

# Norwegian Helsinki Committee

## Annual Report 2012



# 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.

NHC bases its work on international human rights instruments adopted by the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), including the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.

The main areas of focus for 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 multicultural 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.

Editor of the Annual Report: Head of information Berit Nising Lindeman

Cover photo: Svetlana Gannushkina, Lyudmila Alexeyeva and Lilya Shibanova at NHC's Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award. Photo: Anders Nielsen.

## PERSPECTIVES:

In January 2013 NHC released the report *Democracy and Human Rights at Stake in Hungary: The Viktor Orbán Government's Drive for Centralisation of Power*. It is our second report on Hungary in less than a year.

With reference to a number of recent legislative changes, policy decisions and key appointments by the Prime Minister Orbán and FIDESZ, the main government party, which have resulted in what has been termed a "FIDESZisation" of important state institutions, like the judiciary, the NHC concluded that:

"Current developments in Hungary remain of great concern. It seems that old patterns and habits are returning. It also shows that twenty years of democratic rule are not enough to internalise democratic values to such a degree that a party with a supermajority (over 50 percent) in the Parliament is able to resist temptations to centralise power and expand its reach, illegally into the future."

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the pull effect of the European Union, with its powerful economies, meant that human rights values and democratic principles were almost universally accepted in Europe. With the financial crisis in the EU, and the rise of the Chinese and Russian economies (which have provided millions of people with higher living standards), this process is stalling.

The "strong hand" is making a comeback in some European countries, notably in Russia, and right-wing populism has become a factor in some of the economies that have been hardest affected by Europe's financial troubles. The Hungarian example shows that, even within the EU, democracy cannot be taken for granted.

In conjunction with these developments, xenophobia and intolerance have sometimes been tacitly accepted by governments and society. Roma, asylum seekers and certain other groups remain especially vulnerable. In Norway, too, it is important to remind the public and the authorities that these groups have human rights.

In some grave cases, discrimination has government support. Recently adopted laws in Russian cities have banned the "promotion of homosexuality" and similar provisions are being discussed in the Ukrainian parliament. The legislation is aimed at improving birthrates, or so it is claimed. In reality it is legally sanctioned discrimination, and an attempt at waging "moral" war on liberal values.

On a recent visit to Budapest, I discovered the extent to which our critical report is being discussed – among officials, in media and civil society – as part of a larger on-going public debate about democracy and relations with Europe. This debate rallies counterforces in support of Hungarian democracy, and makes it "unlikely that Hungary will join the club of autocratic regimes", as we noted in our report.

It's not only in Hungary where lively public discussion gives hope. Today, frank exchanges of opinions and information characterise internet debate and social media even in semi-authoritarian states like Russia.

Freedom of information is a main defence against backsliding on democracy and human rights in times of social and economic turbulence. This is a problem for the world's autocrats. It is an opportunity for central European institutions, however, like the Council of Europe and, especially, the EU, and also for the international non-governmental human rights movement, including organisations such as the NHC.



Bjørn Engesland,  
Secretary General



# The NHC Secretariat



**Bjørn Engesland**  
Secretary General.



**Aage Borchgrevink**  
Senior Advisor, focus on Georgia. Partly on leave in 2012.



**Veronika Vimberg**  
Project manager of the human rights education programme (from May).



**Lillian Solheim**  
Project manager, EEA grants project.

## 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 Russia, Central Asia, Turkey 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 management.



**Csilla Czibalmos**  
Project manager of the human rights education programme (On leave from June).



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



**Naida Huskanovic**  
Regional co-ordinator for "Build Bridges, Not Walls" project, Sarajevo.



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



**Inna Sangadzhieva**  
Project manager, focus on Russia and Belarus. On maternity leave most of 2012.



**Olga Shamshur**  
Project officer, Russia, Belarus and Natalia Estemirova Documentation Centre.



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



**Meirgul Kudabayeva**  
Administrative officer, Central Asia regional representatives office, Almaty.



**Berit Nising Lindeman**  
Head of information. Senior Advisor, focus on Belarus and Azerbaijan, election observation.



**Enver Djuliman**  
Head of the human rights education programme.



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Regional representative, Central Asia, Almaty Office.



**Aleksandra Sidorenko**  
Project co-ordinator, Natalia Estemirova Documentation Centre



**Elena Saenkova**  
Project co-ordinator, Murmansk office.



**Anders Nielsen**  
Information Advisor. Responsible for the EEA grants information portal [www.ngonorway.org](http://www.ngonorway.org)



**Mina Skouen**  
Project manager of the human rights education programme.



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

## Organisation

The organisational components of the NHC are the annual meeting, the board and the council. The annual meeting is our highest decision-making body, 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: Ragnhild Astrup Tschudi**

Human Rights Advocate with a special focus on Russia and Eastern Europe.

**Vice Chairperson: Julie Wilhelmsen**

Research fellow, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

**Hauk Lund**

Executive director, Hauk Lund Consulting A/S.

**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.

**Ragni Ramberg**

Lawyer at Østgård Wikasteen.

**Inger Skjelsbæk**

Senior Researcher and Deputy Director at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO).

**Ole Benny Lilleås**

Staff representative.

### COUNCIL

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- Kåre Vollan
- Maria Warsinska-Varis
- Svein Wilhelmsen
- Stein-Ivar Aarsæther

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## I

## The year in retrospect

## 2012 – Norwegian Helsinki Committee 35 years' anniversary

2012 marked the 35 years since the founding of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in 1977. We celebrated the anniversary in Oslo in October together with many of our partners abroad and friends in Norway. We organised a jubilee seminar, a ceremony where the Russian NGO Golos received the Sakharov Freedom award and a large reception to which our friends in human rights activism were invited.

The beginnings of NHC, with a concentration of attention on events in Moscow, then the capital of the Soviet Union, were reflected in our 35-year anniversary celebrations. Sadly, even though the Soviet Union ceased to exist a long time ago, the promotion of democracy and human rights in Russia is still needed, and even more needed than we had hoped for when the Communist Party was thrown out of power more than twenty years ago. On the contrary, the concentration of power under Vladimir Putin, and the restriction of civic activity or dissent during his third term of presidency, increasingly show signs of an authoritarian rule.

In the same way as the dissidents forming the Moscow Helsinki Group in the seventies, many Russians do not accept the situation today, and in March, during the Presidential elections and after, thousands took to the street in protest. Among the protesters you could still find members of the original Moscow Helsinki Group. Russia – and the selection of a Russian organisation as a winner of the Sakharov Freedom Award in 2012 – marked the continuation of NHC's work.

## THE BIRTH OF THE HELSINKI MOVEMENT

From its beginnings, NHC consisted of only a few idealists working in solidarity with the members of Moscow Helsinki Group in the then Soviet Union, established just one year earlier. The group included democracy fighters Lyudmila Alekseyeva, Yuri Orlov and Andrei Sakharov's wife Yelena Bonner, all later to be so famous. Eventually 44 Helsinki Committees were established. The goal of the Helsinki movement was to persuade governments, and especially the government of the Soviet Union, to implement the commitment to human rights it had made in the Helsinki documents in 1975, a part of the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The movements' legal validity was based on the provision in the Helsinki Final Act, Principle VII, which establishes the rights of individuals to know and act upon their rights and duties. In signing the document, the Soviet Union wanted legitimacy from the western states for the communist regime in Eastern Europe and to exert influence in Western Europe, whereas the western states, including the USA and Canada, aimed at closing down the "Iron Curtain" in Europe through an increased focus on and respect for human rights. Later, the signatories changed the cooperation from a Conference to an organisation: the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE.



The Sakharov Freedom Award 2012



Bjørn Engesland, Grigory Melkonyants, Lilya Shibanova and NHC chairperson Ragnhild Astrup Tschudi.

The Russian Association 'Golos' was presented with the Sakharov Freedom Award at a ceremony which also marked the Norwegian Helsinki Committee 35 years' anniversary on 23 October. Golos received the award for its outstanding efforts to promote democratic values through free and fair elections in Russia.

Lilya Shibanova accepted the award on behalf of the organisation she leads, saying: "It is a great honour to receive the Sakharov Freedom award. The recognition comes at a very important and suitable time for us, when Russian democracy is dwindling and organisations like ours are under fierce attack from the authorities."

"We believe that the efforts of Golos and its friends sooner or later will result in Russians having a real choice and a real voice in their own affairs," NHC Chairperson Ragnhild Astrup Tschudi said when presenting the award.

Golos ("Voice") is the only independent organisation which conducts nationwide election observation in Russia. The organisation is known for systematic,

efficient and sophisticated methods of monitoring electoral processes in Russia. Particularly in relation to Duma elections on 4 December 2011 and the presidential election on 4 March 2012, the organisation played an important role when, in collaboration with the newspaper Gazeta.ru, they employed modern technology and published an interactive website that could upload reports on violations from the public. Golos received warm greetings from the Chair of the Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs of the Norwegian Parliament, Ine Marie Eriksen Søreide, as well as from the government.

Evgeniy Zhovtis, the 2010 Sakharov Freedom Award recipient, was imprisoned in Kazakhstan when he received his award, and was now at last able to be present at the ceremony. He focused his speech on Ales Bialiatski, the 2006 recipient, who is currently serving a four and a half- year prison sentence at the hands of the dictatorship of Belarus.

Lyudmila Alexeyeva and Bjørn Engesland.



Ine Marie Eriksen Søreide.



Evgeniy Zhovtis.



**ANDREI SAKHAROV FREEDOM AWARD**

The Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award was created in 1980 by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, with the support and consent of Andrei Sakharov himself, to help people who, because of their opinions, beliefs and conscience, are persecuted or imprisoned. The fund's assets will be used for direct support to the persecuted in their home country, mainly by granting the Sakharov Freedom Award.

Previous Sakharov Freedom Award laureates include:

- Evgeniy Zhovtis and the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law
- Svetlana Gannushkina from the Memorial Human Rights Centre in Russia
- Aliaksandr Bialiatski from the Human Rights Centre, 'Viasna', in Belarus
- Elisa Musayeva from Chechnya and Amor Masovic from Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Sergei Kovalyov from Russia
- The first award was granted to Charter 77 in 1984

Anniversary seminar:  
Democracy challenged – How to  
counter erosion of democratic rule?

We were proud to gather together some of the most prominent voices in Europe and Central Asia for our well-attended anniversary seminar, also on 23 October. The seminar took examples from the negative development of democracy in Russia and Hungary and discussed ways to overcome the democratic backslide.

Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide opened the seminar and outlined many of the current challenges to democracy worldwide. Nevertheless, he reminded the audience of some of the achievements during the NHC's 35 years of activity: "35 years, short enough for most of us to remember, but long enough for dramatic changes to occur: end of the Cold War, fall of the Berlin wall, collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of China and Asia and the Arab Spring. And let's not forget that all these changes, including human rights progress and the spread of democracy, do not happen on a meta-level, above us. No, they happen because of us, because of individuals, civil society, governments, people who want to see a better tomorrow. The Norwegian Helsinki Committee is such an actor" Eide continued. "35 years of supporting civil society, monitoring elections and reporting on human rights achievement. Of campaigns and hard-fought victories against human rights violations, prejudice and ignorance, against injustice and repression. Your work is impressive. Not always popular. But as important today as it was during the Cold War. "



Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Espen Barth Eide



Golos representatives Grigory Melkonyants, Anna Vasilevich and Lilya Shibanova.



Svetlana Gannushkina and Lyudmila Alexeyeva.



Adam Bialiatiski, son of imprisoned human rights defender Ales Bialiatiski.

We had invited more than 30 guests from our partner organisations abroad to celebrate with us. This gave a rare opportunity for them all to meet each other and to discuss what cooperation with NHC means and how we can develop together. These issues were discussed at a closed session with NHC the day after the celebration.



Valentin Stefanovich.



Evgeniy Zhovtis, Brigitte Dufour, Sonia Biserko and Gunnar Ekeløve-Slydal



## Activities, by country

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.

2012 was a turbulent year – never in modern history have so many Russian citizens participated in demonstrations and protests against abuses by the authorities.

The protests were triggered by independent reports of fraud in the Duma elections on 4 December 2011. They intensified in the period up to the Presidential elections on 4 March 2012. Evidence of widespread falsifications surfaced during both elections. Before the elections, civil initiatives, such as Citizen Observer and the NHC partner, the Association Golos, mobilised tens of thousands of ordinary people across Russia to act as election observers. An unprecedented number of citizens took part in observation at polling stations during both elections. The Presidential elections could also be followed via the Internet, streamed from cameras at polling stations across Russia. Both approaches allowed the observers to document, by photo and video and through traditional observations, numerous violations of the election regulations.

Both elections were criticised by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for unequal campaigning conditions which clearly favoured United Russia and Vladimir Putin. However, the OSCE also noted the enhanced involvement and awareness of citizens as contributing to some improvements.

The Moscow Centre of the Carnegie Endowment characterised last year's developments as *Russia's awakening*. On 15 February NHC arranged a seminar entitled "Presidential Elections in Russia – a New Spring?" discussing the changes the year could bring. However, the Russian authorities met the awakening of Russian civil society with several measures to regain control. After Putin started his third term as President on 7 May, a series of restrictive laws were passed, resulting in fewer demonstrations and tougher working conditions for independent media and civil society organisations.

In early June 2012, Russia's lower house, the State Duma, adopted amendments to what is known as the Law on Rallies. The amendments introduced harsher penalties for organising and participating in unsanctioned demonstrations. Slander was re-introduced to the Criminal Code. A series of amendments expanding the scope of Criminal Code provisions on high treason, espionage, and disclosure of state secrets were also adopted. The amendments to the Law on Information adopted in July 2012 allowed the authorities to shut down websites alleged to contain "extremist ideas". This raised serious concerns of censorship through abuse of the law.

Still, the gravest limitation on freedom of association was introduced with the so-called Law on Foreign

### The Russian Federation

LEFT: GOLOS press center on presidential election day

RIGHT: Demonstration in Moscow post-election day.





Lilya Shibanova and Nicolay Petrov at the seminar "Presidential Elections in Russia – a New Spring?"

Panel discussion with Lilya Shibanova, Nicolay Petrov, Ine Marie Eriksen-Soreide and Bård Vegar Solhjell



Agents which was adopted in July 2012, two months after the inauguration of President Putin. The law imposed regulations on non-commercial organisations or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) receiving financial support from abroad, including restrictions on their activities, the creation of stricter reporting standards and government oversight and the establishment of administrative punishments (including fines of up to one million rubles) and criminal liability (up to four years in prison) for violations of the new rules. The law requires NGOs to register with the Ministry of Justice as "foreign agents", a term well-known among the Russian public from the cold war period. The use of this label caused a public outcry. Duma legislator and bill co-sponsor Alexander Sidyakin stated that the Association Golos was to be directly targeted by the law.

On 6 May 2012 between 20,000 and 50,000 people participated in demonstrations against the inauguration of Vladimir Putin as President in the Bolotnaya Square in Moscow. The police broke up the demonstrations, and about 500 people were arrested and dozens injured. Criminal cases against the participants in the protest were initiated under the articles of the Criminal Code that cover "appeals to mass disturbance" and "use of violence against a government representative". Some of those arrested have already been charged. Those imprisoned in the "Bolotnaya case" are seen as new political prisoners in Russia.

The Law on Sanctions against Individuals Violating Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms of the Citizens of the Russian Federation deeply divided the Russian society in 2012. Adopted in December 2012, the law established sanctions against US citizens involved in violations of the human rights and freedoms of Russian citizens and also banned US citizens from adoption of Russian children. The law prohibited support from US citizens and institutions for Russian civil society initiatives. The Russian law was a response to the US Act known as the Magnitsky Act, signed into law by Barack Obama on 14 December 2012. The Act obliges the President to establish a list of Russian citizens involved in the Magnitsky case or responsible for grave human rights abuses. Those on the list will be denied a visa to the US and their assets in the US frozen.

Magnitsky, a Russian business lawyer contracted by the American company Hermitage Capital, investigated and reported on a \$230 million tax refund fraud, which had the involvement of Russian tax authorities and law enforcement bodies. Magnitsky was arrested by the same law enforcement representatives who were involved in the fraud, and died in pre-trial detention in November 2009 due to abuse and medical neglect.

Another emblematic case, which acquired unprecedented international media attention, was the Pussy Riot trial. On 17 August 2012, three members of Russian feminist punk band Pussy Riot were convicted of hooliganism motivated by

CEO of Hermitage Capital Management Bill Browder at the hearing on the Magnitsky case at the House of Literature.



#### NHC COOPERATED WITH THE FOLLOWING PARTNERS AND PROJECTS IN 2012

- › Analytical Centre Sova: extending the monitoring and awareness-raising on problems of hate crimes and hate speech.
- › Glasnost Defence Foundation: monitoring of media rights violations in the Russian Federation
- › Regional Civic Organization in Defense of Democratic Rights and Freedoms «GOLOS»: In-depth developing and implementing a methodology for civilian control of the deputies in Northwest regions of Russia
- › Interregional Public Organisation "Committee Against Torture": preventing torture, improving national mechanisms for the European Court of Human Rights
- › "Migration and Law", a programme of the Memorial Human Rights Centre: legal protection for asylum seekers and migrants
- › Memorial HRC (Ryazan): support for the human rights web-portal [www.hro.org](http://www.hro.org)
- › Public Verdict: strengthening Russian regional human rights NGOs in countering human rights violations by law enforcement agencies
- › "Nevolya" magazine: raising the problems of the penitentiary
- › Caucasian Knot webportal (Moscow)
- › Mashr (Ingushetia): making lawyers available to the victims of human rights abuses
- › Memorial (Moscow – North Caucasus): monitoring of the human rights situation in North Caucasus and preparation of cases to be submitted to the ECHR



Elena Kostychenko from Novaya Gazeta, NHC's Aage Borchgrevink, Gregory Shvedov from the web portal the Caucasian Knot and Bjørn Engesland at the Anna Politkovskaya seminar 2012.



Bjørn Engesland at the Anna Politkovskaya seminar 2012

religious hatred, and each was sentenced to two years imprisonment for performing in Moscow's main cathedral, calling for the Virgin Mary to protect Russia against Vladimir Putin. NHC criticised the trial, pointing to violations of freedom of speech and procedural safeguards to ensure fair trial.

## ACTIVITIES

On March 4 NHC organised the seminar "Presidential Elections in Russia – a New Spring?" at the House of Literature, Oslo. Guest speakers were Nikolay Petrov, a senior researcher at the Moscow Centre of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Lilya Shibanova, head of GOLOS.

NHC also visited Russia to follow the presidential elections in Moscow, in cooperation with Golos. Norwegian media were relatively actively reporting from the Russian elections, frequently asking for NHC's opinion as events unfolded.

The NHC expressed concern in Norway and internationally about the adoption of these restrictive laws, in particular the Law on Foreign Agents. There were also several instances of repressive police actions and court cases against opposition politicians and human rights activists.

NHC continued its support to the Magnitsky campaign, asking for Magnitsky-type legislation in the US and Europe. On 27 September NHC arranged a public hearing in the House of Literature in Oslo, screening a new documentary about one the case, "The Magnitsky Files: Organised Crime Inside the Russian Government". NHC also took part in round-table discussions organised in the British Parliament in November, to commemorate the third anniversary of the death of Sergey Magnitsky.

On October 8 we held our annual seminar dedicated to Anna Politkovskaya on threats to free media. On October 23 the Association Golos, represented by its leader Lilya Shibanova, received the Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award 2012 at the NHC's 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration.

During the year, NHC engaged in several actions against restrictions on the rights of sexual minorities, including a string of restrictive laws passed in St Petersburg and several other cities banning propaganda of homosexuality towards children. Similar legislation was introduced in the Duma. NHC started to draft a report on developments in Russia and Ukraine that violate the rights of sexual minorities, forthcoming in the spring of 2013.

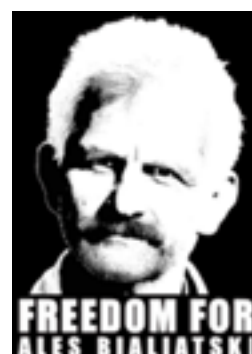
The repression following the mass demonstrations and arrest in December 2010 continued to dominate 2012. We were pleased to see some political prisoners released, among them on 14 April presidential candidate Andrei Sannikov and his campaign manager Dzmitry Bondarenko, who by this time had experienced serious health problems. Later in the year Andrei Sannikov received political asylum in United Kingdom, but his wife remains in Belarus with strict restrictions on her movement. By the end of the year 12 political prisoners were still in prison, most of them related to the 2010 events, while three prisoners have been convicted related to events in 2011. Our close friend and partner Ales Bialitaski, the Head of Human Rights Center "Viasna" remains in prison, serving a four and a half-year sentence, and his appeal was turned down on 24 January. The court decision also confirmed the confiscation of the office premises of "Viasna". On 26 November bailiffs accom-

panied by police confiscated and finally sealed the offices. The staff of Viasna are defiantly upholding the organisation's regular activities.

Belarus is the only European country still with no moratorium on the death penalty and since 1990 282 executions have been carried out. In March, new executions took place despite repeated calls to refrain from carrying them out. Vladislav Kovalyov and a childhood friend, Dmitri Konovalov, both 26, had been convicted in November 2011 and sentenced to death for a metro bombing in central Minsk in 2011, which killed 15 people and injured about 200. There were serious doubts around the two friends' guilt and their trial was reported to be flawed. President Lukashenko finally refused a plea for pardon, and the two were executed on 17 March.

