

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Annual Report 2010



Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Established in 1977

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

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

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

HOW WE WORK

HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING AND REPORTING

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

SUPPORT OF DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES

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

EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

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

INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES

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

PERSPECTIVES:

The end of 2010 was marked by two dramatic events set in different parts of the world: On 19 December riot police brutally dispersed and arrested hundreds of anti-government protesters in Minsk, Belarus. Just two days before, Mohammed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old man trying to support his family by selling fruit and vegetables in the central town of Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, doused himself with paint thinner and set himself on fire in front of a local municipal office. The Tunisian "Jasmine Revolution" that eventually toppled Tunisia's President, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, had triggered a chain of astonishing events in North Africa and the Middle East we are yet to see the conclusions to.



Alexander Lukashenko succeeded, by means of force and grave human rights violations, in restoring control, following the reflexes of many authoritarian leaders throughout the world who on a daily basis close down independent newspapers, put human rights defenders into prison, manipulate elections and torture those who dare oppose them. Ben Ali did not succeed in restoring control; Egypt's Hosni Mubarak failed shortly after. Libya's dictator Muammar Gaddafi may be the next to fall.

Over the past few years, we have seen increased pressure on human rights internationally. Important values have become the topic of a considerable struggle in the world, and the level of conflict has risen. Many see this particular question as legitimate – whether human rights are indeed universal. A regional slide in the global power balance is taking place, and alongside countries like Russia, China especially has increased its global importance, positioning itself as a country able to combine economic growth with heavy-handed government control and little or no respect for democracy and basic human rights. The growth of authoritarian capitalism threatens the protection of international human rights, while also establishing itself as a model for other countries.

In Norway, a 2008-2009 report to the parliament on interests, responsibilities and possibilities in foreign policy stated: "it is not clear where the pendulum will swing – in the direction of universally applicable human rights across borders, or towards a backlash in the direction of the absolute and sovereign position of the national state".

Developments in North Africa and the Middle East over the past few months may have given a few answers as to which direction that pendulum is swinging.

It has long been an established truth that the Middle East is not ready for democracy and human rights, and that strong regimes are a necessity if we are to avoid an Islamic revolution. Today, the people are letting their governments know what they want – they demand democracy and respect. Not all state leaders like to be reminded today about how positively they once spoke of Mubarak or Gaddafi, and of the fact that human rights violations in Egypt and Libya were being brushed under the carpet for all those years.

Countries that were long considered stagnant, characterised by a lack of development and oppressive regimes, have shown a strong potential for rebellion and change. Events of the past three months prove that the ideas of freedom, democracy and respect for basic human rights are indeed universal.

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee has worked for years to promote respect for democracy and human rights in countries like Belarus, Azerbaijan, Russia and Kazakhstan, and we clearly see that governments are far from always ready to support human rights in the face of so-called "realpolitik". If events in North Africa at the beginning of this year have shown us one thing, it is this: In the long run, human rights prevail, authoritarian regimes do not. This should also be realised by Western leaders, who should no longer silently accept human rights violations in the interest of short-term economic or security gains. We hope that those brave human rights defenders in Belarus, Azerbaijan, Russia and Kazakhstan do not have to wait too long for what is rightfully theirs.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bjørn Engesland". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Bjørn Engesland,
Secretary General

The NHC Secretariat



Bjørn Engesland
Secretary General.



Aage Borchgrevink
Advisor, focus on Russia and Georgia.



Csilla Czibalmos
Project assistant, human rights education programme.

STAFF ABROAD:



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



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



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



Olga Shamshur
Project assistant, human rights education programme.



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



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



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



Vanja Bentsen Kleven
Co-ordinator for EEA grants project.



Elena Saenkova
Project co-ordinator, Murmansk office.



Berit Nising Lindeman
Head of information. Advisor, focus on Belarus, Ukraine and Azerbaijan.



Enver Djuliman
Head of the human rights education programme.



Ivar Dale
Advisor, focus on Central Asia and Georgia.

OTHER STAFF:

Anne Marit Austbø
Advisor. On leave for most of 2010.



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



Mina Skouen
Project co-ordinator of the human rights education programme.



Lene Wetteland
Project co-ordinator, Central Asia programme.

Vugar Gojajev
Project co-ordinator in Baku, Azerbaijan (until August 2010).

Elena Mamadnazarova
Project co-ordinator at the NHC Central Asia office (until June).

Zuzanna Godzimirska
Project assistant Russia Conference.

Organisation

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

BOARD

Chairperson: Morten Bergsmo, senior researcher, International Peace Research Institute (PRIO).

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

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

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

Kari Schage, management consultant, Resources Global Professionals.

Eirik Moen, Secretary General of the International Democrat Union.

