter fight for justice also continued in the case of Sergey Magnitsky, a respected business lawyer who died in custody in 2009 due to abuse and harsh prison conditions. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev acknowledged that Magnitsky's death resulted from criminal acts and promised a thorough investigation. However, little has been done to ensure accountability for those responsible for his treatment.

There was continued insecurity for journalists, human rights defenders and other civil activists; a large number of them were beaten, harassed or even imprisoned without due process, in circumstances that indicate they were punished for expressing their opinions or carrying out their legitimate work. Criminal prosecution was initiated against 117 civil activists and heads of NGOs and in 45 cases human rights defenders and journalists were severely beaten. In total, the Russian NGO Agora registered 850 cases of threats and violence against journalists and human rights defenders in 60 regions in Russia in 2011, up from 603 cases in 2010.

The situation is especially grave in the North Caucasian republics of Chechnya and Dagestan. Two journalists and a university rector were killed in 2011 as a result of professional activity. The pattern of near total impunity for human rights violators remains in the region. The verdict in the Israilov case of 1 June 2011 in a Vienna court was therefore of historical importance. For the first time, a crime committed by Chechen authorities was condemned by an independent court; three defendants were convicted and sentenced for the murder of Umar Israilov, a Chechen who had filed a case against the Chechen President in the European Court of Human Rights. The trial shed light on the widespread violence, arbitrariness and system of illegal detentions in contemporary Chechnya. Israilov had previously been President Kadyrov's bodyguard, but broke ranks with him and became an ardent critic of his rule.

The Russian Federation



Gunnar Ekeløve-Slydal



Meeting with Liliya Shibanova at Golos headquarter

Arkadiy Lyubarev, Anna Vasilevich from Golos and Lene Wetteland

Ludmila Alexeeva and Inna Sangadzhieva



Demonstration in St. Petersburg after the Duma election



PROJECT SUPPORT

- Human Rights Centre Memorial (Moscow, Ryazan, North Caucasus)
- Civic Assistance Committee (Moscow)
- Golos (Moscow)
- Glasnost Defence Foundation (Moscow)
- Nevolya Magazine (Moscow)
- Civic Control (St. Petersburg)
- Informational Agency Caucasian Knot (Moscow and Caucasus)
- Public Verdict (Moscow)
- Committee Against Torture (Nizhny Novgorod)
- Society of Russian-Chechen Friendship (Nizhny Novgorod)
- Information Centre SOVA (Moscow)
- NGO MASHR (Ingushetia)

Russia accounts for 26.6 percent of cases pending at the European Court of Human Rights. Complaints against Russia frequently concern poor conditions and inadequate medical assistance in pre-trial detention facilities, as well as a range of other serious abuses. Notwithstanding Russia paying compensation, Russian authorities refrain from fully implementing ECHR decisions and from dealing with the root causes of the large amounts of complaints.

In the last month of 2011, a wave of public protests spread across Russia after numerous reports of fraud during elections to the Duma. The movement "For Fair Elections" spread from St. Petersburg to Vladivostok, raising protest waves in Nizhny Novgorod, Yekaterinburg, Buryatia, Krasnoyarsk, Barnaul, Novokuznetsk and Tver. A stronger civil society started to emerge; strong enough that the Kremlin had to present some reform measures in order to improve future elections and make the registration of candidates easier.

Despite efforts from Norwegian authorities to convince the Russian authorities to lift bans on entering Russia, the Secretary General and several other staff of the NHC remained effectively banned from entering Russia in 2011.

ACTIVITIES

Work on human rights issues in the Russian Federation remained a priority for the NHC. Two NHC staff travelled to Moscow and St. Petersburg during the Duma elections. NHC staff also travelled to Russia to take part in training seminars and other events throughout the year.

The NHC hosted several human rights defenders and journalists to take part in seminars and meetings in Norway. The NHC took part in international network meetings with Russian colleagues in Stockholm, Kirkenes and other European cities to discuss developments in Russia. In September 2011 an NHC delegation travelled to Moscow in order to discuss project cooperation with Russian colleagues and take part in a training seminar for representatives of Public Observation Commissions from regions in north-west Russia.

In June 2011 the NHC hosted a delegation of Russian, Belarusian, Azeri and international human rights

defenders. They took part in a seminar arranged by the NHC and Stortinget, the Norwegian parliament, in connection with a Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) meeting in Oslo.

In October 2011, the NHC organised a seminar in cooperation with the Norwegian Institute of Foreign Affairs (NUPI) dedicated to the memory of Anna Politkovskaya, marking the five years since the murder of this award-winning journalist. Sergey Sokolov, Deputy Editor-in-Chief and the Head of the Investigations Department at Novaya Gazeta, talked about the ongoing investigation of Anna Politkovskaya's murder and the impact it had on the work of the newspaper. Also the challenges of journalistic work in Russia and the coverage of Russia by the Norwegian media were discussed. Other guest speakers at the seminar were Editor-in-Chief of Caucasian Knot, Grigory Shvedov, and a number of Norwegian journalists and politicians.

The NHC has run an extensive project to establish the Natalia Estemirova Documentation Centre. This is a major effort to secure and make online documentation easily accessible about human rights violations in the North Caucasus and is in cooperation with eight leading international and Russian human rights groups. The centre will gather and analyze documentation of human rights violations and international criminal law cases, and serve as a resource centre for historical research, journalism as well as for prosecution services and lawyers. The NHC has built a team of human rights workers from the region and international experts in order to establish the centre.

The NHC also published articles and open letters about human rights issues in Russia.

Sergey Sokolov



Inna Sangadzhieva, Gunnar Ekeløve-Slydal and editor Naum Nim

The NHC continued to support asylum lawyers with information related to cases of asylum seekers from the North Caucasus. A number of decisions in individual cases in the appeals board of the immigration authorities (UNE), and in first and second instance courts have been based on, or referred to, information and testimony from the NHC. The NHC successfully applied for the transfer to Norway of a torture victim from the Republic of Ingushetia and his family on the refugee quota.



Demonstration outside the Starting supporting the 31 movement

The presidential elections on 19 December 2010 caused a renewed human rights crisis in Belarus which lasted throughout the year. Of several hundred people arrested in December 2010 more than 60 were investigated and most of them charged with criminal offences. During the spring some were released, many of them with serious restraints on their freedom. The wife of presidential candidate Andrei Sannikov, Irina Khalip, was conditionally released in March but since then been refused exit from Belarus and with partial house arrest. The editor of www.charter97.org, Natallia Radzina, was among those conditionally released. She managed to flee the country and received political asylum in Lithuania. Several of those released during the spring told the public about humiliation and torture in custody, often intended to extract confessions or apologies from the prisoner.



Andrei Sannikov



Mikalai Statkevich



Dzmitry Uss

By the summer most of the 19 December-related court trials were over. Among the convicted, we find seven out of the 10 candidates for the 2010 presidential elections. Among the convicted were opposition leaders and other civil society leaders. Convictions and prison sentences were handed down to 29 persons, all of whom are considered by the NHC to be political prisoners. Among those are three presidential candidates: Andrei Sannikov, Mikalai Statkevich and Dzmitry Uss. In August, nine political prisoners were amnestied and released from prison, and over the next few months many of the imprisoned were

amnestied. Remaining in prison by the end of the year we found: presidential candidates Andrei Sannikov (five-year sentence), Mikalai Statkevich (six years), Dzmitry Bandarenka from Sannikov's campaign team (two years). Activists Eduard Lobau, Zmitser Dashkevich and Pavel Seviarynets were also all still jailed. From prison we received extremely worrying reports of the health and security of the political prisoners, especially that of Andrei Sannikov, who was moved from place to place and for periods kept out of reach of his wife and lawyer, and Bandarenka, who had to undergo surgery while imprisoned, and Zmitser Dashkevich.

In June it became clear that the founder and leader of Human Rights Centre Viasna Ales Bialiatski was under investigation for tax evasion. In August he was arrested and in November convicted to 4.5 years in prison and confiscation of property. His deputy, Valientsin Stepanovich, was convicted and ordered to pay a total of 56 million roubles to the State in a related case.

Convicted in the "anarchists' case" in the autumn were Mikalai Dziadok, Aliaksandr Frantskevich and Ihar Alinevich. Three more involved in the same case were convicted to seven years in prison for petty hooliganism in seriously flawed trials: Yauhen Vaskovich, Artsiom Prakapenka and Pavel Syramolatou, all considered political prisoners by local NGOs. The businessman Mikalai Autukhovich is also a political prisoner, already convicted in 2009.

The reaction from the European Union (EU) was quick, reimposing sanctions against officials representing the regime. The EU had previously suspended visa sanctions against Belarusian senior officials and approached the regime for closer cooperation after some improvement in the belief that an opening for dialogue with the regime would lead to better results. The Belarus-EU rapprochement through the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, put on hold awaiting Belarusian authorities' proven commitment to improve its practices in the field of human rights, was the carrot put forward to Lukashenko.

Belarus



Andrei Sannikov and Irina Khalip



Dzmitry Bandarenka

After the crackdown, the EU increased sanctions by adding more names to the lists of visa bans. It reached a total of around 200 by the end of the year. There was also a trade ban with a few select companies. Norway supported the sanctions.