Parliamentary elections were held on 23 September. Domestic observers concluded that the election

## Belarus





"Action on Belarus" at the House of literature.

Thorbjørn Jagland at the conference "Action on Belarus".



Yuri Zisser, Adam Globus, Tatsiana Reviaka and Natalia Radzina



Andres Herkel, PACE Special Rapporteur on Belarus.



Torgeir Larsen, Norwegian State Secretary.



Andrej Kim, blogger and youth activist

process was marked by serious violations of the principles of democratic and fair elections. The election took place in an atmosphere of political persecution and repression of the opponents of the government; this political environment, as well as the limitations on the creation of election commissions and campaigning had a negative effect on the freedom to make an informed choice. Non-transparency of vote counting procedure made it impossible to state that the election results reflect the will of the Belarusian people.

The European Union (EU) upheld and somewhat increased the sanctions against officials representing the regime. The sanctions include refusal of a visa to EU territory and freezing of any assets they may have in European banks. A ban on trade with a selection of Belarusian companies has been imposed, and the EU sanctions are supported by Norway. The reaction from the EU caused a diplomatic crisis between Belarus and the EU, first on 28 February when the EU and Polish representatives to Belarus were asked to leave. In solidarity, members of the diplomatic representatives of the EU member states were temporarily recalled for consultations. Diplomatic relations between Sweden and Belarus were seriously strained again in August when, in a Swedish publicity stunt, hundreds of teddy bears were dropped by plane over Belarus with a message of democracy attached to them. Belarus swiftly reacted on 8 August by ordering the Swedish embassy to be closed by the end of the month. The financial crisis seen in 2011 continued in 2012 but became less urgent.

NHC staff could not travel to Belarus in 2012 as we have been denied entry by the authorities.

## ACTIVITIES

The intensified repression of Belarusians, including against many of our friends, contacts and partners,

dominated much of our activity and concern in 2012 and NHC issued or supported several statements concerning events in Belarus. In February we issued recommendations for the Norwegian Foreign Minister's Belarus strategy and we also made a recommendation to the strategy of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (ERBD).

At the beginning of the year three Norwegian organisations, Human Rights House Foundation, Norwegian PEN and NHC, joined forces to move the situation in Belarus up the agenda. We organised an ambitious conference on 22 March called "Action on Belarus". The conference included many high-profile speakers, including Council of Europe Secretary general Thorbjørn Jagland, Council of Europe parliamentary assembly rapporteur on Belarus Andres Herkel, Norwegian State Secretary Torgeir Larsen, Chief Editor of [www.Charter97.org](http://www.Charter97.org) Natalia Radzina, Tatsiana Reviaka of Viasna, and many others. The conference was very well attended and raised a string of issues related to facts, challenges and possible future action.

In the wake of the conference, the cooperating NGOs challenged the government to raise Belarus even higher on the agenda of Norwegian foreign policy. In April we launched a new campaign to move the World Ice-hockey championship planned for Minsk in 2014 to another host country, again in cooperation with many other NGOs. A website, [www.minsk2014.no](http://www.minsk2014.no), was established with the slogan "Don't play with the dictator".

On the fringes of the Oslo Freedom Forum in May, Bjørn Engesland gave a presentation about the political prisoner Ales Bialiatski. In September we participated in the mass movement to congratulate Ales on his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, in prison. In December we marked the international human rights day on 10 December by greeting all political prisoners in

Belarus and marked the two-year anniversary of the mass arrests in Minsk on 19 December.

Throughout the year, we regularly published mini-documentaries about current and former political prisoners in Belarus on YouTube and on the website. NHC representatives were frequently asked to be speakers at seminars and act as experts in the media on Belarus issues.



Happy 50th birthday to Ales Bialiatski.

2012 regrettably represented a downslide for Ukraine's human rights and democratic processes. International organisations evaluate Ukraine in 2012 as less free, and the country has had the worst year in terms of freedom of speech since the Orange revolution, dropping ten positions down on the Press Freedom Index. Attacks on journalists in 2012 were frequent, and cases of censorship reported.

The President's Region Party bullied its way through the Parliamentary election in October to win with over 30 percent of the votes. The widespread cases of abuse of power, the excessive role of money in the election and the fact that opposition leaders were prevented from running for office has led international observation monitor OSCE to conclude that democratic progress in Ukraine has reversed. Prospects for bilateral Ukraine-EU trade and an association agreement at present appear to have been shelved after Ukraine failed to conduct a free and fair election process. With the former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko still in jail, another important condition set out by the EU prior to the election was not met. Tymoshenko's appeal options were exhausted in Ukraine and her case is now up for consideration by the European Court of Human Rights. The rare positive Ukraine-EU cooperation in connection with the EURO 2012 football championship gave a welcome opportunity to highlight the situation in Ukraine, where the xenophobia was referred to as huge problem at the audience at the football stadiums.

Adding to the worrying trends came an upsurge of homophobia. The Kiev parliament has proposed

legislation intended to ban so-called "homosexual propaganda". The law is similar to laws already adopted in several Russian cities, Moldova, Lithuania and Hungary. Although impermissibly vague in its form; bills number 8711 and number 10290 are likely to criminalise public activity, positive media coverage, and other information dissemination. Ukrainian LGBT organisations and their activists may face up to five years' imprisonment if the law comes into force in 2013. Violence against activists is widespread and the Kiev Pride parade in May had to be cancelled because nearly 1,000 aggressive counter-demonstrators prepared to attack the parade, and the organisers could not count on adequate police protection from the police. NHC protested about the draft bills, in a picket in front of the Ukrainian Embassy in June, together with Norwegian LGBT NGOs passing on a statement to embassy staff. In November we wrote a letter to Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide urging them to raise the deteriorating human rights situation with Ukraine's Prime Minister Mykola Azarov during an official visit to Oslo in November.

The 2013 chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) presents Kiev with a major challenge. For Ukraine, of taking a unique chance to build trust and relations between the different OSCE member states, despite its poor citizens' rights record in recent years, and for the OSCE of committing to a clear and stable support for the democratic aspirations of Ukrainian citizens.

Ukraine



Yulia Tymoshenko.



Protesting against new law banning "homosexual propaganda" outside the Ukrainian embassy in Oslo.

# South Caucasus

## Armenia

In 2012, Armenia received much international praise for its reforms and lifting of restrictions, and was in negotiations with both the EU on a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, and with long-time ally Russia on the Eurasian Union. Libel had already been decriminalised in 2010, and the large number of administrative cases that followed had reduced somewhat in 2012. An extensive police reform was under way. In May 2011 a new Electoral Code was adopted, in time for implementation in preparations for the Parliamentary elections in May 2012. Freedom of speech and freedom of assembly seemed ensured for the election campaign and for political discussions. However, though media had an opportunity for more independent coverage, the economic situation remained a challenge, and the journalists and media outlets were still not capable of making adequate use of the opening provided due to their lack of experience and skills.

to enter into a coalition with the governing Republican Party, and has taken a position as an “alternative” party, rather than an opposition party.

The cool relationship with neighbouring Turkey over the 1915 genocide and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh remained tense in 2012, and became heated when Hungary extradited an Azeri officer sentenced for the murder of an Armenian soldier back to Azerbaijan. Also in 2012, more than 50 Jehovah’s Witnesses remained imprisoned for evasion from draft military call-up, despite European Court of Human Rights judgments. LGBT persons are also subject to harassment and ostracism. In May the DIY bar in Yerevan, also known as the gay bar, was subject to fire-bombing and subsequent vandalism, and the culprits were publicly supported even by a member of parliament. A few human rights organisations focusing on LGBT and women’s rights later organised a diversity march through the streets of Yerevan. The march was protected by police, but the participants were still subject to harassment and insult from passers-by and counter demonstrators. Expectations as to the roles of women and young people in society are still fairly rigid, though a number of civic demonstrations and actions have led to certain results in the past year, in particular with regard to environmental issues.

Similarly, despite reforms and promises by the authorities, corruption and a dependent administration of justice still act as a brake on development. Torture and abuse is rife in police stations and in the military, and accusations of torture are met with indifference and impunity for the culprits in court. To date no independent investigation has determined the details of the unrest that led to 10 deaths following the disputed Presidential elections in 2008, and the public’s trust in the political and judicial system remained low.

### ACTIVITIES

NHC visited Armenia three times in 2012 – in January, May, and November. During such visits the NHC meets with the five partner organisations that are supported through the democracy support programme: Armenian Helsinki Association, Armenian Helsinki Committee, Helsinki Citizen’s Assembly Vanadzor, Caucasus Institute, and Civil Society Institute. All players are central to the civil society of Armenia and represent a wide spectrum of approaches towards an improved human rights situation in Armenia. The main focus of the organisations is torture prevention and the situation in closed

On 5 May 2012, Armenia voted in the first all-national vote since the 2008 elections and unrest. Despite the new Electoral Code that addressed certain technical aspects of the voting process, there were still reports of widespread bribery and intimidation before the elections, various forms of fraud on Election Day, and inconsistencies with the counting. Again the voters’ lists, and the number of the electorate compared with the overall population were a concern. After the elections, the second largest party decided to reject its promise



Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor Office.



A Yerevan campaign office for the Republican Party of Armenia



LEFT: Parliamentary election in May.

RIGHT: Polling station in Yerevan





Rally for the Republican Party of Armenia.

institutions, administration of justice and police, as well as religious minorities and journalistic skills.

On 16 April, the NHC cooperation partner Helsinki Citizen's Assembly Vanadzor was subject to an attack from an enraged crowd following a dispute about a film screening depicting Azerbaijan. The office was surrounded, and angry protestors threw eggs and stones at the office. None of the associates was physically harmed, but the experience was unpleasant and the consecutive response from the police and authorities inadequate. The NHC signed a joint support statement urging the Armenian authorities to ensure secure working conditions for civil society in the country, together with other local and international activists.

The NHC also issued a statement on the incidents of hate crime against LGBT people in Armenia, and submitted recommendations to the EU's human rights dialogue on the administration of justice in

the country in a common statement with partner organisation Civil Society Institute. The NHC also organised a meeting between a delegation from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and NHC cooperation partners and other NGOs in Yerevan in cooperation with the Human Rights House Foundation Norway.

The NHC was present in Yerevan for two weeks during parliamentary elections in May. The NHC met various actors in the civil society field and monitored a number of polling stations in Yerevan together with partner organisation the Civil Society Institute and their monitoring "ambulances". The observers noted intimidation at the polling stations, multiple voting and inconsistent voters' lists. The ruling Republican Party secured a large majority of the votes, and the remaining parties and blocks barely made it past the threshold. The NHC tweeted from the field and issued a statement condemning the elections, despite technical improvements.