Raymond Johansen, Secretary General of the Norwegian Labour Party.

Berit Nising Lindeman, staff representative.

COUNCIL

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- Maria Warsinski
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- Stein Ivar Aarsæther

Content

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee	2
Perspectives	3
The NHC secretariat	4
Organisation	5
I The year 2010 in retrospect	6
Kyrgyzstan: In the wake of democratic revolution – violent tragedy	6
Russia on the agenda: International conference in Oslo	7
Belarus: A total breakdown of human rights	8
ACTIVITIES, BY COUNTRY	9
The Russian Federation	9
Belarus	11
Ukraine	12
SOUTH CAUCASUS	13
Armenia	13
Azerbaijan	14
Georgia	15
Turkey	16
CENTRAL ASIA	16
WESTERN BALKANS	19
II Human Rights Education	21
III Human Rights in Norway	24
IV Co-operation and International Processes	27
V EEA Grants	29
VI Information	30
VII Finances	30

The year 2010 in retrospect

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee has a strong national and international commitment, with widespread activities in many countries. Our main focus is the human rights challenge in Eastern Europe, but we also aim to be active human rights defenders in our own country, Norway. Through our expertise and the wide-ranging networks of our staff we follow developments closely, take action on urgent matters and have an extensive range of project activities. The focus is determined by our planning and decisions, but also by current events. In 2010, three major areas of our attention, concern and activity were our presence and activity in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, during the ethnic violence there, as organisers of an important conference on the developments in Russia and eyewitnessing the human rights crisis in Belarus towards the end of the year.

Kyrgyzstan: In the wake of democratic revolution – violent tragedy

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee was among the first outsiders to arrive to Southern Kyrgyzstan after the worst violence 10-13 June, along with Human Rights Watch and Human Rights Center Memorial. In June and July, Ivar Dale and Russian colleague Vitaliy Ponomarev interviewed numerous people in Osh and Jalalabad regions who had been caught up in the shocking violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks which left over 400 people dead and entire neighbourhoods in Osh and Jalalabad in ruins.

The need for an international presence was obvious. There was no communication between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, the latter a large minority in the country. Burnt-down houses – even entire neighbourhoods – racist graffiti, dead, injured – this was but the

obvious. As the city gradually returned to normality on the surface, curfew and nightfall brought brutal government-led operations to search for weapons and suspected perpetrators of the violence, targeting Uzbek neighbourhoods in particular. In the village of Nariman, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee became witness to the most brutal clean-up operation in this period, leaving two people dead and 40-50 people injured.

After participating as accredited election observer in the referendum on the new Constitution, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee met with President Roza Otunbaeva in July to present our findings from the visits to the South. We noted positively her willingness to act on specific recommendations, but it was also evident that political in-fighting in



Burned out buildings in Osh.

Uzbek Women in grief in Osh.



Burned out buildings in Osh.



Victims of cleanup in Nariman.



Woman mourning the loss of her husband in Nariman.

the country creates great obstacles to implementing Kyrgyzstan's international human rights obligations.

As the year came to an end, Southern Kyrgyzstan was still struggling to come to terms with the tragedy that had occurred. The human rights situation has deteriorated further as trials related to the June events have proved seriously flawed, including threats and attacks against witnesses, lawyers and those charged with participation in the violence.

In a report due to be published in 2011, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Human Rights Center Memorial and Freedom House will outline the events in the year that has passed without Bakiev and give recommendations to the current government.

The challenges ahead are enormous, but the potential role Kyrgyzstan can play in bringing democracy to Central Asia should not be underestimated.

Russia is a main area of attention for the Norwegian Helsinki Committee and the committee aims to be in forefront of the human rights activism related to Russia. In September 2010, we organised an international conference to discuss the challenges and possible new approaches for promoting human

rights in Russia. The conference, which was held in Oslo in a closed working group format, was co-hosted by Amnesty International Norway.

Representatives from leading Russian and international NGOs, as well as the Council of Europe, the EU and the United Nations, discussed how to broaden the human rights movement, the impact of President Medvedev's modernisation plans for human rights and the need to gather a record-keeping system for evidence of human rights violations occurring in the conflict-area in the North Caucasus. The conference decided to establish Natalia Estimirova's Documentation Centre. The conference underlined the need to focus on and strengthen the relationship between business

Russia on the agenda:
International conference in Oslo



Bjørn Engesland and John Peder Egenæs.



Left: Svetlana Gannushkina and Grigory Shvedov.
Right: Igor Klyamkin, Ludmila Alexeeva and Bjørn Engesland.



Svetlana Gannushkina and Ludmila Alexeeva.