The year was also marked by a financial crisis, which was keenly felt by the population. The value of salaries dropped sharply as inflation surged to 118 percent over the year, and the prices of services managed by the authorities were increased by more than 70 percent. A sharp rise in petrol prices sparked protests, also from Belarusians normally not engaged in anti-Lukashenko protests. Lukashenko asked for huge credits from the IMF, Russia, China and others, a call answered by Russia and China, and not enough to secure the stability of the economy.

NHC programme managers Inna Sangadzhivaya and Olga Shamshur were denied entry into Belarus in June, and Head of Information Berit Lindeman was denied entry in October when she tried to observe the Bialitski trial.

ACTIVITIES

The massive crackdown against Belarusians, including very many of our friends, contacts and partners dominated much of our activity in 2011. In January we convened, together with Viasna, Belarusian and international human rights organisations to discuss the crisis and plan for an emergency strategy for the release of all the political prisoners. The strategy was immediately presented to the international community, including EU ambassadors who, in protest against the inauguration of Lukashenko, spent the day with Belarusians and human rights defenders in Vilnius.

For several months at the beginning of the year we marked the Day of Solidarity by picketing the



Yuri Dzhibladze, Khadija Ismayilova, Bjørn Engesland, Berit Lindeman and Tom Mayne

Parliament in Oslo. Supporting the effort were several political parties and human rights-oriented NGOs.

The NHC issued or supported several statements concerning events in Belarus. In February we asked the Lithuanian OSCE Presidency to take leadership in efforts to release political prisoners. Democratic setbacks in Belarus, Azerbaijan and Russia were also items for discussion at the NHC annual meeting in March. In May we condemned the conviction of a string of central democracy fighters in Belarus, including presidential candidate Andrei Sannikov. We protested against the arrest and conviction of Ales Bialitski in August and November. We also expressed concern at the new legislative amendments imposing further restrictions on civil society groups in Belarus.

At the beginning of June three staff from the NHC travelled to Minsk. Unfortunately only one was allowed entry, but the visit proved important to understand the massive changes that had taken place in Belarus in the last six months, leaving a civil society ridden with fear, but also defiance. We met with released prisoners of the 19 December

Berit Lindeman together with wives and mothers of political prisoners in Belarus



Day of solidarity



Solidarity with Belarus



events and relatives of prisoners, as well as NGOs active in their support. In mid-June we were invited by the Norwegian parliamentary delegation to the Council of Europe to host a seminar for the Committee of Legal and Human Rights Affairs. Among the speakers we invited was Ales Bialiatski, who spoke about the political prisoners and the need for action. A public seminar entitled “The underlying dilemma: Azerbaijan and Belarus in the spotlight” was held the following day. In July we organised meetings for Ales Bialiatski with politicians in Brussels, the last international appearance before his arrest. In September we addressed the European Parliament about the human rights crisis in Belarus, and then the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights jointly with other NGOs. In October we brought up the lack of rule of law at

the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation meeting. We also co-hosted a side event on the Belarusian situation. It was also a protest against the imprisonment of Ales Bialiatski with French FIDH as the convening partner. In December the NHC was invited to address the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly Political Affairs Committee with a final input to the Andres Herkel report on Belarus. Throughout the year, we called on Norwegian civil society to write letters to political prisoners in Belarus and kept updated registers of the imprisoned and how to reach them.

The NHC was frequently asked to provide speakers at seminars and experts in the media on Belarus-related issues.



Ales Bialiatski and Norwegian MP Karin S. Woldseth

The year of the 20th anniversary of Ukraine’s independence has been characterised by a number of resonant criminal cases implicating high profile politicians, the cementing of power by President Yanukovich and his team, tensions in the relationship with Russia and continuing uncertainty over the future of Ukraine-EU cooperation. Many experts and international organisations noted the unfortunate deterioration of the situation regarding human rights in the country.

Police violence, torture and poor conditions in the detention centres are widespread. Corruption in the judiciary and pressure against the political opposition, NGOs and civil movement activists are unsettling.

A strong and unbiased judiciary is vital to upholding the human rights of the citizens. However, Ukraine seems to have drifted even further away from this goal in 2011. The year began with the arrest of the former interior minister and political ally of Yulia Tymoshenko, Yuriy Lutzenko, on charges of embezzlement and abuse of office. The case is seen as highly political and an attempt by Yanukovich’s team to clear adversaries ahead of the coming elections in 2012.

An unexpected development of an old murder case came in late March, when the Prosecutor charged the former Ukrainian president, Leonid Kuchma, with abuse of power and exceeding his authority, which led to an outspoken and critical journalist’s death in 2000. The criminal case against Kuchma was, however, quickly dismissed, indicating that the authorities are not ready or interested in getting to the bottom of the case and punishing the culprits.

This parade of high profile political cases culminated with the jailing in August of the opposition leader and former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. She was later sentenced to seven years in prison for allegedly exceeding her constitutional powers in signing a gas deal with Russia. Additionally she was charged with tax fraud and embezzlement. Tymoshenko’s allies have tried to rally big protests and campaigns – while the case was pending and after the verdict. However, there seems to be a general weariness among the Ukrainian people. They do not trust politicians, whether they are from the opposition or not, and do not wish to get involved in their rivalry. Widespread corruption, Ukraine’s troubled economy and an ageing population are more urgent matters that concern the majority of Ukrainians.

The imprisonment of Tymoshenko brought negotiations with the EU to a standstill. The message from the EU was clear – Ukraine must hold free and fair parliamentary elections in October 2012. The EU has also indicated that ratification of a trade treaty will be long delayed if the former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko stays behind bars. The signature and ratification of the association agreement between the Ukraine and the EU’s 27 countries could signify a great geopolitical shift in 2013 if it does transpire. If the agreement fails, this can push Ukraine further into seeking the support of its neighbour in the East. Balancing between Russia and the EU thus seems to remain Ukraine’s most steady strategy and the biggest political challenge in the years to come.

The NHC carried out an extensive human rights school programme in Ukraine, described below.

Ukraine



Yulia Tymoshenko

South Caucasus

Armenia

In 2011, Armenia saw an increase in political activity in the run-up to the upcoming elections. Many demonstrations and rallies have taken place in Yerevan despite efforts by the authorities to limit transportation on the relevant days. The Armenian authorities initiated a second commission in order to address the excessive use of force by police on 1 March 2008, following the disputed presidential elections on 19 February 2008. However, this commission also failed to meet the demands of the people and the opposition, and there is still a lack of accountability for the deaths that occurred that day. As elections are coming up in 2012 and 2013, the population is not confident that these elections will be carried out in an appropriate way and there is no trust in the electoral system. The last of the people arrested and imprisoned in connection with 1 March 2008 were released through an amnesty in May, but even if this was one of the opposition's requirements for dialogue with the government, this has yet to take effect. More than

50 Jehovah's Witnesses are still imprisoned for treason, despite several European Court of Human Rights judgements ordering Armenia to facilitate alternative military service for conscientious objectors. The decriminalisation of libel in May 2010 has not had the intended positive effect on the freedom of expression in Armenia. In fact, the media has experienced the opposite effect, as the abolished criminal provision was already dormant, whereas the administrative provision has been used around 30 times against the media since its introduction. Journalists and human rights activists are mainly left to carry out their work as long as they do not get too involved in cases regarding economic issues or the business elite.

Torture and abuse in prisons and military institutions continue to be rife, and the widespread corruption in the court system is a significant obstacle to addressing these problems in court.

PROJECT SUPPORT

The NHC supports a number of well-established human rights organisations in Armenia. Their main focus is on monitoring conditions in closed institutions, providing a hotline for torture victims and citizens in conflict with the police, education for young journalists, freedom of religion, as well as legal advice in human rights-related questions and monitoring trials.

- › The Helsinki Citizen's Assembly Vanadzor is one of a few human rights organisations based outside the capital, Yerevan. A large part of this project is analysis of the number of abuse complaints against police officers at police stations, and to what extent these complaints are handled in court or withdrawn due to threats and intimidation by the police officers.
- › The Armenian Helsinki Committee continues its effort to raise awareness and understanding for believers who are not members of the powerful Armenian Apostolic Church.
- › Caucasus Institute educates a number of young journalists from throughout Armenia every year. Through concrete tasks and internships during the year of study many of them obtain core positions in influential regional media like IWPR and Fritt Ord Press Prize 2011 laureate A1plus.



A1plus Company Director Mesrop Movsesyan

The Azerbaijani government, headed by President Ilham Aliyev, continues to hold a tight grip on society by means of corruption and human rights violations. The human rights violations increased in 2011. Throughout the year much attention was given to old and new political prisoners in the country as well as continued repression of the freedom of expression. The “Arab Spring” inspired many activists and equally scared the regime. In February and March youth activists organised protests in Baku against the oppression of the regime, systematically using social media to spread information. The government arrested activists even before the mass meetings had started. A 20 year-old opposition party member and blogger, Jabbar Savalan, was arrested on 4 February and convicted to two-and-a-half years in prison for trumped-up drug possession charges. He received a presidential pardon on 26 December 2011. The Facebook activist Bakhtiyar Hajiyev was arrested just ahead of a planned 11 March protest and later convicted to two years in prison for military draft evasion, an accusation cherished by the authorities against young activist men. Hajiyev had lawfully applied for alternative service.