The South Caucasian Republic of Azerbaijan came under a rare public spotlight in 2012 for the unlikely reason of show business. Azerbaijan's entry to the Eurovision Song Contest won in 2011 and Azerbaijan prepared to host the most costly ESC event in history in May 2012. The capital saw massive construction projects and the concert hall – Crystal Hall – rose like the mythical bird the phoenix. Large parts of the city were renovated, some of it at the expense of citizens who were forced out of their homes, which were torn down to make room for the modern face of Baku. Lives for Azerbaijanis,

however, did not improve and despite the fact that the eyes of Europe were on Azerbaijan, the human rights violations continued relentlessly.

A continued target for arrests, harassment and unfounded civil cases are independent journalists. Two murders of journalists are still not solved. Those responsible for the death of editor Elmar Huseynov, shot dead in 2005, still enjoy impunity. Journalist and writer Rafiq Tagi died in Baku on 23 November 2011 from the injuries he sustained during a brutal knife attack four days earlier. His murderer is still at liberty.

Famous investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova was publicly humiliated by the publication of an intimate video recording, following attempts at intimidating her into stopping publication, which she consistently refuses to do. Faramaz Novruzoglu, an independent journalist arrested on 18 April, was accused of calling for mass disorder on Facebook and illegally crossing protected borders and in August was convicted to four and half years in

## Azerbaijan



Olga Shamshur and Ali Kerimli.



Khadija Ismayilova



Members of Musavat party on hunger strike demanding release of political prisoners.



Musavat Party leader Isa Gambar.

prison. Six journalists were charged and are awaiting court decisions, among them Hilal Mammadov and Avaz Zeynalli who both risk 12 years' imprisonment if convicted. In June, the Supreme Court released Bakhtiyar Hajiyev, a social media activist who had been serving a two-year prison sentence and was the target of an NHC campaign. Five imprisoned journalists were also pardoned on 27 December by President Aliyev ahead of the World Azerbaijanis Solidarity Day that was celebrated on 31 December. Among the pardoned on 27 December was also human rights defender Vidadi Iskenderov. Overall, the existence of a high number of political prisoners in Azerbaijan continued to attract much of the attention focused on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan. In mid 2012 the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly rapporteur for political prisoners in Azerbaijan Christoph Strässer released his report, setting the number of political prisoners at around 85. To a large extent based on the work in Azerbaijan, the Parliamentary Assembly also adopted a benchmark definition of political prisoners in October.

Director of the Institute for Peace and Democracy Leyla Yunus



Several attempts at organising protests in Baku and other cities in the country were stopped, often by use of violence and mass arrests. The most spectacular incidents were in Baku during the week of the Eurovision Song contest when the police broke up protests, arresting dozens of the participants in of a large European press corps.

Human rights defenders and lawyers defending opposition activists lost their licences or were harassed in other ways. The Human Rights House in Baku remained closed.

In the exclave of Nakhchivan, the most serious repression of ordinary people continued to be documented. We are also increasingly concerned about the tightening of religious freedoms, including criminalising religious literature that has not been state-approved.

### 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 NHC joined for advocacy purposes. IPGA also issued a thorough report on freedom of expression – Running Scared – playing on the title of the Azerbaijani winning song of the ESC the previous year.

NHC made a significant advocacy effort in connection with the European Song Contest in Baku. The goal of the efforts was to counter the massive propaganda show that the government of Azerbaijan rolled out and to make the human rights situation in the country known to an audience otherwise without knowledge about Azerbaijan. Local organisations in Azerbaijan were very active



NHC friends Rasul Jafarov and Anar Mammadli at Sing for Democracy rally in Baku.



Protester arrested by force and protester taken away by police.





and many other international organisations were part of this joint effort. Together with Amnesty International Norway, Norwegian PEN, Norwegian Journalists Association and Human Rights House Foundation, information materials were made available to journalists who travelled to Baku and we also organised an information seminar – “Fra glitter til gitter” (“From glitter to prison bars”) – for interested journalists. NHC also travelled to Baku in May and was present during the days leading up to the contest itself. The media showed a commendable interest in our efforts, and although the music contest was a success, the massive

corruption and human rights violations were also widely exposed to the European audience.

NHC, with funding from the Norwegian MFA, supported monitoring of 24 civil and criminal trials in Azerbaijan, through the Institute for Peace and Democracy. Several of the monitored cases had broad public attention and were the result of political repression and the sentences handed down reflected this. Of 15 monitored civil trials, only two decisions were justified, none of the criminal cases. The monitoring results were published widely in the local press and also to some extent abroad.



Olga Shamshur outside the Crystal Hall.

The Parliamentary elections in Georgia on 1 October 2012 resulted in a peaceful transfer of power from the ruling National Movement, headed by President Mikheil Saakashvili, to the opposition coalition Georgia’s Dream, headed by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili. This achievement consolidates Georgia’s position as the most democratic corner of the Post-Soviet Caucasus.

Political polarisation remained, however, after Ivanishvili became Prime Minister, in the form of strained relations with President Saakashvili. Some former National Movement officials have been placed under investigation for alleged crimes committed while they were in power. Although the charges are serious and in most cases appear well-founded, both the international community and the National Movement have warned against a political witchhunt.

That the elections ended in a peaceful transfer of power, was not a given. A number of legislative changes and administrative decisions by the

government seemed targeted at impeding the opposition’s campaign and restricting information in favour of the state media, which mostly reported the National Movement’s version. Journalists were beaten during the campaign, and on election day there was violence in some towns.

A force that challenged authoritarian practices was a coalition of civil society groups, which included the main human rights groups in Georgia, some of them our partners. The transfer of power may resolve some of country’s main human rights issues. Some political prisoners have already been released, while a number of prisoners, who may have been unfairly tried and sentenced, may have their sentences reduced or overturned.

## ACTIVITIES

The NHC continued to work with our main partners in the country, the Georgia Human Rights Center and the Caucasian Centre for Conflict Studies and Human Rights, on a three-year project aimed at providing free legal aid, running an information

Georgia



Tbilisi.

program based on the webpage [humanrights.ge](http://humanrights.ge), monitoring human right violations and conducting international advocacy.

A delegation consisting of our partners and a prominent journalist visited Oslo in September, in order to inform the MFA and Parliament about the election process and other human issues. Ucha Nanuashvili, former head of the HRC, was appointed Georgia's new Public Defender (Ombudsman) by Parliament in December. The Public Defender is arguably the most important human rights institution in Georgia. The NHC has focused on the lack of investigations after the war of 2008, in which grave violations of humanitarian law were committed by both sides, Georgia and Russia, in the form of war crimes and crimes against humanity. In November the NHC released the third report in a series documenting a lack of will and ability to investigate crimes, this time with a focus on the Russian side.



Ucha Nanuashvili and Simon Papuashvili.

As Georgia is a member of the International Criminal Court, the NHC has argued that the ICC should assume a more proactive role and try to ascertain whether results are feasible, given the lack of progress from the two parties. The third report was presented to the ICC Office of the Prosecutor during the annual assembly in November. During the autumn of 2012, the ICC changed the language in its description of Georgia to saying that the OTP is "checking whether genuine national proceedings are being carried out in [Guinea, Colombia and] Georgia."

In Tbilisi, in November 2012, we also had meetings with senior officials in the new Georgian government, including the head of the legal affairs committee in Parliament and the Chief Prosecutor, arguing that Georgia should refer the case to the ICC, as is its right under the Rome statute. The new government has stated that it will reassess the investigation file, but at this stage it is unclear what this will mean in practice.

## Central Asia

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee has been devoted to the promotion of democratic principles and human rights in Central Asia for a number of years. The NHC Representative Office was established in the region in 2006 and is, with its two staff members, located in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Through monitoring, fact-finding, publishing of reports and other written materials, advocacy work in the region and on the international level, as well as through our popular Small Grants Programme, we seek to be an active and positive addition to the vibrant human rights community in Central Asia.



Lene Wetteland speaking on freedom of religion to students at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek.

While the ongoing integration of Central Asia into the global scene involves rapid change on many levels, certain areas are still left behind. It is not unusual for the population to be without electricity and gas during severe winter frosts. Bureaucracy, too, retains much of its post-Soviet legacy, as do the attitudes of some government officials and key decision-makers. National economic indicators are not always consistent with the reality of those



Maxim Ryabkov, Indra Øverland and Gunnar Ekeløve-Slydal.

struggling to get by in the cities and villages dotting Central Asia's vast landscape. In addition, a growing scepticism about so-called non-traditional religions in the region has led to repressive legislation that bans unregistered religious activity and forces many religious believers underground instead of contributing to society.

The focus of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, human rights, is an area that unfortunately saw more setbacks than major steps forward in the course of 2012.

The success of **Kyrgyzstan** as a democratic leader in the region after the April 2010 revolution is vital not only to the country itself but to the future of the region as a whole. Positive developments can serve as an example to neighbouring countries, while failure could be a serious destabilising factor for the entire region. While Kyrgyzstan is markedly better on transparency of the government, involvement of civil society in decision-making and recent



LEFT: Anniversary of the Kyrgyzstani ombudsman.

RIGHT: Gunnar Ekeløve-Slydal at anniversary for the Kyrgyzstani ombudsman.

election processes than its immediate neighbours, serious problems remain, especially in the south of the country. The violent clashes that took place in the provinces of Osh and Jalalabad in June 2010 are still a highly sensitive topic, both at government level and in the population. The legal aftermath has been overly focused on persecuting the Uzbek part of the population, which remains under-represented in law enforcement and the political elite. Instances of torture and ill-treatment are still evident, and the difficult fight against corruption has but begun.

In **Tajikistan**, violence broke out in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province, a mountainous area bordering Afghanistan, after the head of the local security services was murdered. Media access was barred while large numbers of government troops were moved into the region, leaving the real numbers of casualties a matter for speculation – ranging wildly from twelve to one hundred. During and after the military operation, Tajik authorities blocked a number of news sites and social media, effectively leaving the population in Tajikistan and the outside world without information about events as they unfolded. Throughout the year, no official responsibility was taken for the shadowy decisions to block popular social media like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube as well as the websites of the BBC and numerous other western and Russian news agencies – apparently due to unwelcome “criticism of government policy”. This was another indication that the Tajik authorities were disconnected from the realities of the information age and, more importantly, disrespectful of the right of Tajik citizens to freely access information.