Karianna Moskalenko, Inna Sangadzhuyeva and Bjørn Engesland



Igor Klyamkin and Aage Borchgrevink.

and human rights and to monitor the parliamentary and presidential elections set for 2011-12 in a coordinated manner. Solidarity actions with the demonstrators in Russia on the 31st of the month were planned to be held outside Russia too, including in Norway.

The conference culminated in a public seminar titled "Medvedev's Russia, – moving towards democracy?". Among the key speakers of the seminar were the Head of the Moscow Helsinki Group Ludmila Alexeeva, the expert from the Liberal Mission Foundation Igor Klyamkin and the head of Civic Assistance Committee Svetlana Gannushkina.

Belarus:
A total breakdown of human rights

The rage displayed by Belarusian President Lukashenko against his own people on the night of popular protests against the rigged elections should have come as no surprise to anyone following his regime for the last 16 years. But, given his slightly less aggressive tone against opposition forces the preceding few months, it still did.

Just ahead of the Belarusian presidential elections in December 2010 the NHC issued a press release headlined "No expectations for the elections in Belarus". The NHC claimed that the basic preconditions for holding free and fair elections in the country were not present in the country, despite fewer cases of harassment of activists and some access for opposition candidates to conduct election campaigns. The official outcome of the election, an overwhelming win for Lukashenko, was as expected. Three NHC staff were present in Minsk on election day and for a few days following, and witnessed events unfold as thousands gathered on Independent Square and moved to the presidential administration building. Vast amounts of OMON forces, a police riot control commando, surrounded the protesters and after the entrance

door to the administration building had been broken down, it is still unclear by whom, the commandos came down on people with brutal force. Hundreds were beaten with truncheons and kicked while lying on the ground, as many as 700 were arrested on the night and during the following days. A presidential candidate, Aleksander Niyakliayev, never made it to the protests as he had already been brutally beaten up and arrested. The office of Human Rights Center Viasna was raided minutes after NHC staff left it in the morning of 20 December.

It is probably unheard of in European history that seven out of 10 candidates for a presidential election were arrested on election day. Political party leaders, journalists and campaign workers have been investigated for organising mass riots, and most of the Belarusian opposition is now in danger of spending the next several years behind bars. The seriousness of the situation cannot be exaggerated and will require intense attention from the European community until all political prisoners are freed and at some point President Alexander Lukashenko resigns.



Presidential candidate Andrei Sannikov.



Charter97.org



Charter97.org

Left: Demonstration. Right: OMON special forces.

Activities, by country

Although the Russian authorities have taken some positive steps during 2010, the overall human rights situation remains dismal. The year started with the arrest of the 82-year-old head of the Moscow Helsinki Group, Ludmila Alekseeva, at a demonstration on 31 December 2009 in support of Article 31 of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of assembly. The year ended with the police cracking down on a similar demonstration on 31 December 2010, and imprisoning several of the participants, including former Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov, who was sentenced to 15 days in prison.

There were no cases of high profile killings of journalists and human rights defenders, but some deaths of journalists and court officials, including the murder of a judge in April, appeared to be linked to their professional activities. Harassment of human rights defenders continued in many forms, including the criminal case against Oleg Orlov, head of Russian NGO human rights centre Memorial, for defamation of Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov. Orlov claimed Kadyrov was politically responsible for the murder of Natalia Estemirova in July 2009. If convicted, Orlov could face up to three years in prison.

In January, the state Duma ratified Protocol 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which streamlines the case review process of the

European Court of Human Rights. Reforms were launched in the prison and law enforcement sectors, but the effect of these reforms in terms of new legislation and improved practices has not been satisfactory. Other legal amendments have had a negative impact, including new provisions to the law on the Federal Security Service (FSB), which allows the FSB to issue warnings in order to halt "extremist activities" by individuals, organisations and the media.

Concern remained about the independence of the judiciary. The prosecution, incarceration and death in custody of the lawyer and whistle-blower Sergei Magnitsky in November 2009 was a case in point, as was the second verdict against former Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky and his associate Platon Lebedev in December 2010.

The situation in the North Caucasus remained critical throughout the year, marked by violent attacks, including terrorist attacks in Moscow. Systematic impunity continues to fuel the spreading of violence, crime and extremism in the region. Russia has to date not taken any effective steps to effectively implement the more than 150 decisions in the so-called Chechen cases of the European Court of Human Rights, nor taken meaningful investigative measures into the many credible allegations of involvement of Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov in serious crimes.

The Russian Federation

Bjørn Engesland interviewed by NRK during President Medvedev's visit.



Demonstration outside the Parliament in support of the 31-movement in Russia.



Demonstration outside the Grand Hotel during President Medvedev's visit.

Lidia Yusupova and Usam Baysaev.