Bakhtiyar Hajiyev

Jabbar Savalan

On 2 April around 1,000 protesters defied warnings and participated in the anti-government rally in central Baku. Riot police were quick to disperse the protesters violently and arrested several dozen, including at least 10 journalists. In all, 15 political activists were convicted to lengthy prison sentences after the March and April events. The Azerbaijani government appears unwilling to solve the problem of political prisoners in the country. Although some political prisoners were released, many new names were added to the list in 2011. The Rapporteur the Council of Europe assigned to report on political prisoners in Azerbaijan, Christoph Strässer, is simply denied access to the country and must rely on NGO sources for information.

Since 2006, the NHC had been active in the campaign for the release of imprisoned Editor-in-Chief Eynulla Fatullayev. On 26 May Fatullayev was finally released in an amnesty that included several dozen prisoners. After his release, Eynulla wrote a letter of thanks to NHC, in which he writes:

Eynulla Fatullayev



“It has been eight days since I am freed. Eight days, since I feel imprisoned by the mythical and artificial freedom. Eight days, since I am looking for the answer to the new question of my new life: Can a man be free in a country which is not free? And how does one go on living in this country, after receiving an unexpected, but precious freedom? Certainly, if it was not for you, for the Council of Europe, perhaps then someday, many years later, I could have touched the freedom again. But you helped to bring this day nearer, you did not let me be destroyed and become the prison dust. You’ve made the fairy tale come true. Thus, again. Can a man be free in a country which is not free? Yes, he can. He can, if he believes in a fairy tale, where the Evil never wins.”

The persecution of media representatives continued and journalists were exposed to threats, violence and murder. Avaz Zeynalli, the Editor-in-Chief of the Khural newspaper, was arrested on 28 October and by year-end he was still serving pre-trial detention on trumped-up charges of extortion and bribery, based solely on the unsubstantiated claim by a parliamentarian. He faces up to 12 years in prison if convicted. Prominent Azerbaijani journalist and writer, Rafiq Tagi, died in Baku on 23 November from the injuries he sustained during a brutal knife attack four days earlier. His murderer is still at liberty.

Human rights defenders were also persecuted and harassed. Lawyers defending opposition activists lost their licences or were harassed in other ways. In April, the Human Rights House in Baku lost its registration and was subsequently closed, and its



Rafiq Tagi



Berit Lindeman and Vugar Gojayeve

manager Vugar Gojayeve, a former NHC employee, has been repeatedly threatened and his relatives harassed. Our partner Leyla Yunus, on a visit to Norway, had her office illegally demolished in August. Bulldozers arrived without warning and within little more than an hour nothing was left of the building that for years served as the premises for important human rights activity in Azerbaijan, including a crisis centre for women, the only one in Baku. All inventory, equipment, documents were destroyed or taken away by officials. Among her activities, Yunus had assisted at trials and publicly protested in cases concerning the vast amount of expropriation cases in Baku, increasing as the city was beautified for the Eurovision Song Contest to take place in 2012.

Leyla Yunus



In the exclave of Nakhchivan, the most serious repression of ordinary people continued to be documented. Turac Zeynalov, 31, died in police custody a day after being detained, showing clear signs of having been badly beaten. Attempts were made to prevent journalists from covering the case.

ACTIVITIES

Throughout the year, the NHC issued a number of statements concerning the situation in Azerbaijan, most notably in connection with the cases of imprisoned journalists and political activists. Several of those were issued through the International Partnership Group for Azerbaijan (IPGA), which the NHC joined for advocacy purposes. We also protested and spread information in the media concerning the demolition of Leyla Yunus' offices in August, linking the case to the Eurovision Song Contest.

In an open letter to the HRH Crown Prince Haakon in May, the NHC – with support from Rafto Foundation and Human Rights House Foundation – advised the Crown Prince to refrain from travelling to Baku and participating in the opening ceremony of the 2011 International Caspian Oil & Gas Exhibition and Conference.

We argued that His Royal Highness' participation could send signals which could be abused for propaganda by Azerbaijan, and pointed to the grave human rights situation in the country. The letter caused massive attention and public debate, and drew support from a record number of four editorials in the Norwegian press. The NHC also wrote a five-page description of the human rights situation in Azerbaijan with suggestions for a human rights-oriented programme for the Norwegian official delegation to Baku, which also included the Norwegian minister of petroleum and energy and State secretary of foreign affairs. In the end, Crown Prince Haakon did travel to Baku, but the programme had included a human rights profile, including meetings with human rights activists and a meeting with newly-released Eynulla Fattulayev. This was, at least, covered in the opposition press and abroad.

In mid- June we were invited by the Norwegian parliamentary delegation to the Council of Europe to host a seminar for the Committee of Legal and Human Rights Affairs. Among the speakers we invited was the Azerbaijani journalist Khadija Ismayilova who challenged the parliamentarians to take bolder action towards Azerbaijan. The seminar "The underlying dilemma: Azerbaijan and Belarus in the spotlight" was held the following day.



Khadija Ismayilova and Aage Borchgrevink

In October we raised the issue of political prisoners and lack of justice at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw. In November the NHC gave input to the preparatory meeting of the EU-Azerbaijan Human Rights Sub-Committee.

PROJECT SUPPORT

- Institute for Peace and Democracy: Monitoring the judicial system (Court trials and rule of law). Assistance to civil society and the mass media.

In Georgia, tensions stemming from the political polarisation continued to simmer throughout 2011 and turned violent during street protests on 26 May. The government crackdown left two people dead, several injured and many people were arrested. In July four photojournalists were arrested on charges of espionage. The non-transparent manner of the process, led to speculations that they were targeted for reporting on the 26 May events. Although Georgia is a freer society than its neighbours Russia and Azerbaijan, significant problems remain: New amendments to the election law seem targeted at excluding certain individuals from standing for office, possibly in view of the parliamentary elections in Georgia in 2012. The main media and the judiciary remain heavily influenced by the state, and there were instances of persecution of journalists and human rights defenders, including the apparent surveillance by security organs of our colleagues in the Human Rights Centre.

ACTIVITIES

The NHC continued to work with our main partners in the country, the Human Rights Centre and Caucasus Conflict Resolution Centre. The main focus during the year was the lack of an effective

investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the August 2008 war. The

NHC produced two reports based on extensive research in 2010 and 2011, *Unable or Unwilling? Georgia's faulty investigation of crimes committed during and after the Russo-Georgian war of August 2008* (May 2011) and *The Impunity Syndrome in the Caucasus: The Situation of the Georgian-Russian conflict of August 2008* (December 2011). The reports were presented to the Prosecutor's Office and State Party Assembly of the International Criminal Court (ICC), to the European Parliament, various other international institutions and the government of Georgia. The NHC visited Georgia in October in order to collect information and carry out advocacy on this topic.

The Georgian situation remains one of those under scrutiny by the ICC.



PROJECT SUPPORT

- › The Georgian Human Rights Centre, jointly with Caucasus Conflict Resolution Centre: Strengthening the Rule of Law and the Freedom of Expression in Georgia. Legal Aid Programme, Information Programme, Human Rights Monitoring, International Advocacy.

Georgia

Turkey became an EU candidate country in 1999 and started to introduce substantial human rights and economic reforms. The death penalty was abolished, tougher measures were initiated against torture and the penal code was reformed. Reforms were also introduced in the areas of women's rights and in support of Kurdish culture, language, education and broadcasting.

In the wake of the so-called "Arab Spring", Turkey was portrayed as a model country by both Western and Middle Eastern commentators and politicians, one that combines democracy and strong Islamic values.

However, Turkey still suffers from a range of human rights problems. Reforms that strengthen women's rights do not go far enough; police abuse continues; media freedom and freedom of expression are undermined by prosecutions and threats against journalists, and the Kurdish conflict remains unsolved.

By some estimates Kurds constitute up to a fifth of the population. The Kurds have long complained that they suffer from efforts to destroy their identity and economic position, and face human rights violations. As part of a new "Kurdish initiative" launched in 2009, the government led by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan pledged to extend linguistic and cultural rights and to reduce the military presence in the

Kurdish areas. Nonetheless fighting has continued. A PKK truce offer in July 2010 was met with an official refusal to respond to "terrorist" statements.

The NHC did not have any projects related to Turkey in 2011. However, it followed developments that in particular related to freedom of expression and the Kurdish conflict. It gave media comments on the so-called Roj TV case. Roj TV was charged by Danish prosecutors with advocating PKK terrorism and of being financed and directed by the PKK. The court fined Roj TV and its parent company \$445,000 each for programmes it said incited terrorism, but rejected demands to revoke its broadcasting license.

The NHC criticised restrictions on media coverage of sensitive issues, such as the military, Kurds and political Islam. During 2011, there were a range of controversial verdicts against journalists.

A seminar was held in the Norwegian Parliament in June 2011, in which the NHC took part. It was organised by the Socialist Left party (SV), and was in recognition of crimes against Kurdish populations. It focused in particular on the poison gas attack against the Kurdish city of Halabja in Northern Iraq during the so-called Anfal campaigns in the 1980s.