The Kyrgyzstani parliament building in Bishkek

While working through an ambitious programme for planned future achievements both on the domestic and international arena, the year paradoxically saw several major steps backwards for **Kazakhstan** in the area of human rights. Following the tragic events in Zhanaozen in December 2011, when at least 16 strikers were shot and killed by government forces, the authorities cracked down on selected opposition leaders such as Vladimir Kozlov of the Alga political party, sentencing him to seven-and-a-half years' imprisonment for his alleged involvement in the strikes. Soon after, the offices of Alga were closed down by the authorities, which followed this by raising charges of extremism against independent and opposition media outlets such as the Golos Respubliki and Vzglyad newspapers, as well as StanTV and K+ television channels. Officials in Astana have sought to portray the process as fair and necessary. Yet, by the year's end, pro forma trials were wrapping up, leaving Kazakhstan with a bleak media scene, a lack of real political pluralism



Union leaders Yessenbek Ukteshbaev and Ainur Kurmanov.



Vladimir Kozlov



The Pamir valley, Tajikistan.

and widespread disillusionment about Kazakhstan's commitment to human rights.

**Uzbekistan** remained one of the worst human rights violators in the world in 2012. No notable improvements were made in the course of the year, as innumerable human rights defenders, journalists and religious believers continued their lives in prison, while still more members of its marginalised civil society and journalistic scene found it necessary to flee the country to escape persecution, torture and imprisonment. Uzbek security services continued to seek the extradition of political refugees from neighbouring countries such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as making threats against Uzbek asylum seekers in Russia. While international human rights organisations do not have access to Uzbekistan, foreign businesses do. The infamous daughter of President Islam Karimov, Gulnara Karimova, emerged as a central figure in the probes into Swedish Telia-Sonera's business deals in Uzbekistan, underlining the risks involved when making investments in repressive regimes. Uzbekistan is likely to fight back against criticism and sanctions in 2014 as western states attempt the seemingly impossible – to balance its commitment to human rights with the importance of access to Uzbek land routes during the announced military withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the potential new ownership of the military equipment.

**Turkmenistan** is still one of the most closed countries in the world, and while the vast proven gas reserves in the country means that both businessmen and diplomats frequent the capital Ashgabat, international human rights organisations have no access. A new media law proposed in 2012 should in theory make Turkmenistan the most liberal country in the CIS region for journalists to work in. However, paper reform does little to lift the absolute government control on the flow of information inside the country, the complete lack of political freedoms and the highly dangerous environment for civil society activists. Being one of the few countries in the world to practise exit bans on its own citizens for undisclosed reasons, President Berdymukhammedov's Turkmenistan rightly shares the bottom of the global democracy indexes with Chad and North Korea.

From the Zhanaozen court case, Kazakhstan

These considerable challenges to human rights and democracy in Central Asia run counter to the fact that a strong civil society has developed in all five republics since independence. While working conditions vary sharply from country to country, a network of human rights defenders exists across the region, seeking to shine a light on ongoing human rights abuses and to participate in international processes to improve the situation in their home countries.

## ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS

The NHC carries out monitoring work on ongoing human rights violations in Central Asia, produces reports and public statements on current events and broader topics, contributes commentary to regional and international news outlets, participates in seminars, round tables and conferences devoted to human rights in Central Asia and produces recommendations for stakeholders at the international level.

In the course of 2012 we made a number of statements on specific areas of concern in the Central Asian republics, such as ongoing trials, media and religious freedoms, women's rights, elections, labour rights, freedom of movement, and the general situation as regards human rights and democracy in the Central Asian region. In June, the NHC published a major report on the tragic events in the south of Kyrgyzstan in June 2010, "A Chronicle of Violence" together with Memorial Human Rights Centre and Freedom House. Presentations on the report were held in Bishkek, Vienna and Brussels. The report was the most comprehensive and detailed report about the events to date, and a massive undertaking for both NHC and Memorial.

We produced and submitted recommendations to important international reviews and missions, such as the UN Universal Periodic Review on Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the Turkmenistan review of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, during the OSCE Human Dimensions Implementation Meeting in Warsaw, to the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy during her visit to Central Asia, and during the review of the EU Central Asia Strategy, as well as to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Seminars were organised throughout the year, including on labour rights in Kazakhstan, the situation in the south of Kyrgyzstan and on human rights in Uzbekistan. We also hosted working groups on human rights in Central Asia throughout the year. A two-day seminar was organised in Almaty on the future of the International Criminal Court (ICC), with participants from all five Central Asian republics as well as international experts.



Mutabar Tajibayeva, Lene Wetteland and Tika Tsertsvadze



Mutabar Tajibayeva at NHC and NOAS seminar on human rights in Uzbekistan.





Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan



Union leaders from Kazakhstan at seminar in Oslo and panel discussion



Participants at roundtable on ICC ratification.

In addition, we contributed to a large number of conferences organised by our partner organisations in Central Asia and in Europe and participated in advocacy meetings with diplomatic staff, international organisations and government officials.

In the course of the year, visits were made to several cities and towns in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, where we met local human rights organisations, representatives of religious minority groups and representatives of the authorities. We were present during the trials of the Zhanaozen oil strikers in Aktau and during the trial of Kazakhstani opposition leader Vladimir Kozlov, as well as during court hearings in Almaty on the closure of opposition newspapers and other media. In some instances, NHC provided urgent assistance to refugees from Central Asian countries, including visits to prison facilities. We also served as expert witnesses in Central Asian asylum cases before Norwegian courts, and provided migration services with up-to-date information on human rights issues in Central Asia.

Together with the Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights, Stefanus Alliance and Forum 18, we continued our focus on freedom of religion or belief in Central Asia. A delegation visited Kyrgyzstan and met stakeholders and representatives of religious minorities there, collecting information and recommendations for an updated report and forthcoming visits with decision makers.

Throughout the year, we provided commentary on human rights issues in Central Asia to news media in the Central Asian region, as well as to international news outlets. In addition to our own day-to-day work on the ground and in international forums, the NHC provides important support to

civil society. Already in its sixth year, the NHC Small Grants Programme for Central Asia is open to applications from experienced non-governmental organisations, as well as to new and promising additions to the existing community. Through funds contributed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as additional funds for Kazakhstan provided by the National Endowment for Democracy, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee supports projects across the region. In 2012, we focused on projects devoted to human rights education and NGO capacity building in Kazakhstan, torture prevention and legal aspects of the June 2010 aftermath in Kyrgyzstan, freedom of the media in Tajikistan as well as projects on women's rights both in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. A full list of grantees for the period is available on our website.



## Western Balkans

Developments in the Western Balkans in 2012 continued at an uneven pace with considerable variation between countries, in a region pulled between the goal of EU accession and the lure of identity politics. The main political concerns in the region are relations between Serbia and Kosovo over political and territorial issues related to the independence of Kosovo, the ethno-political deadlock that is holding back Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as internal political relations in Macedonia. Some of the main human rights concerns relate to the rule of law, impunity for past war crimes and human rights violations, and minority rights.

Throughout the region the LGBTI-community remained at risk of discrimination and hate-crimes. In several places LGBTI organisations have reported an increased number of violent attacks. The few cases reported to the police were insufficiently, or not, investigated at all. Belgrade Pride 2012 was banned allegedly for safety reasons, like in 2009 and 2011. Parades in Split and Zagreb, and a series of small-scale demonstrations in Belgrade, Skopje and Tirana took place despite massive opposition from religious communities, citizens' initiatives and politicians. The premises of the magazine Kosovo 2.0 were attacked when launching an issue covering, inter alia, same sex sexuality. NHC reacted to specific incidents and called on the authorities to secure the exercise of freedom of assembly and expression, as well as to systematically prevent and prosecute hate crimes and discrimination. On 23 January NHC organised the seminar *The politics of Cultural Heritage in the Western Balkans: Destruction, Reconstruction and an Ongoing War of Symbols* in Oslo.

**Serbia** had elections at both national and local levels on 6 May 2012. The result gave major political changes as Tomislav Nikolic, a former staunch nationalist involved in the war events, who has now turned into an opposition politician with a focus on people's more daily needs, became president. Following lengthy negotiations, Ivica Dacic, a former Milosevic aide, became Prime Minister. In the run-up to the elections, NHC hosted a seminar in Oslo providing background and future perspectives to a Norwegian audience.

NHC was present in Belgrade in the days before the elections and observed voting in and around Novi Pazar, the centre of the Bosniak community in Sandzak. The campaign took place in an atmosphere of fierce competition between the main Bosniak parties. Among the irregularities we found that not all respected the secrecy of the vote and that the incumbents exploited public resources to unduly influence local media. Overall, NHC expressed concerns about the nationalistic and



Sonia Biserko and Aage Borchgrevink at book launching at the House of Literature.

hateful rhetoric against minorities used by the candidates from many parts of the country.

Cases of forced resettlement of Roma people to areas with insufficient infrastructure, with indications that this was successfully used as bait for voters, called for serious concern. NHC considers that the treatment of minorities and individuals and groups who are different from the majority would be the litmus test of the new government's pledges to modernize Serbia.

In 2012 NHC continued to work with our partner, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, in a project cooperation to encourage the country to face up to its past and honestly analyse its present predicament to promote human rights. In a further attempt to encourage Serbia to face up to its violent and nationalistic past the NHC published a book written by Sonja Biserko, the chair of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, called *"Yugoslavia's Implosion – The fatal attraction of Serbian Nationalism"*. On 20 November the book was launched at our seminar in Oslo, *"Serbia, stuck in the past or proving EU worthy of a peace prize?"* Violence and threats against journalists were reported from both Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. 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.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina** conflicts continued to define the politics and stall the development of the country. Even though a new state government based on a broad coalition took office in January, leading political figures continued to call into question fundamental issues regarding the existence and nature of the state. This further undermined the capacity of institutions to deliver in fields that are



Serbian ambassador Milan Simundić at seminar on cultural heritage in the Western Balkans.



Polling station in Novi Pazar.

Serbian election poster.





NHC's Enver Dzuliman with Svein Mønnesland at the marking of the genocide in Srebrenica.

pivotal to human rights and rule of law. The need to change constitutional provisions on the ineligibility of minorities to certain positions continued to be unresolved, and the independence of the courts is a concern. BiH leaders attempted to reduce the overall independence of the judicial system by stifling the main body responsible for judicial administration and oversight, the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council. The outcomes of war crimes cases were frequently brushed off as allegedly biased against ethnic groups, not just by politicians but also by the media, religious communities and among significant parts in the populations. Our regional human rights education projects were also added to our promotion of reconciliation at different levels in the country.

During the year, cases against war-time Bosnian Serb leaders Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic finally got under way at the International Criminal Court for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). NHC followed the cases and provided interviews and background information to Norwegian media.

Important concerns regarding **Albania** remain the strength and independence of institutions that should provide checks and balances on the executive, including courts, electoral administration and the parliament. The way the government reacted to investigations into the killing of four demonstrators back in 2011 gave rise to serious concern, which NHC underlined during a meeting with the prosecutor general in 2012. During a visit in June, working in tandem with the Albanian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (AHC), NHC observed the conditions of arrestees at Police Commissariats in Vlora and Gjirokaster and visited two border-crossing facilities. AHC sent written reports to authorities and is following up concrete concerns about conditions in cells that were observed during the mission.

In **Kosovo**, inter-ethnic tensions have eased somewhat. EU-sponsored talks between Belgrade and Pristina about "technical issues" continued to help defuse some of the acute tensions on the ground. Despite fears of the contrary, the change of government in Belgrade did not alter this trend. NHC is

concerned about the continued marginalisation of the RAE (Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian) minorities, the taboos regarding war crimes and severe shortcomings in the rule of law. Especially in the north of Kosovo, freedom of expression is severely curtailed by threats and violence against individuals.

In a prominent war crimes case at the ICTY, former Kosovo Liberation Army Commander and former Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj was acquitted in a retrial. The retrial was ordered by the ICTY Appeals Chamber which found that the Trial Chamber had failed to take sufficient steps to "counter the witness intimidation that permeated the trial". The lack of efficient witness protection and support is an impediment to war crimes justice in all the countries of the region.

Detractors of the ICTY put the acquittal of Haradinaj in context, comparing it to an unrelated case against **Croatian** generals Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markac in which the two were acquitted on appeal for bombardment of civilian targets during the 1995 military operation "Storm" against Serb breakaway republics in Croatia. The dominant discourse on these cases was according to the pattern of "heroes" and "enemies" and allegations that ICTY is "anti-Serb".

In **Macedonia** there were widespread concerns about the level of corruption and lack of transparency of governmental institutions. Over recent years the gap between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, a minority making up about one third of the population, has widened. The government has pursued an assertive line and carried out a large-scale renewal of the capital, Skopje, making extensive use of symbols favoured by the ethnic majority. The use of Alexander the Great in this context has only exacerbated the conflict over the country's name with neighbouring Greece, a conflict that has blocked Macedonia's EU and NATO integration since 2008.



Police cells in Vlora, Albania.

From Split Pride 2012



## Hungary



NHC's Björn Engesland, Csilla Czibalmos and Lillian Solheim at fact finding mission in Hungary

Under Viktor Orbán's premiership, and thanks to Fidesz' supermajority in the Parliament, an unprecedented number of legal reforms have taken place in Hungary. At the beginning of January 2012 a new media law came into force in Hungary, to widespread attention and criticism in Hungary and internationally. Some of the largest demonstrations since the end of the cold war were held in Budapest, journalists went on hunger strike and international organisations and institutions expressed grave concern.

However, the new media law was only one of many legislative changes in Hungary since Fidesz came to power after a landslide victory during the 2010 election. Fidesz received more than half of the votes from an electorate that was deeply disappointed with the ruling socialist government after a number of corruption scandals and growing economic problems. Because of the electoral system, which combines single-seat constituencies and seats by proportional representation, Fidesz obtained a two-thirds majority in the Parliament.

Viktor Orbán gained a strong mandate to take charge of the Hungarian state as the new Prime Minister, a state suffering from increasing debts and a stagnating economy, as well as a range of other challenges. Reforms were clearly needed. The qualified majority (over 50 percent) enabled the government to push through a wide range of legal reforms in the course of 2010 and 2011. These included a new Constitution, the previously mentioned media law and reform of the justice sector and the electoral system. The government claimed that they had been given a popular mandate to finally get rid of the communist legacy and complete the regime change of 1989. Critics argued that the new laws were moving Hungary away from the principles and practice of liberal democracy.

Due to the concerns over the speed and scope of the legislative reforms, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee decided to reach a better understanding of the legal and political developments in Hungary by conducting a number of meetings and interviews



Hooligans at demonstration in Budapest

with stakeholders in the country, as well as by studying available reports and articles. During meetings in Budapest and Oslo, NHC met representatives of the government party, opposition parties, non-governmental organisations, academics, diplomats, and media representatives.

A first outcome of these efforts was a report published in February 2012. The report, *"Democracy at stake in Hungary – The Orbán government's constitutional revolution"* describes how Viktor Orbán's government has been centralising power, undermining the independence of courts and putting media freedom under pressure. The report concluded that, during the last year, Fidesz had weakened institutional checks and balances and compromised the independence of central institutions. The report presented a number of recommendations to the government of Hungary and European institutions.

A follow-up visit was made in June to meet additional government and NGO representatives in Budapest. In Gyöngyöspata, a village which was the scene of extreme right demonstrations against Roma a year earlier, we met representatives of the Roma community to hear more about their situation and the growth of extreme right groups.

In October 2012, an updated expanded draft of the report was discussed with a group of Hungarian human rights organisations. They also elaborated on how the many legislative changes, the financial crisis and the political environment affected their work.

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee published its second report in January 2013, and remains critical of the reforms, although some concessions have been made due to criticism by European institutions and Constitutional Court rulings. The NHC will continue to monitor developments, and in particular the outcome of new legislative initiatives introduced in early 2013 that give rise to new concerns.



Former head of the roma community in Gyöngyöspata explains how far rights extremists group was patrolling the village

LEFT: Kids playing in the village Gyöngyöspata.

RIGHT: Journalists on hunger strike outside the headquarter of a Hungarian TV-channel.





## Human Rights in Norway

In 2012, the NHC was active on a range of human rights issues in Norway, including human rights in prisons, Norway's obligations under the UN treaty bodies, re-organisation of a strengthened National Institution for Human Rights, minority and refugee issues, discussions on establishment of a National Preventive Mechanism, the human rights situation of illegal residents, proposals for introduction of a chapter on human rights in the Constitution, proposing human rights policies to political parties, etc.

### REFUGEE PROTECTION ISSUES

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 from Norway. We provide information to asylum lawyers, the immigration services and other authorities, both generally and in specific cases. In 2012 the NHC continued to support asylum lawyers with information related to cases of asylum seekers, in particular from the North Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Central Asia. A number of decisions in individual cases at 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. 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.

### THE NORWEGIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The NHC cooperates with the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (NCHR) on a range of issues. In 2012, the NHC cooperated with the NCHR on arranging meetings with representatives of the Romani/Tater people of Norway. The NCHR is functioning as a secretariat for a government-appointed commission to investigate past policies related to this national minority, and to propose measures for the government to strengthen the protection of the human rights of the group.

NHC regularly provides briefings for election observers heading to missions in areas where the NHC has key competence. Secretary General Bjørn Engesland is a member of the board of the Centre for Human Rights, and NHC is also a member of the advisory board of the NCHR/ National Institution for Human Rights.

### HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CONSTITUTION AND FUTURE NATIONAL INSTITUTION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The NHC remained active on issues related to the future organisation of Norway's National Institution. NHC argued that a separate Human Rights Commission should be established, taking over the role of being Norway's National Institution from the NCHR, being set up and given sufficient resources to become fully Paris Principles-compatible and able to ensure full respect for human rights in Norway.

The NHC also argued that Norway's National Preventive Mechanism, which has to be established when Norway ratifies the Optional Protocol of the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT), should be a part of this new institution. However, the government preferred a different solution.

The NHC took part in discussions based on a proposal from a Parliament-appointed committee to amend the Constitution, including a chapter on all categories of human rights (civil, political, economic, social and cultural). The NHC supported the proposal, arguing that listing human rights in the Constitution will increase their prominence in legal and political matters. The NHC participated in a hearing organised by the Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs of the Norwegian Parliament on 16 April, where we

promoted these points of view orally and in writing and by responding to questions from MPs. Later in the year, NHC gave input on these issues to the programme committees of the political parties represented in the Norwegian parliament.

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

For many years, NHC has been hosting the secretariat of the Norwegian NGO Forum for Human Rights. In February, the Forum issued general recommendations to the government of Norway regarding human rights priorities at the United Nations and recommending action on Kazakhstan, Russia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Sudan and five thematic areas, including, inter alia, discrimination and persecution on the grounds of religious belief, caste and sexual orientation. The recommendations are widely distributed within the Foreign Service and are believed to have had an impact on Norway's priorities and actions at the UN as it represents the collective priorities of many civil society organisations (NGOs). The document was presented and discussed at a meeting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In August the Forum sent an open letter to the Government of Norway addressed to the Prime Minister, expressing regrets that several issues regarding Norway's international human rights obligations were not handled with the customary



efficiency and openness. The then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jonas Gahr Støre, promptly responded to the letter on behalf of the government and invited the NGOs to a dialogue meeting. By the end of the year the government had proposed to the parliament to ratify and implement the OPCAT appointing the Parliamentary Ombuds-person as the National Preventive Mechanism under the protocol. This proposal was criticised by NGOs, both on the basis of substance as not fitting the task and on the basis of procedure, as there had been only limited dialogue or advance exploration of alternatives.



Gene Sharp meets Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre.

Gene Sharp receives a standing ovation at the Human Rights Human Wrongs 2012 (Photo: Tom Henning Bratlie).





The UN Committee against Torture (CAT) examined Norway's combined 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> report in October-November, in Geneva. NHC was part of a delegation of Norwegian NGOs there. NHC delivered a joint statement on behalf of the delegation, took part in answering questions from interested Committee members and in informal lobbying activities. NHC had coordinated and edited a joint alternative report issued to the Committee the previous year. CAT issued concluding observations highlighting many of the issues raised by Norwegian NGOs, including the use of solitary confinement, the use of police cells, children in prison, Norway's National Institution for Human Rights and the use of force in mental health care, among other issues. In a number of meetings with the authorities NHC has called for efficient follow-up of the concluding observations of the CAT, but the issue remains open at the end of the year.

NHC was re-elected to serve as Secretariat of the Forum for two more years and performed this task throughout 2012.

## HUMAN RIGHTS HUMAN WRONGS DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL

Human Rights Human Wrongs, Scandinavia's only film festival dedicated to human rights, was arranged for the fourth time in Oslo in 2012. The event took place at Parkteatret and Litteraturhuset from February 7 to 12. As before, the NHC co-organised the festival together with Oslo Dokumentarkino and the Human Rights House Oslo.

The festival was built around four themes: Status Illegal, Nonviolent Revolutions, Business and Human Rights, and Battle for Justice. The aim of the festival is to generate and stimulate debate on known and lesser-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. Again, all these goals were achieved: 13 films from 8 countries were screened, among them 8 Norwegian premieres and one pre-premiere. In addition, 7 panel debates, one Q&A with renowned non-violence activist Gene Sharp and various talks took place, giving room for discussion and a perspective for all the films. The festival also hosted 13 international guests, who participated in debates and discussions. These included Gene Sharp and Rasul Jafarov from the Azerbaijan Human Rights Club, who debated the potential of non-violence as a weapon against brutal dictatorships, with the ongoing Arab uprisings as backdrop. The festival also featured a panel debate moderated by Berit Lindeman of NHC on the situation of paperless refugees who are living almost without human rights.