Turkey

Central Asia

Central Asia holds strategic, economic and political interest to many outside the region itself. While geographically remote from Europe, ties with these republics are getting stronger. Even if the human rights situation in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are worse than in other parts of Central Asia, human rights are regularly violated by the authorities in all five countries. Sometimes human rights issues are overlooked by their partners abroad. The NHC has sought to promote respect for human rights and democratic values in Central Asia for several years.

While several republics in Central Asia have established legal frameworks for protection of human rights, these rights are often not observed in practice. Torture and ill-treatment are widespread. On a systemic level, administrative resources are often used to ensure that a single leader is kept in power. While large-scale construction is evident across the region, hospitals and schools often suffer from a lack of funding, raising questions around the transparency of the more grandiose projects taking place in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan in particular. In addition to police abuse and torture, freedom of expression, assembly and religion or beliefs are but a few of the issues which concern the entire region.

Kazakhstan chaired the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in 2011 whilst still being a member of the OSCE Troika. Early presidential elections took place in April, immediately following the OSCE Chairmanship and summit. The elections were found to have several shortcomings, in particular with regards to the use of administrative resources, political pressure and the lack of genuine choice. Two restrictive laws on religious groups passed through parliament without any open discussion, as well as a law on national security. Human rights activist Evgeny Zhovtis remained imprisoned under



Polling station in Osakarovka, Kazakhstan



NHC's Parvina Abduvakhobova



Kazakhstani President Nursultan Nazarbayev



Artur Artemyev, Meingul Kudabayeva and Gunnar Ekeløve-Slydal

Gunnar Ekeløve-Slydal, Kjell Magne Bondevik and Kazakhstani Ombudsman Askar Shakirov



Askar Shakirov, AIF-Åge Hansen and Gunnar Ekeløve-Slydal. Oslo





Striking workers in Aktau

conditions harsher than those of his fellow inmates. Working conditions for independent civil society and the media worsened. Government-sponsored NGOs take up an ever increasing part of the space, attention and funding, complicating the work of genuine NGOs. The ongoing strikes among oil workers in western Kazakhstan ended in tragedy on 16 December. According to official figures 17 people were killed in clashes with government forces that opened fire on demonstrators.

While still plagued by the horrors of the June 2010 mass killings in the southern cities of Osh and Jalalabad, **Kyrgyzstan** made the most far-reaching democratic reforms of any Central Asian country. While sometimes used as an example of revolution

Azimzhan Askarov Photo: Nurbek Toktakunov



gone wrong in the media in neighbouring countries, Kyrgyzstan is considered a leader in the region among local civil society activists and abroad. However, torture is widespread and many trials in the wake of the June 2010 events have been characterised by ethnic bias. The rise of aggressive nationalism among ethnic Kyrgyz in the south of the country remains a great concern and may turn into a source of future violence. The report of the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission was met with strong criticism and led to the head of the commission, Finnish Parliamentarian Kimmo Kiljunen, being declared persona non grata by certain groups in Zhogorku Kenesh, the Kyrgyzstani parliament. However, overall political processes are democratic on a level previously not seen in the region. President Roza Otunbaeva stepped down as previously agreed in November 2011 leaving the post of president to Almazbek Atambaev after elections.

In **Tajikistan**, the stand-off between radical groups and the authorities has intensified, and this has worsened the situation for non-radical religious minorities and believers. More restrictions have been introduced for believers who visit independent places of worship, and believers wanting to go on the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca are subject to needing approval from local authorities as well as an obligation to wear a particular uniform for Tajik citizens. Drug trafficking across the borders adds to the insecure situation in the regions and in border areas. The media situation is characterised by self-censorship and ongoing lawsuits against independent newspapers and journalists, particularly in relation to so-called "slander" against government officials. Constructive public debate on issues such as corruption is often curbed by claims that those seeking change wish to destabilise the situation in the country, often with reference to the tragic years of civil war in the 1990s. Restrictive legislation continues to regulate the private life of citizens. Life in Tajikistan is particularly characterised by the large numbers of migrant workers travelling regularly to Russia, and whose families are dependent on this income, as work opportunities are scarce in Tajikistan itself.

Uzbekistan is considered one of the most repressive regimes in the world. President Karimov continues to exert pressure on religious groups under the pretext of anti-terrorism policy, and routinely imprisons human rights activists, opposition figures and believers. Two journalists started a hunger strike to protest about the media situation. The use of torture is widespread, and civil society organisations have all but ceased to exist. The office of Human Rights Watch in Tashkent was completely closed last summer. Despite the release of the famous poet Yusuf Juma and an imprisoned HIV/AIDS activist, there are still at least 12 human rights defenders in prison or prison camps along



Uzbekistan: Samarkand

with probably several thousand other political prisoners. Western governments continued to develop relations with the country in spite of its dismal human rights record. Asylum seekers have been deported from Kazakhstan back to Uzbekistan. The daughter of the president sued a French newspaper for calling her father a dictator, but lost – effectively giving an unprecedented legal backing to the claim that Uzbekistan is indeed a dictatorship.

Under President Berdymuhammedov, the situation in **Turkmenistan** deteriorated further. Information exchange is still a challenge as there are serious restrictions on Internet use and censorship is widespread. The explosion at a military base in the remote area of Abadan is one example where several people died and authorities withheld information about the incident from the general public. Preparing for the presidential elections in February 2012, President Berdymuhammedov officially invited exiled opposition politicians to return to the country in order to participate in the elections. But despite concrete efforts to return by potential candidates in exile, no such arrangements were made. Gulgeldy Annaniyazov, a dissident with asylum in Norway, was arrested, convicted and sentenced to 11 years in prison upon returning to Turkmenistan in 2007. He is still kept incommunicado and the state of his health and wellbeing are unknown. Blacklists for students and activists still exist; no international human rights activists or organisations are allowed entry or existence in the country. Despite increased contact with multinational oil and gas companies, this is not leading to improvement for the country's citizens.

ACTIVITIES

The NHC representative office in Central Asia was registered in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in May 2010 and an opening ceremony took place in late March 2011. It was the second opening of an office in the region, the first having been located in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, until 2008. The NHC office is staffed by Regional Representative Ivar Dale and Administrative Officer Meirgul Kudabayeva.

One year after the violence in the south of Kyrgyzstan in June, the NHC returned to Osh in order

PROJECT SUPPORT

Small grants fund

The Central Asia small grants fund has continued its success with increased interaction with our Almaty office.

Through the small grants fund, NGOs all over the region are invited to carry out their activities with support from the NHC. Some examples are:

- ▶ In Tajikistan, two projects focus on the rights of women. The first focuses on the rights of the “second wives” who do not have any documents to secure their status. The second disseminates knowledge to prevent domestic violence and advocates a

law that would criminalise such acts. The role of women is worsening in the poor country where frustration over bad governance and unemployment is leading to a tense domestic situation. In addition, many men spend most of the year away from their families, leaving their wives in a difficult social and economic situation. Another project focuses on the rights of the LGBT community in Tajikistan, providing information and assistance to young people, as well as doing important work to prevent the spread of

HIV/AIDS among this group.

- ▶ In Kyrgyzstan, our project focus throughout the year was on the aftermath of the June 2010 violence. Local organisations are determined to address the distrust between peoples of Kyrgyzstan and the potential for more violence, and aim at fostering mutual understanding and consolidation. Organisations supported by the NHC monitor trials and try to ensure justice for defendants of all ethnic groups. Other organisations use modern technology and social media to involve youth in tolerance-

building processes, carry out monitoring of the media situation and promote the rights of children.

- ▶ In Kazakhstan, one project has focused on the country's implementation of the national human rights action plan, another looks at the legislation in terms of electoral rights and the access to information. The situation for refugees and asylum-seekers has changed in recent years, being the topic of legal review under another NHC-supported project.

to follow up on certain elements in connection with an upcoming detailed report about the 2010 events. The NHC has petitioned for the release of human rights activist Azimzhan Askarov, who was sentenced to life imprisonment after a flawed trial following the violence in Bazar-Korgan in Jalalabad Province in 2010.

The NHC covered the presidential elections in October, worked with local human rights groups and closely followed developments in the country.

The NHC also followed the case of Kazakhstani human rights activist Evgeniy Zhovtis throughout the year, and issued a statement for his early release in January. Secretary General Bjørn Engesland visited Zhovtis in prison in eastern Kazakhstan for the second time in April in order to support him and keep attention on his situation. Zhovtis and the organisation he heads, the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, had been granted the NHC Sakharov Freedom Award in 2010. The NHC continued to raise issues of restrictive legislation on religion with the government of Kazakhstan as well as in international fora and regional press. It also maintained good relations and exchange of information with religious groups and experts in the country. As a result of the high-level meetings, Ombudsman Shakirov spent three days on a study visit to Norway in June, followed by a seminar.

Kazakhstan was also the scene for a long-running labour conflict, where oil workers in western Kazakhstan were on strike for the last six months of

the year. The NHC visited the region in September and also made several statements in connection with the arrest and sentence of the oil strikers' legal representative, Natalia Sokolova. The NHC condemned the use of violence against strikers on 16 December, where officially up to 17 people were killed by government forces and expressed concern at the reports of mass arrests and mistreatment of prisoners during the following state of emergency.