In addition to the official festival programme, the festival included school viewings of the films "5 Broken Cameras" and "Imagining Emanuel", which deal with the issue of paperless refugees, when the students got to meet director Thomas Østbye and the main character Emanuel Agara.

Human Rights Human Wrongs managed to attract an audience of about 2,550 people, with an average of 104 people on each showing, setting a new record. Media coverage was extensive.

NHC's Anders Nielsen at the opening of the Human Rights Human Wrongs 2012.

Panel debate on the situation of paperless refugees (Photo: Tom Henning Bratlie).

## IV

## Human Rights Education

Human rights education is an important pillar of the NHC's work. 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 to developing strong civil society and free media;
3. Human rights education as condition for attainment of individual rights, and individuals' capability and opportunity to actively participate in social life;
4. Work to rebuild trust and reconciliation after conflicts, in order to secure lasting peace and peaceful coexistence.

In Norway, the cooperation with Buskerud University College and Drammen municipality has been continued. In September we organised a two-day seminar for around 100 employees of the Introduction Centre for Refugees in Drammen.

Our education materials are included in the manual for teachers, "The right to choose – Ideas for education programmes on forced marriages and similar topics", published by the Norwegian Directorate for Integration and Diversity.

In 2012 we continued our international education activities through seven existing programmes. In addition, we have contributed with our knowledge and experience in many relevant activities carried out by other organisations and institutions.

### WESTERN BALKANS

#### HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION FOR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

As part of the regional programme Human rights education for Active Citizenship: more than 400 young people received training in human rights, intercultural understanding, non-violent communication and youth activism in 2012.

In addition to the human rights schools at local level, we directed the focus at current events and human rights issues and regional human rights schools, with participants from all the republics. We addressed the increasing ethnic tension and the potential for

mitigating the conflict in intercultural relationships. We also addressed violence against women and hate crimes against those belonging to sexual and gender minorities. The training sessions focused specifically on common regional challenges, such as the failure of institutions in handling gender-related problems, the legacy of sexual violence during the conflicts, and to secure – rather than hinder – the right to freedom of assembly and expression based on membership of a group. At the end of the year we managed to bring participants from the region to Mitrovica, Kosovo, to draw attention to the root causes of the recent unrest and conflict. The thematic focuses of the regional schools were also reflected in the youth projects implemented by our 12 youth groups in the region.

We consider the most substantial result we have achieved to be the long-lasting impact we have on active youth participation in society. More than two-thirds of our participants remain active within civil society a year after participating in our schools, which is an impressive number compared to averages concerning the youth population in general, estimated at no more than 2 percent.

Our long-term efforts to influence the institutional commitment to human rights education is progressing, despite reluctance from the institutions to deal with topics such as transitional justice, war crimes, sexual and gender minorities and more. We organise joint events, advice on curricula and participate in discussions about how to improve the civic education programmes in the region.



Students in Novi Pazar.



Conference in Novi Pazar regarding universities and their role in peace building.

## THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITIES IN PEACEBUILDING

The pilot project "Intercultural understanding and human rights" that we started in 2011 in Bosnia and Herzegovina has resulted in a three-year regional programme uniting universities and non-governmental organisations in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. The Buskerud University College is also part of the programme. The aim of the programme is to open a dialogue on the role of the universities, to teach staff and students in peacebuilding, which would result in concrete actions to be implemented in cooperation with the authorities. The participating universities are, because of the geopolitical context they operate in, politicised, ideologised and ethnicised. Besides, courses related to human rights are generally seen as futile and problematic, since they introduce controversial issues and they question the status quo.

Last year we succeeded in establishing a network of partner universities, as provided for in the programme and to implement the planned activities. We did this despite the fact that two universities withdrew from our cooperation for political reasons. We established the study in intercultural understanding and human rights for full-time and part-time students in four universities. We took up topics like education and nationalism, nationalism and history learning, nationalism and language, literature learning, self-victimisation in education and more. We organised an exchange of students and teaching staff among universities. We also organised two open conferences about the role of the universities in peacebuilding in Mostar and Novi Pazar. University libraries with literature on human rights and intercultural understanding were established. The programme also has its Facebook-page: <https://en-b.facebook.com/Build.Bridges.Not.Walls>.

## NORTH CAUCASUS

Our programme for intercultural understanding and human rights in Chechnya, Ingushetia and North Ossetia has been implemented in cooperation with the Civic Assistance Committee since 2009. In 2012 we provided various training for 76 young people and 27 police officers, and our participants have carried out projects which have included approximately 700 children, youth, students and others.

An issue which has been repeatedly addressed is corruption within education institutions. Other recurring themes relate to the need for non-violent arenas, such as youth clubs, movie screenings and social projects. Dissemination of information about human rights, as well as training for young people and children about human rights, remains important to the participants.

As a part of our work on intercultural dialogue, we have carried out joint activities between Ingush and North-Ossetian youngsters from the ethnically divided areas in the outskirts of Vladikavkaz.



Conference in Mostar on universities and peace building.

Workshop.





Enver Djuliman and Mevlud Dudić, principal of the university of Novi Pazar, at the opening of the human rights corner in the university library.



Studying human rights and multicultural understanding in Novi Pazar.

We aim to help these young people to establish relationships with each other and we believe this contributes to understanding and a positive development in the stalemate between these ethnic groups.

During 2012 we introduced police officers in Ingushetia as a target group. In cooperation with the Ombudsman institution, we discuss, among other pressing issues, the problem of torture and forced disappearances in the republic. Along with our work with young people and teachers, this work will be a priority for the coming years.

Through the training sessions over 350 young people gained knowledge about democratic ideals, universal values, tolerance and political participation; 40 activists were trained to monitor and prepare an alternative report to the UN Committee on the Rights of People with Disabilities; over 30 activists took part in the training of human rights monitoring.

In 2012, a lot of effort was put into how to cover human rights in the media and which tools to use in human rights campaigns. The specific focus was on different minorities, investigative journalism, security implications and journalists' rights as well as means of protection. Over 100 journalists took part in the seminars. A seminar for lawyers on the European standards for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms was organised as well.

New useful teaching materials were developed, translated and published. The participants in our seminars are actively using their networks for sharing knowledge and experiences. As part of a study trip, a group of human rights activists visited human rights monitoring NGOs in Norway as well as Norway's penitentiary system.

## SOUTH CAUCASUS

At the end of 2012 we started a new EU and Norwegian MFA-backed programme, the "Coalition for Rebuilding of Trust". It is a project designed by NHC and six partners from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. It aims at addressing problems caused by past wars that have left scars in the troubled region that is the South Caucasus. It seeks to empower and assist civil society organisations and individuals to address root causes of the conflict and contribute to the establishment of tolerance and understanding, which is perceived as the only means of guaranteeing in the long term respect for human rights and peace in the region. Marion Kipiani, the citizen of Austria permanently based in Tbilisi, was chosen for the position of regional coordinator for the programme.

## UKRAINE

NHC's cooperation with UHHRU in the framework of the three-year project "Let Us Understand Human Rights-All Ukrainian Educational Programme" ended in December. The project's goal was to contribute to Ukrainian society's having access to relevant education in human rights, and to encourage citizens' positive engagement in societal issues. Training programmes for activists, young people, teachers and school administrators, journalists, lawyers, police and prison officials were organised via a broad network of our cooperation partners.

## BELARUS

A three-year project was completed in December 2012. Our target groups have been young people, teachers, activists and journalists, but we also involved women and law enforcement officials. Through human rights schools, seminars and round-table discussions we contributed to the dissemination of knowledge about human rights in the authoritarian Belarusian society. We also supporting the translation and publication of relevant human rights-related handbooks and materials.

Over 140 journalists participated in different educational, solidarity and capacity-building activities, as well as in public discussions about the legal status of Belarusian freelance media workers. In 2012 the focus was on promotion of media campaign activities and the development of the Belarusian freelance journalists' web-section at [www.baj.by](http://www.baj.by). Distance training courses were also very popular among young as well as experienced journalists. In November, the 10 best-qualified participants from the previous three years were invited to Oslo to attend training by local media and human rights experts, and to visit the editorial offices of leading Norwegian media outlets and the offices of human rights watchdogs.

Several important publications were printed in 2012. For example, COMPASS (Council of Europe's manual of human rights education for young people), a brochure "Family violence is not a private affair", study materials for journalists, etc.



Human rights school for people working in penitentiary facilities in Ukraine.

Training sessions to increase women's knowledge of their rights reached their audience, and more women are able to detect where the rights are impaired, know where to apply for help and protection, and educate others around them. Also, the Territorial Social Welfare Centres (TSWC) are more capable of, and active in, rendering professional assistance to those in need and in making recommendations on how to act in specific situations of violence.

Law enforcement-themed seminars were in demand in 2012 as administrative repression is the main way of persecuting activists in Belarus. As a result, activists are becoming more aware of the need to know their rights and effective ways of acting in emergency situations. Several follow-up training sessions were organised for alumni from previous years as well. In addition, alumni communicate via social networks, share opinions, advise each other, elaborate joint projects, etc. Human rights education activities will be continued in Belarus over the next three years (2013-2015).

## RUSSIA: THE BARENTS PROJECT

The Barents project, implemented in various forms since 2000, involves cooperation between the non-governmental sector and the authorities in the regions of Murmansk, Arkhangelsk and Karelia in Russia and Northern Norway. The aim of the project is dissemination of knowledge on human rights, intercultural understanding and peaceful conflict resolution by implementation of educational programmes directed towards young people and teachers, journalists, correctional services



Human rights school for Belarusian and Ukrainian youth in Krim.

workers, law enforcement officials and people working with disabled people.

New in 2012 is that we organised, in cooperation with the regional NGO "Renaissance of Russian culture" and the Northern Federal University Lomonosov in Arkhangelsk, an elective course in human rights. Lars Petter Soltvedt, a professor from Buskerud University College and a member of the Council of NHC, co-organises this section. The first semester was attended by 50 students and to our knowledge we are so far the only NGO to initiate university courses on human rights in this part of Russia.

In total, we have organised education for 100 young people, 75 teachers, 100 journalists, 75 people who work with the disabled, 175 employees in the Correctional Services and 150 police staff. Evaluation questionnaires handed in by representatives of the target groups show that an overwhelming majority now consider human rights education as one of their priorities.

## NATALYA ESTEMIROVA DOCUMENTATION CENTRE: KEEPING RECORD OF CRIMES AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS

NHC continues its work on the Natalya Estemirova Documentation Centre (NEDC) which has been established to ensure documentation of grave abuses in Russian North Caucasus. The centre is a co-operative project with Russian and international non-governmental organisations.