The issue of prison conditions in Turkmenistan was addressed through the release of a report on the prison conditions in the women's colony in the northern Dashoguz region of Turkmenistan. The report was submitted for the review of Turkmenistan under the UN Committee Against Torture, was presented and discussed in New York and Washington D.C. as well as in Brussels and Norway. It was also covered widely in Central Asian independent media. The report is one of a very few that describes the situation inside the dreaded Turkmen prisons. Action for the release of Turkmen dissident Gulgeldy Annaniyazov along with campaigns for other political prisoners in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan continued throughout the year. The NHC has raised the issue in several meetings with Norwegian and international decision makers and representatives of international organisations.

The NHC often commented on events in Central Asia in local and international media. In some cases, the NHC supported refugees and asylum seekers from the region.



Evgeniy Zhovtis



Western Balkans

In 2011 international attention in the Western Balkans was focused on the trouble spots of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. There were increased concerns for negative trends, especially in Albania and Macedonia. EU enlargement fatigue and the impact of the global economic downturn continue to cast shadows over the prospects for the region.

Bosnia and Herzegovina lived through its most serious political crisis since 1996. Wrangling continued throughout the year over the formation of the state government following the November 2010 election. Only at the end of December 2011 was there an agreement to form a six-party government. The year 2011 was marked by a series of setbacks, and Bosnia's fundamental problems remained unresolved. The need to change constitutional provisions on the ineligibility of minorities to certain positions which are in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms continues to be unaddressed.

Graffiti on a wall in Staro Gradsko/Grackë





Bjørn Engesland meeting the Prosecutor General of Albania



Local elections in Albania

The leadership of Republika Srpska continued to challenge the only state level court in the country and even called for an entity referendum on the competence of the court, which heightened political tensions and intensified the crisis. The referendum was called off, but the political pressure had severe implications for the ability of the court to deal with politically sensitive war crimes and corruption cases.

Serbia continued to pursue the goal of EU accession but it became increasingly clear that the EU required an adjustment to Serbia's policy towards Kosovo. A major step forward was the overdue apprehension and extradition of the two remaining ICTY fugitives.

On the eve of the gay pride parade scheduled for 2 October 2011, the government introduced a ban claiming that the police would not be able to protect against violence. The ban was criticised as ceding to extremism and lack of political will to protect freedom of assembly. Hate-speech and threats directed towards the LGBT community from political and religious leaders was widespread and concerning as were threats and violence from extremists.

NHC's Ole Benny Lilleås



In 2011, **Kosovo** saw violent conflict over the control over border crossings to Serbia. Two Kosovar border guards were killed in riots and road blocks were set up in northern Kosovo in July. EU-brokered Belgrade-Prishtina talks helped diffuse tension and find workable compromises, but the road blocks remained in place. The NHC took positive note of improvements in the security and freedom of movement of minorities in recent years and welcomed the establishment of new municipalities enabling the political participation and influence of Serbs south of Ibar. On the other hand the NHC regretted the continued marginalisation of the Roma, Ashkaeli and Egyptian minorities (RAE), the taboos regarding war crimes and severe

shortcomings in the rule of law. In the north of Kosovo, freedom of expression is severely curtailed by threats and violence against individuals.

Albania's political crisis intensified over the year. On 21 January three demonstrators were killed and 55 injured during major demonstrations near the Prime Minister's office in Tirana. The NHC called for an impartial investigation against those members of the National Guard allegedly responsible for the shooting, but have noted with dismay the reported political obstruction of the investigations as well as pressures against judicial authorities. The local elections held in May were fiercely contested, especially for the position of mayor of Tirana, with significant shortcomings especially in counting of votes and resolution of electoral disputes. The result for the Tirana mayoral race was tipped in favour of the candidate preferred by the government following controversial decisions of the Central Election Commission, undermining further independence of and trust in institutions in the country.

Macedonia's name dispute with Greece continued to hamper the prospects of its euro-Atlantic integration while government of the country took a negative turn with respect to freedom of the press and various attempts at undermining civil society organisations. An on-going renewal of Skopje has had the use of Macedonian symbols as a centrepiece, which does not resonate well in a multi-ethnic state.

Transitional justice remained a key concern and priority area for the NHC. In a major development, indictees Ratko Mladić and Goran Hadžić were apprehended and extradited by Serbia to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina the implementation of the War Crimes Processing Strategy adopted by the



From the seminar Bosnia at the Breaking Point?



From the seminar Albania – Domestic and International Challenges

Council of Ministers in 2008 to address the huge backlog of war crimes cases seems to have fallen further behind schedule. The political attacks against the Court of BiH have undermined both the output of the court as well as the reconciliatory effects of its findings – as facts established by courts that could provide the basis of establishing truths shared by all communities are brought into question and disrepute.

Denial of war crimes committed by one's own ethnic kin and a rejection of the findings of international and domestic courts remain regional problems along with relativisation and politicisation of the findings. These are problems found not just in Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina and Kosovo. In an affront to international justice in 2011, the HDZ government of Croatia pledged state support for the appeal cases of two Croatian generals found guilty of war crimes by the ICTY in the first instance. Against this background, many people dedicated to justice in the Balkans expressed great shock when the Norwegian public broadcaster, NRK, aired a clearly biased documentary that left an impression that effectively denied the major findings of the ICTY and ICJ on the crime of genocide at Srebrenica in June 1995, without clearly stating what those findings were.

On a positive note, the government of Norway officially recognised the fact that genocide was committed in Srebrenica in the a White Paper, submitted to the Storting (Parliament) which gave its formal acceptance. The NHC had taken a leading role in advocating recognition in the preceding year with reference to a similar resolution already passed by the European Parliament and other assemblies.

Freedom of the media. Violence and threats against journalists were reported from both Serbia and

Bosnia and Herzegovina. In both countries there were calls for such cases to be more effectively investigated and prosecuted. In Serbia, concerns were expressed over lenient sentencing in such cases. The media structures of Serbia and Bosnia remained in place, mostly unreformed, with private and public owners meddling in editorial policies. In Macedonia, media freedom deteriorated over the year. Following a tax evasion case a major TV station and three newspapers were shut down. Changes in public broadcasting management and the broadcasting oversight body opened the door for direct governmental influence, according to observers.

ACTIVITIES IN 2011

We carried out advocacy towards the development of Norwegian policy on the Western Balkans that was defined in the White Paper (Meld.St. 17 2010-2011) adopted by the Storting in 2011. We also addressed a preliminary hearing organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in January and an open hearing organised by the Standing Committee for Defence and Foreign Affairs of the Storting on 8 June, as well as other advocacy efforts.

In the autumn, we issued letters expressing human rights concerns in Albania and Kosovo respectively to Norwegian MFA and relevant MPs before the official visits to Norway of Sali Berisha, Prime Minister of Albania, and Hashim Thaci, Prime Minister of Kosovo.

The NHC closely followed the case of the ban on the Belgrade Pride Parade 2011, scheduled for 2 October. We protested against the decision and demanded that the authorities ensure freedom of assembly and expression, and especially that the event could take place in 2012.

In March we went on a fact-finding mission to Albania to inquire about accountability for the

NHC's Enver Djuliman



Kai Eide, Norwegian MFA Special Adviser to Western Balkans





Blocked bridge in Mitrovica

handling of violence related to a demonstration in which three demonstrators were shot dead and many were injured. A number were arrested in January. We also wanted to examine and express concerns for the rule of law in the country.

On 8 May we observed local elections in Albania in co-operation with the Albanian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights.

The NHC submitted a complaint to the Norwegian Press Complaints Commission against the Norwegian Broadcasting Service which aired the documentary "A Town Betrayed" at the end of April 2011. The documentary was biased and in effect contradicted key findings of the ICTY on the crime of genocide in Srebrenica in July 1995. The Commission concluded that NRK had violated the ethical code for journalists.

We also hosted a successful seminar in Oslo on 23 May "Bosnia på bristepunktet?" (Bosnia at Breaking Point?) held at the height of the crisis in the country with speakers including the President of the Court of BiH, the President of the Helsinki Committee of BiH and other leading experts.

A delegation from the NHC visited the Sandzak region in May 2011 and discussed the problems of the predominantly Bosnian population with local politicians and other community representatives. Issues in focus included the administrative challenges for institutions such as an Islamic university to become registered, and the functioning of the elected Bosnian Council.

By coincidence, the NHC was present in Belgrade on the occasion of the arrest of Ratko Mladić, and was able to monitor the subsequent riots, the political response and the media coverage. A delegation visited Bosnia and Herzegovina in September and took part in human rights monitoring and the development, planning and execution of projects. The NHC met with representatives of civil society, the media, international organisations and decision-makers in the justice and education sectors.

In November the NHC led and co-organised a region-based fact-finding and advocacy mission to Kosovo, including representatives from the Helsinki Committees for Human Rights in Serbia and Albania. The mission focused on the situation for minorities and the rule of law in light of the heightened political tensions.