Natalya Estemirova.

The North Caucasus, and in particular Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan, remains a region where serious human rights abuses continue to take place and where it is highly dangerous for human rights defenders to operate. A culture of impunity prevails, with almost no accountability for the atrocities. What is more, some important documentation relating to the conflicts has already been destroyed or disappeared and, as time goes by, the risks of such damage continue to increase, thus further magnifying obstacles to ensuring accountability.

Nine Russian and international human rights organisations, which have extensively documented atrocities perpetrated during the conflicts in the North Caucasus, agreed to compile and preserve documentation from different public and non-public sources in a comprehensive and unified information base. They delegated NHC to develop such an information base and establish the Documentation Centre in Norway as an independent organisation. The Centre was named after our friend and colleague Natalya Estemirova, an award-winning Russian human rights defender, who was abducted and killed in 2009 by unknown perpetrators.

In establishing the Centre, the organisations explicitly refer to international human rights and international humanitarian and international criminal law instruments as the basis for its activities. An underlying principle is that a lasting peace in the North Caucasus is impossible without justice, the establishment of truth and the preservation of a factual history of the armed conflicts of the 1990s and 2000s. This principle is clearly stated in the 22 September 2010 Oslo Resolution on establishing the NEDC.

Documents and material include witness testimonies; videos; photographs; and other first-hand records, as well as prosecution documents; court decisions; and other case materials. The Centre's secure server has been set up and some of the partner organisations have digitised and secured large parts of their archive. Partner organisations held one annual meeting to coordinate their efforts in 2011. A new meeting is planned to be held in April 2013.

Recently, the Centre has developed a cutting-edge documentation system which has a capacity to store and organise transferred archival information in a way that allows its multi-purpose use. Among its numerous functionalities it allows the same document to be used both in order to map concrete criminal incidents and to develop a catalogue of missing or killed persons in the region. It enables setting individual incidents and crimes into a larger context of military conflict and attacks. It allows analysts to trace the organisational units allegedly responsible for the large-scale human rights violations committed during the conflict.



Categorisation of information according to the time the information was reported and geographical grids will allow cross-reference of different facts and relate to the role of different individuals. This work is particularly important in order to analyse the role of possible perpetrators and their respective networks and institutions. The staff of the Centre provide support and quality control of the work.



## 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 fora 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)

#### HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING (HDIM)

The NHC was present with two staff members at the OSCE/ODIHR's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw. In our interventions at the meeting we focused on the importance of an independent judiciary, drawing upon the examples of the Sergey Magnitsky case in Russia and the case against several opposition members in Western Kazakhstan. We also drew attention to governments' obligation to facilitate human rights education, including by refraining from hindering participation by visa denial. Together with the Netherlands Helsinki Committee and other European and Central Asian colleagues, the NHC participated with a presentation on freedom of religion or belief in a side event addressing the sober reality of the human rights situation in Central Asia. The NHC also facilitated

a separate meeting on the developments after the 2010 unrest in Osh between interested diplomats and NHC partners.

#### OSCE MINISTERIAL AND CIVIC SOLIDARITY PLATFORM

On 5 December the NHC and a range of other activists from Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia gathered at the OSCE Parallel Civil Society Conference in Dublin Castle on the eve of the 19<sup>th</sup> OSCE Ministerial Meeting. The organisations, representing the Civic Solidarity Platform, adopted the Dublin declaration on Human Rights Defenders and a document outlining civil society recommendations to the delegates from OSCE participating states gathered in Dublin. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton received the documents during a separate meeting with some of the activists, and also referred to the platform during her intervention. As did several others of the Ministers present, including the Irish Chairman in office Eamon Gilmore and the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Espen Barth Eide.



HDIM in Warsaw.  
Photo: OSCE Piotr Markowski.



OSCE 19<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Council in Dublin.



LEFT: In front of Palais de Nations in Geneva.



RIGHT: Demonstration at the HDIM in Warsaw.

## INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

In 2011 NHC entered into a formal collaboration with Brussels-based NGO International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) to represent NHC in EU bodies and to serve as a two-way information channel between EU and NHC. The agreement ensures that NHC can have input to some of the many relevant advocacy opportunities in the EU structures during the year. In 2012, through this co-operation NHC has been informing the EU institutions of its findings and concerns related to human rights issues in various countries and regions. The NHC provided input to EU processes such as EU human rights dialogues with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Through joint initiatives with IPHR and other partner organisations, it has called on the European Union to capitalise on the negotiations for an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Kazakhstan to advance concrete human rights improvements. In connection with the five-year anniversary of the EU Strategy for Central Asia, the NHC and other groups have appealed to EU institutions and member states to place human rights at the core of its engagement with Central Asia to ensure an effective impact on the current status quo, marred by systematic violations. On EU internal matters, the report "Democracy and human rights at stake in Hungary" informed decision-makers in Europe about recent developments in the centralisation of power and threats to the independence of the judiciary and media freedoms in this EU member state.

## 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. In 2012 Engesland participated in the dialogue meeting with Indonesia, participating in the working group for the police and the armed forces. The dialogue with China has been suspended since 2010, due to the strong Chinese reactions to the granting of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo.

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.

## INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

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

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 published a report on the state of Russian investigations. The NHC continued a major project together with eight Russian and international human rights organisations to establish a centre for documenting international crimes in the North Caucasus. The NHC co-organised with CICC a meeting in May in Almaty for Central Asian NGOs on ICC-related matters.

The NHC Deputy Secretary General, Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal took part as an expert witness in a trial in the Oslo city court of a Rwandan for participation in the 1994 genocide.



Panel at the seminar "The Silenced", a side event to the Oslo Freedom Forum.

## 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. The fourth Oslo Freedom Forum took place from 7–9 May 2012 titled "Out of Darkness, Into Light", with 38 prominent speakers from all over the world. In addition to NHC, partners included Amnesty International Norway, Civita and Plan Norway.

## INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS

NHC is a member of several international networks of human rights organisations. The NHC is

located in the Oslo Human Rights House which is a member of the Human Rights House Network. We are also a founding and active member of Civic Solidarity Platform, which includes 35 leading civil society organisations and is an international platform for cooperation on advocacy in the OSCE area. In 2012, NHC was among the founders of European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE), uniting 14 leading NGOs with a focus on election observation, and is a member of the EPDE steering committee. We are also members of the International Partnership Group for Azerbaijan (IPGA), promoting freedom of expression issues in Azerbaijan. In addition, we are members of the International Coalition for the ICC, the Forum for International Criminal and Humanitarian Law (FICHL) and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network and DARE – Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe.



LEFT: Press conference at the Oslo Freedom Forum.

# VII

## EEA Grants



Launch event in Sofia.

Through the EEA and Norway Grants, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway contribute to reducing social and economic disparities in, and strengthening bilateral relations with, EU countries in Central and Southern Europe. For the period 2009-14, the EEA Grants and Norway Grants amount to €1.79 billion and 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.

Ten percent of the total EEA Grants are dedicated to support of civil society. A strong civil society is one of the cornerstones of a well-functioning democracy. The Norwegian Helsinki Committee has since 2005 been responsible for coordination and information towards Norwegian civil society under the EEA and Norway Financial Mechanisms and NGO funds, with a particular focus on bilateral partnerships. The main areas of support include democracy, human rights, good governance, anti-discrimination, reduction of social inequalities and gender equality.

The NHC is responsible for keeping Norwegian civil society informed about the EEA and Norway



Launch event in Tallinn.

Grants and NGO funds in the beneficiary countries, assisting in establishing contact and cooperation between non-governmental organisations (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 Programme Operators in the beneficiary countries, Donor Programme Partners, the Norwegian embassies in the beneficiary countries as well as the Financial Mechanism Office.

Launch event in Riga





Information meeting in Oslo.



Programme operator seminar in Oslo.

In order to facilitate bilateral partnerships, information meetings about the EEA grants were arranged in the six largest cities of Norway, attracting a wide range of representatives from Norwegian civil society organisations. The NHC also maintains direct contact with Norwegian organisations seeking information about the EEA and Norwegian Grants. A website portal is also maintained by NHC to facilitate dissemination of information and search for partners.

NGO funds were launched in several countries throughout 2012, and the NHC facilitated the attendance of potential Norwegian partner organisations during launch conferences in Estonia, Latvia and Bulgaria. The voluntary sector in Norway consists of 115,000 non-governmental and non-profit organisations, and the range of

organisations represented during the launch conferences illustrates the diversity of the NGO sector in Norway. There is great interest in learning more about the so-called Nordic Model of democracy, where NGOs play an important role. NGOs from the beneficiary states are very interested in sharing experiences and developing joint projects with Norwegian counterparts.

One of the main overarching themes of the NGO-fund is hate speech, and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee also coordinated the start of an informal network of NGOs in Norway working on the issue, as well as attending and recommending speakers for training and conferences on the topic. NHC was also in the reference group that planned a conference on the topic in Budapest in November 2012.



Information meeting in Trondheim.

## VIII

## 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 2012 the NHC or its advisors were registered with around 500 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 on several important human rights questions in 2012, 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, Facebook, Twitter and publications. In the course of 2012, the NHC published 107 relevant news

articles on the website [www.nhc.no](http://www.nhc.no), in addition to other postings. On average, the NHC website had 235 unique visits per day in 2012. The NHC also became more active on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

## PUBLICATIONS

The NHC published the following reports in 2012:

- *Waiting for Russian Justice: The ineffective Russian investigation of crimes committed during the August 2008 armed conflict between Russia and Georgia*
- *A Chronicle of Violence: Report details June 2010 events in Kyrgyzstan*
- *Democracy at stake in Hungary – The Orbán government's constitutional revolution*

The NHC was also part of the report published by International Partnership Group for Azerbaijan (IPGA), "Running Scared: Azerbaijan's Silenced Voices".

NHC was the publisher of a book written by Sonja Biserko, Chair of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia titled *Yugoslavia's Implosion, The Fatal Attraction of Serbian Nationalism*.

All publications can be downloaded from the web page [www.nhc.no](http://www.nhc.no), or ordered from the NHC information department on request.

## MEMBERSHIP

As of the end of 2012, the NHC had 570 individual members.

## IX

## Finances

The total spending in 2012 was 36,4 million NOK out of which project support for partners constituted 22,8 million NOK. Total income balance was 36,5 million.

The Norwegian Helsinki Committees donors are primarily the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Freedom of Expression Foundation (Fritt Ord), Open Society Institute, National Endowment for Democracy and the European Commission. Gifts, members contribution etc. provided an income of 225 613 NOK.



NORWEGIAN  
HELSINKI COMMITTEE

*35 years*



From a Sing for democracy rally in Baku, Azerbaijan

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