A delegation from the Albanian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights visited Norway in December. The delegation met with a number of Norwegian bodies dealing with Norwegian policy and investment in Albania, including the PACE delegation and the Standing Committee on Defence and Foreign Affairs at the Storting, as well as the MFA and others. A seminar "Albania – Domestic and International Challenges" was organised.

PROJECT SUPPORT

Project co-operation with partner committees in the Western Balkans continues but has become a less important part of the NHC's work as donor support for the Western Balkans is decreasing and becoming more focused on support for state structures. NHC projects have involved monitoring, reporting and consciousness-raising in the field of human rights, especially transitional justice,

in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia.

- Helsinki Committee for human rights in Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Cooperation between five universities in Bosnia to develop curriculae and approaches to transitional justice issues and values. Target groups include students of law, political and social

sciences, and journalism.

- Helsinki Committee for human rights in Serbia: The magazine Helsinki Povelja has been published bimonthly and public meetings have been held around the country to present citizens with alternative ideas and to promote human rights and liberal perspectives based on the rule of law. In particular the project focuses on

transitional justice and information to counter war crimes denial.

- A regional human rights education project provided education in human rights, intercultural understanding and conflict resolution to more than 400 young people from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Macedonia and Kosovo.

Human Rights Education

Human rights education is an important pillar of the work of the NHC. Our primary goal is development of democratic societies where people actively participate in the advancement of human rights culture, where the achievement of individual rights goes hand in hand with international standards, and where conflicts are resolved through open dialogue, securing a peaceful coexistence.

Our human rights education programme focuses on four main areas:

1. Monitoring human rights education, with the aim of influencing the commitment of the individual states in this area.
2. Human rights education as a means of developing strong civil society and free media.
3. Human rights education as a prerequisite for attaining individual rights and active participation in social life.
4. Work to rebuild trust and reconciliation after conflicts, in order to secure lasting peace and peaceful coexistence.

In 2011 our department for human rights education continued its work to promote cooperation between its programmes and programme partners, i.e. Barents, the Western Balkans, Belarus, Ukraine, North Caucasus and Norway. The second NHC Forum for Cooperating Partners in Human Rights Education was held in April in Sarajevo. It gathered 25 representatives from all our programmes. Since the previous Forum in 2009, they had already started to work as a network to build and exchange competencies, experiences and develop educational materials.

Also in 2011, the Faculty of Pedagogics at Sarajevo University joined our programme of establishing studies in intercultural understanding and human rights, in which the Faculty of Humanities at the Džemal Bijedić University in Mostar had already been participating. The positive experiences of this formed the basis for developing a new and extensive international programme entitled "The Role of the Universities in Peacebuilding". The programme started in December 2010 and involves universities and non-governmental organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo and Norway.

In Norway, the cooperation with Buskerud University College and Drammen municipality has been continued. Thus, in February an educational course for refugees in human rights and intercultural understanding was organised in cooperation with the Introduction Centre for Refugees in the municipality. The department also undertook a series of meetings in 2011 with relevant Norwegian institutions aimed at exploring possibilities for

contributing to the systematic and long-term improvement of human rights education in Norway.

THE BARENTS REGION

The Barents project is a collaboration between Sør-Varanger municipality in Norway, the Severomorsk city administration, the City of Murmansk and the Murmansk region, City of Arkhangelsk and City of Petrozavodsk (all in Russia), and the NHC. The project includes partners from civil society in Russia such as Barents Press, Memorial, Uteshenie and Rassvet. The aim of the project is dissemination of knowledge on human rights, intercultural understanding and peaceful conflict resolution by implementation of different educational programmes directed at particular groups. They include young people, teachers, journalists, prison employees, law enforcement officials and people working with disabled people. The main idea is to promote the educational programmes within the different layers of society in order to contribute to developing the democratisation process and formation of civil society.

The main experiences from the project implementation in 2011 are as follows: the target groups have accomplished knowledge and gained insight into human rights and democratic processes, rights protection and support mechanisms, multicultural understanding and peaceful conflict management. They also became better prepared to implement human rights standards in their work and activities. The project is based on an implementation plan to



Enver Džuliman interviewed during a partner meeting in Sarajevo



Barents project

provide our partners with as much knowledge as possible in order to help them with future human rights education activities, and to provide them with all possible tools, mechanisms, methods, documentation and educational literature to organise the educational process independently.

The project implementation process has shown good achievements with strict follow-up of the working plan and evaluation of the fulfilled activities. Our partners underline the importance of the fact that a variety of projects associated with human rights are now available and that communication between cooperating partners – irrespective of the different regions they work in – has been significantly improved. Evaluation questionnaires submitted by representatives of the target groups show that an overwhelming majority consider human rights education as one of their priorities now. The project will continue in 2012.

BELARUS

Since its start in 2006, the Belarusian human rights education programme has increased in value and outreach despite numerous challenges and negative developments in the country. The programme runs in cooperation between the NHC and a number of very dedicated and professional partner organisations in Belarus. Together with their support we have been able to reach out with educational projects to young people, journalists, teachers and human rights activists.

In 2011 the political, economic and social problems in the country continued their slow regress, marked so strongly by the scandalous presidential elections of 2010. Organisations that are not registered and are susceptible to prosecution, as well as a new law criminalising the receipt of financial aid from foreign organisations, have together undoubtedly

affected the general state of mind and atmosphere in the country. Nevertheless, the planned activities have been carried out – albeit with great care and attention to information and personal security issues.

Great efforts have been undertaken in order to consolidate an educational module designed for journalists and these efforts have resulted in a series of highly topical seminars and discussions for the Belarusian target group in addition to a spin-off project targeting freelance journalists.

Last year's success in establishing support for educational activities focused on gender equality and domestic violence in the context of women's rights as human rights has continued. Important steps have been taken in order to ensure that a bill on domestic violence be included in the National Plan of Action to Provide Gender Equality for 2011-2015.

UKRAINE

The NHC's role in Ukraine is central for the *"Let Us Understand Human Rights – All Ukrainian Educational Programme"* aimed at raising the level of human rights culture in Ukraine and promotion of democratisation of Ukrainian society. This national programme is the largest in the country and it represents a joint effort by over 50 civil society organisations. They are dedicated to strengthening the level of human rights and respect for them in the country. There is real dedication to providing access to human rights education to as much of the population as possible. The programme is coordinated by the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, which also runs websites for the programme www.edu.helsinki.org.ua and www.hr-activists.net.

In 2011 the programme for formal and informal human rights education was strengthened through cooperation with state institutions in an attempt to introduce long-term and goal-oriented educational modules in human rights for teachers, students, law enforcement and prison officials. These are important strategic steps that have been taken in order to achieve the developmental goal of the programme.

LEFT: Human Rights school under the Belarusian human rights education program



RIGHT: Human rights school in Ukraine



Reports from our partners have pointed to a worsening of the general situation in the country, including human rights-related aspects. They underline the fact that, if left unmonitored, the trends of the current leadership will move the country towards greater centralisation and consolidation of power, i.e. towards authoritarianism. Under these conditions the aims of the educational programme stand out as the prerequisite for the development of a strong civil society that can effectively contribute to the state authorities complying with their commitments to international human rights standards.

WESTERN BALKANS

The NHC's human rights work in the Western Balkans dates as far back as the 1990s, and human rights education has become one of our core activities since 2000. More than 10,000 young people and teachers have been trained in human rights, intercultural understanding, non-violent communication and conflict resolution. Thousands of young people have been involved in activities to improve the human rights situation regionally and in their local communities, educational materials have been published in local languages, and we have succeeded in introducing an elective course in teaching methodology for intercultural understanding and human rights at two universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We work with a broad network of partners in the region, which includes civil society organisations, educational institutions, regional structures and experts.

Young people's participation in processes of transitional justice, minority rights and providing in-depth knowledge on specific local challenges at a regional level were specific priorities in 2011. Unrest in Kosovo, the post-election development in Macedonia, the tense situation in the predominantly Muslim Sandzak-area of Serbia and the countries' different status in the EU-accession procedures are all matters that can influence and shed light on the regional development.

The NHC and our regional partners have had continuous consultations, roundtables and public presentations with representatives from institutions, civil society organisations and youth networks to present best practice on human rights education, discuss options for cooperation between the state and civil sector. As a result we are now counselling on curricula development and providing extracurricular training for teachers. School representatives are actively partaking in our activities.

The establishment of the study in intercultural understanding and human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina was also part of the project in 2011. The aim was to work on building the programme and competencies at the universities in Sarajevo



Network forum for cooperation in human rights education in Sarajevo



Tatevik Gukasyan, Mina Skouen and Csilla Czimbalmos



Partner meeting in Sarajevo

and Mostar that will enable quality education of students, especially in pedagogy, journalism and philosophy. Thus, at the above-mentioned universities two semesters were implemented on the basis of prepared educational materials from our department while in the lectures representatives of NGOs from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia were involved.

NORTH CAUCASUS

The NHC and our partner organisation Civic Assistance Committee continued in 2011 the development of a training programme in Chechnya, Ingushetia and North Ossetia. We provide training and competence enhancement in intercultural understanding, conflict resolution and human rights. Young people, teachers, trainers and journalists are taking part in the various processes that are intended to enable them to contribute to positive and peaceful development in their communities. Highlighting alternative ways of contributing to peace rather than enter in to an escalating conflict situation has resulted in the development of concrete peace-promoting activities, interethnic dialogue, and important discussions and dissemination of information about the content and value system of the international human rights framework.



Building bridges, not walls

III

Human Rights in Norway

In 2011, the NHC was active in a range of human rights issues in Norway, including human rights in prisons, obligations under the UN Convention against Torture, re-organisation of a strengthened National Institution for Human Rights, minority and refugee issues, the human rights situation of illegal residents, etc.

REFUGEE PROTECTION ISSUES AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE 'PAPERLESS'

Given our knowledge about the human rights situation in the countries in which we are active, as a human rights organisation we have a responsibility to give some assistance to asylum seekers from some of these countries who are in need of protection in Norway. We agree to intervene in a limited number of cases where intervention may be valuable and necessary to receive protection by Norwegian immigration decision-making bodies. We provide information to asylum lawyers, the immigration services and other authorities, both generally and in specific cases. In 2011 the NHC continued to support asylum lawyers with information related to cases of asylum seekers from the North Caucasus. A number of decisions in individual cases in the appeals board of the immigration authorities (UNE), first and second instance courts, have been based on or referred to information and testimony from the NHC. We also supported a limited number of cases from Azerbaijan and Central Asia. Although we do not have regular consultations for asylum seekers, we experience a constant stream of applicants to our office, which shows there is an unmet need for assistance.

In August 2010 we joined a campaign supported by Norwegian organisations to promote a mechanism to ensure a permanent solution for the so-called

“paperless” – immigrants with rejected asylum claims who for various reasons have stayed in Norway without documents and legal rights. By the end of the year, the campaign was supported by close to 40 organisations.

In January a Russian “paperless” citizen, who had published a book about her experiences as a non-registered immigrant under the name of Maria Amelie, was detained for deportation by immigration police at the Nansen school in Lillehammer just after a lecture about the situation for paperless. Her deportation order caused a public outrage and thousands of protesters gathered several times all over the country. The NHC was involved in the campaign for her, amongst other things through our expertise on Russia. The “Marie Amelie case” became the most debated immigration case in Norway in 2011. Marie Amelie was eventually forcefully deported, but by this time she had already won a battle: The Parliament approved “Lex Amelie”, allowing asylum seekers who have been expelled because of illegal residence, to return on certain conditions without a quarantine period of several years. The main conditions are that the person must have undergone approved vocational training in Norway, and have a job offer that is relevant to education. Although Marie Amelie was indeed allowed to return to Norway, the rule change hardly did anything to solve the challenges of the “paperless” in Norway.

Demonstration in support of Maria Amelie



The NHC was also active in media debates on refugee protection.

In our efforts related to refugees in Norway we enjoy good relations with other organisations in Norway, most notably NOAS, The Norwegian Centre against Racism and Amnesty International Norway.

NATIONAL MINORITIES: ROMANI/TRAVELLERS:

The NHC met with a delegation of the Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in May 2011, raising issues on the current situation of the Romani people in Norway. In particular, the delegation was presented with information on the lack of a national scheme of compensation for Romani persons who were subject to abuse due to government policies in the past. In its Third Opinion on Norway (section 80) of 30 June 2011, the Advisory Committee included a recommendation the setting up of such a national scheme.

The NHC also took part in lobbying efforts targeting Norwegian parliamentarians on similar issues. It also met with the National Commission on Romani/ Travellers, which is mandated to conduct research on Norwegian Romani policies and provide recommendations on how to deal with past abuses and strengthen current policies. The National Commission was set up by the government in the wake of a NHC report and lobbying efforts in 2009.

PRISON MONITORING

The NHC started to monitor prisons systematically in Norway. During the year, NHC staff visited Skien high-security prison and Bredtvet women's prison, and developed plans for further visits. As the legal basis for prison visits was questioned by a prison that NHC asked to visit, the NHC secured a formal approval from the Ministry of Justice to conduct prison monitoring. During visits, we discussed a number of sensitive issues with inmates, managers, prison officers and health personnel.

CAT AND CPT REPORTING

The NHC was member of a group of NGOs that submitted comments to the Ministry of Justice on the draft Norwegian periodic report to the UN Committee against Torture (CAT), pointing out several shortcomings in the draft. This engagement formed a basis for a follow-up of the final Norwegian report in 2012.

We joined a group of NGOs and institutions to meet informally with the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) delegation, which visited Norway in June 2011.

OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE (OPCAT) NATIONAL PREVENTIVE MECHANISM (NPM)

The NHC took part in meetings with an inter-ministerial working group, mandated to propose organisation of a Norwegian National Preventive Mechanism (NPM). Norway signed the NPM Protocol in 2003, but has so far not ratified. The working group was mandated to propose a model involving the Parliamentary Ombudsman as the main institution for conducting the tasks of a NPM. The NHC argued that Norway's National Human Rights Institution should be involved in the NPM, and that the mandate of the NPM should require strong civil society consultation.

HUMAN RIGHTS HUMAN WRONGS DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL

The Human Rights Human Wrongs Film Festival is Scandinavia's only film festival dedicated to human rights, and it was arranged for the third time in 2011. The 2011 event took place at Parkteatret from 2 to 6 February 2011. The NHC co-organised the festival together with Oslo Dokumentarkino and the Human Rights House Oslo. The themes of the festival were built around the following four themes: Transitional Justice, Without Protection, Freedom of Expression, and Resource Conflicts. The aim of the festival is to generate debate on

From debates during HRHW Film Festival:

LEFT: Andreas Motzfeldt Kravik, ILPI, Øystein Rolandsen, Prio, and Gunnar Ekeløve-Slydal

MIDDLE: Erling Borgen, Vugar Gojayev, Mitra Nasreen Forouhar, Zoya Svetova and Vadim Kleiner

RIGHT: Audience





Emmanuel Jal

known and less-known human rights issues, raise awareness on human rights violations, demonstrate the importance of human rights documentary film making, and provide a platform for activism and further engagement. This goal was achieved in 2011, when 21 films from 11 countries were screened. Eight of the showings were Norwegian premieres. Nine major panel debates also took place. Additional longer comments, introductions and Q&As meant that all the films had discussion opportunities associated with them. The festival hosted 10 international guests who participated in the thematic discussions. Among them were big names such as filmmaker Frank Piasecki Paulson, director of *Blood in the Mobile*, Vadim Kleiner, a lawyer working for Hermitage Capital Management and who is running a worldwide campaign demanding justice for Sergei Magnitsky, and Emmanuel Jal, the former child soldier and now a star on the international hip hop music scene from South Sudan. Additionally, 19 international and national experts in Norway introduced and discussed the topics raised by the films. An audience of 2,500 people attended the films and discussions. The media coverage was also considerable.

CONFERENCE – “LIVING TOGETHER IN DIVERSITY”

In November the NHC arranged a well-attended conference, “Living Together in Diversity”, in conjunction with NOAS and Amnesty International Norway. It addressed multiculturalism in Europe and the challenges arising from the resurgence of intolerance and discrimination. The idea of a conference came up in the aftermath of the 22 July terror attack in Norway. An important focus of the conference was to present and to discuss the report “Living together: combining diversity and freedom in 21st Century Europe. Report of the Group of Eminent Persons of the Council of Europe”. This is a report commissioned by Council of Europe’s Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland and written by, among several others, Joschka Fischer, Russian Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin and Javier Solana. The event brought together Norwegian and international experts, with presentations from Thorbjørn Jagland, Alexander Verkhovskiy, head of the Russian SOVA Centre for Information and Analysis, Hungarian scientist and 1989 Rafto laureate Peter Mólnar, Susanne Nour from the Danish Institute for Human Rights as well as Lars Østby of Statistics Norway, and our own Secretary General Bjørn Engesland. Norwegian parliamentarians and local activists participated in a panel debate after the presentations.

At the conference, Jagland said: “The European reality is a multicultural reality. All Europeans need to understand and accept this fact. Europe is dependent on the 40-50 million extra immigrants to sustain our standard of living. This reality stands in sharp contrast to a perception that is beginning to spread, especially among the radical right in Europe, namely that we are facing a threat from mass immigration. This myth should be put down and the efforts to get everyone to understand that we live in a multicultural reality in Europe must be strengthened.”



“Living Together”: From left: Lars Østby, Alexander Verkhovskiy, Susanne Nour, Bjørn Engesland and Peter Mólnar



LEFT: Peter Mólnar
RIGHT: Thorbjørn Jagland



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)

In 2011, the NHC continued its focus on advocacy through the OSCE and ODIHR, using all possible opportunities to address the participating States. Most effort is targeted at the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, held in Warsaw in September/October. The NHC actively organised side-events last year, targeting impunity after grave human rights violations in the OSCE area. We used the Russia-Georgia conflict, Andijan, South Kyrgyzstan and Chechnya as case studies. In the second meeting the NHC turned the focus on freedom of assembly and association in Kazakhstan, using the conflict of oil strikers in western Kazakhstan as an example. The NHC also co-hosted a side-events on Belarus and was actively involved in other joint initiatives on Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Furthermore, the NHC made several statements and interventions: on freedom of religion in Central Asia, freedom of expression in the Balkans, rule of law in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and rule of law in Azerbaijan and Belarus. Discussions around an emerging network of human rights activists in the OSCE area took place and continued on the fringes of the 18th Ministerial meeting in Vilnius in December.

The NHC sees the participation of civil society as crucial in the OSCE and ODIHR's work for human rights and democratisation, and is engaged in defending this possibility. Some participating States and voices in the Secretariat have recently launched initiatives that would limit the influence of civil society in the organisation, and others seem to follow suit. The NHC remains vigilant to ensure that so-called administrative reforms and political negotiations do not undermine the results the civil society and the participating States of the OSCE have jointly achieved since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975.

NORWEGIAN NGO FORUM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND FOCUS ON THE UNITED NATIONS

The NHC served as the secretariat of the NGO Forum in 2011. The NHC presided over meetings in the Forum, organised the activities of the Forum and organised the participation of Norwegian NGOs in the work of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Our activities included following up on a written alternative report to the UN Human Rights Committee on Norway's compliance with the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights with extensive comments on Norway's official sixth periodic report. In October the report came up for consideration and the NHC spoke to the Committee on behalf of a group of NGOs, lobbied and observed the hearing of Norway.

The NGO Forum also issued 10 recommendations to the Norwegian government regarding the Norwegian membership of the UN Human Rights Council and broader human rights promotion at the UN. The NHC participated in a conference in Brussels on 28-29 March organised by the regional office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), to argue that the UPR should be used to put political weight behind human rights and in favour of the need for being specific in UPR recommendations. This would especially strengthen implementation of treaty body recommendations.





Demonstration in support of Azimzhan Askarov at HDIM in Warsaw

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 dialogue with China is currently suspended, due to strong Chinese reactions to the granting of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010 to the Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo. In 2011, Bjørn Engesland took part in dialogue with Indonesia, while Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal, Deputy Secretary General, took part in dialogue with Vietnam; both organised in Oslo. The NHC holds that the dialogues remain important channels to address human rights issues and develop contacts. There are, however, limited possibilities in the dialogue set-ups with Vietnam and China to assess any impact of the dialogue on the countries' human rights policies.



Gunnar Ekeløve-Slydal and Ivar Dale at HDIM in Warsaw



Ivar Dale and Lene Wetteland at HDIM in Warsaw

NORWEGIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The NHC has close ties with the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (NCHR). 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. The NHC was also engaged in the Centre's role as national institution for human rights. The NHC appealed to the government and members of parliament to re-organise Norway's NHRI. We argued that recommendations of a Ministry of Foreign Affairs review team on Norway's NHRI should be followed up swiftly. The team concluded that the current organisation of NHRI as part of the NCHR at the University of Oslo was not in line with international standards (the so-called Paris Principles). NHRI should be re-organised as a human rights commission with a mandate based in law to protect and promote human rights.



Demonstration in support of Ales Bialiatki at HDIM in Warsaw

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

The NHC remained active in 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 international legal bodies, and universal jurisdiction issues under Norwegian law.

The NHC was represented at the 10th ICC Assembly of State Parties, held in New York from 12-21 December 2011. At the meeting, elections of new Prosecutor and six of the 18 ICC judges took place. The current Deputy Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, was elected Prosecutor, to succeed Luis Moreno Ocampo whose mandate ends in June 2012.

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), and takes an active part in some of its activities.

During the year, the NHC cooperated with Georgian human rights organisations to collect and present material to the ICC on investigations into war crimes during the 2008 war between Georgia and Russia. The NHC was involved in monitoring Norway's domestic efforts on prioritising and prosecuting international criminal cases in the Norwegian courts. The NHC also started a major project together with eight Russian and international human rights organisations to establish a centre for documenting international crimes in the North Caucasus.

OSLO FREEDOM FORUM

The NHC remained a partner in organising the Oslo Freedom Forum; an international conference first organised in 2009 to gather activists from across the world to speak about fundamental freedoms and democracy issues. The main organiser is the New York-based Human Rights Foundation, led by Thor Halvorssen. The third Oslo Freedom Forum took place from 9-11 May 2011. In addition to NHC, partners included Amnesty International Norway, Civita and Plan Norway.

HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE IN OSLO/HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE NETWORK

The NHC is a member of the Human Rights House in Oslo and occupies approximately half of the space of the offices shared with eight other NGOs. The Oslo Human Rights House is member of the Human Rights House Network.

EEA Grants

The NHC has since 2005 been responsible for coordination and information to the Norwegian civil society under the EEA and Norway Financial Mechanisms and NGO funds, with a particular focus on bilateral partnerships.

Through grants from the EEA and Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway contribute to reducing social and economic disparities in EU countries in central and southern Europe. They also help strengthen bilateral relations. For the period 2009-14, grants from the EEA and Norway amount to €1.79 billion. They will benefit NGOs, research and academic institutions, and the public and private sectors within 15 EU countries. Key areas of support are environmental protection and climate change, research and scholarships, civil society, health and children, gender equality, justice and cultural heritage.

In the course of 2011, Memorandums of Understandings regarding the priorities and allocation of funds were agreed upon by the donor countries and the beneficiary states. In 2012, the NGO funds, which represent around €135 million in funding, will be launched.

The NHC is responsible for keeping Norwegian civil society well informed about the EEA and Norwegian grants and NGO funds in the beneficiary countries, assisting in establishing contact and cooperation between NGOs in the beneficiary countries and Norway, and giving advice to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in matters related to Norwegian civil society. Through this project the NHC cooperates closely with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Norwegian embassies in the beneficiary countries as well as the Financial Mechanism Office.

In 2011, the NHC facilitated and organised visits, meetings and events in order to strengthen civil society engagement and foster partnerships. We also facilitated study visits to Norway by Estonian NGOs

in March and Hungarian NGOs in April. During these meetings, the NGOs had a wide range of meetings with potential partners. The NHC attended a workshop in Bulgaria and organised a meeting with the Latvian Programme Operator in December.

A stakeholder meeting was held in Oslo in June 2011, organised in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway and the Financial Mechanism Office. Participants included representatives of intermediaries from the beneficiary countries, National Focal Points and Norwegian civil society, as well as the ministry itself, the Financial Mechanism Office and the NHC. During the meeting, lessons learnt were discussed and achievements and challenges of the previous grant period (2004-2009) were reviewed. Consideration was also given on how to plan for the future.

An information meeting about the EEA grants and Norwegian support for civil society in the beneficiary countries was arranged in Oslo in September. The meeting, which was organised in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, brought together approximately 120 representatives from different sectors of Norwegian civil society.

An important task for the NHC is also to have ongoing and direct contact with Norwegian organisations seeking information about the EEA and Norwegian grants, on how to apply for funds and other relevant questions. A new website was also developed to facilitate the development of partnerships. The portal will be an important tool for continuously disseminating information about the EEA and Norwegian grants.



NHC's Anders Nielsen



Study visit from Estonia



LEFT: Stakeholder meeting in Oslo
RIGHT: Study visit from Hungary

VI

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 2011 the NHC or its advisors were registered with 735 hits in 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 a substantial additional source of visibility. Additionally, NHC representatives are frequently used as commentators and experts, and in debates 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 in several important human rights questions in 2011, and we are continuing to be one of the most visible human rights organisations in Norway.

WEB PAGES

The information department communicates the work of the NHC through its own website and publications. In March 2011, the NHC launched a new website. The upgrade was necessary and the new web solution has proven to be user-friendly for visitors, and a useful tool for the information department in communicating the work of the

NHC. In the course of 2011, the NHC published 157 relevant news articles on the website www.nhc.no, in addition to other postings. On average, the NHC website had 230 unique visits per day in 2011. The NHC also became more active on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

PUBLICATIONS

The NHC published two printed reports in 2011:

- ▶ **Turkmenistan: Dashoguz women's prison colony.** The report was prepared by Turkmen civil society activists, and co-edited with the Human Rights Center Memorial.
- ▶ **Unable or unwilling? Georgia's faulty investigation of crimes committed during and after the Russo-Georgian war of August 2008.** The report was co-authored with the Georgian human rights groups Article 42, Georgian Young Lawyers' Association and Georgia's Human Rights Center.

Additionally, the NHC published the following report electronically in 2011:

- ▶ **The impunity syndrome in the Caucasus: The situation of the Georgian-Russian conflict of August 2008.** The report was co-authored with the Georgian human rights groups Article 42, Georgian Young Lawyers' Association and Georgia's Human Rights Center.

All three publications can be downloaded from the web page www.nhc.no, or ordered from the NHC information department on request.

MEMBERSHIP

As of the end of 2011, the NHC had 574 individual members.



VII

Finances

The total spending in 2011 was 45,0 million NOK out of which project support for partners constituted 32,7 million NOK. Total income balance was 45,3 million NOK.

The Norwegian Helsinki Committees donors are primarily the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Freedom of Expression Foundation (Fritt Ord), Open Society Institute and National Endowment for Democracy. Gifts, members contribution etc. provided an income of 347 736 NOK.



Demonstration in St.Petersburg after the Duma election in December

NORWEGIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE

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