PROJECT SUPPORT

- The Glasnost Defense Foundation in Moscow: "Monitoring of media violations in the Russian Federation."
- Human Rights Centre Memorial: "Migration Rights", legal protection of refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons and other groups of vulnerable migrants in Moscow and selected regions of the Russian Federation.
- Information agency Caucasian Knot, www.kavkaz-uzel.ru: "Independent and censorship-free information about events in the Caucasus and their human rights and humanitarian aspects".
- Human rights organisation Mashr, Ingushetia: "Legal aid to the defence of victims of abuse".

These crimes include the killing of his former bodyguard Umar Israilov in Vienna in 2009. The ongoing Israilov trial in Vienna underlines what the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe stated in its Resolution 1738 (2010): "The Assembly observes that the situation in the North Caucasus region, particularly in the Chechen Republic, Ingushetia and Dagestan, constitutes today the most serious and most delicate situation from a standpoint of safeguarding human rights and upholding rule of law, in the entire geographical area covered by the Council of Europe."

ACTIVITIES

The NHC was unable to conduct monitoring missions in Russia. Difficulties in obtaining visas for NHC staff continued, with inter alia at least one staff member barred from entering Russia for reasons of state security. The Norwegian Foreign Minister, Jonas Gahr Støre, raised the issue with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, but the situation did not improve.

In cooperation with the Norwegian Institute of Foreign Affairs (NUPI) the NHC organised a seminar on the North Caucasus in March. In September the NHC organised a large-scale strategy conference for Russian and international human rights defenders. A report from the conference will be published early in 2011. In cooperation with seven leading international and Russian human rights groups, the NHC established the Natasha Estemirova Documentation Centre, as a project run from the NHC office. The Documentation Centre will gather and analyse data connected with human rights violations in the North Caucasus, and serve as a library and archive for lawyers, prosecutors and researchers. Two of our threatened colleagues from the North Caucasus region have had the NHC office in Oslo as a base throughout the year.

Our programmes of project support for Russian human rights initiatives continued. The NHC participated in events dealing with Russia in Kampala, Stockholm and Hamburg, we have arranged several demonstrations in Oslo, including in support of the 31-movement in Russia and in connection with President Medvedev's visit in April. We have also written a number of media articles and public letters to Norwegian, Russian and international government representatives and bodies about various human rights issues. With a number of leading Russian and international human rights groups, the NHC has monitored the Israilov trial in Vienna.

The NHC has provided information in asylum cases from the North Caucasus, and written several critical letters about Norwegian practices in these cases in cooperation with Amnesty International Norway and the Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS). Negative decisions in individual cases have been overturned by the appeals board of the immigration authorities (UNE) based on information from the NHC. We testified and provided information in three separate court cases in which UNE decisions were overturned. An application to the immigration authorities regarding the resettlement in Norway of three Russian citizens was granted, and the family arrived in Norway in May.

Ebjørn Engesland.



Mantas Kvedaravichius.



The presidential elections on 19 December 2010 defined the year after the violent crack-down on demonstrators in the centre of Minsk during the evening and night to protest against the stolen elections. Between 600 and 700 protesters were detained; scores were brutally beaten by the riot police and armed forces. The demonstration had been planned and announced by opposition candidates weeks in advance. Most of the detained were convicted and sentenced to between five and 15 days' imprisonment, or fined. However, seven out of 10 candidates remained imprisoned when the new year started, most of them charged with organising mass riots, risking up to 15 years' imprisonment. In addition, many offices of human rights organisations, candidate campaign offices and homes of activists were searched. The NHC had three staff members present in Minsk at the time of the protests, eyewitnessing both the peaceful manner of the demonstration and the violence of its dispersion.

The violent reaction of the Lukashenko regime came as a surprise to most, as some small steps were made in a positive direction towards liberalising the election process. Most importantly, the opposition candidates were not excluded from registering for the elections or from carrying out election campaigns, although largely without access to state media and TV. The overall impression was nevertheless that the OSCE/ODIHR international observation mission concluded the elections were not fair.

In 2010, President Alexander Lukashenko's rule still suppressed independent media and NGOs, arbitrary arrests and harassment of opposition forces took place regularly throughout 2010. But until December, this was less than had been usual in the preceding few years. On the Day of Solidarity, 16 March, searches were carried out in the offices of the website www.Charter97.org and

the independent newspaper *Narodnaya Volya*. In addition, searches were conducted in the private homes of staff. The editor of www.Charter97.org, Natalia Radzina, was beaten by masked special forces during the raid. On 3 September, another staff member of Charter97, Aleh Byabenin, was found dead, apparently after suicide. A number of questions related to his death remain open; there is suspicion that he was murdered for his active involvement in Charter97 and the upcoming election campaign for a major opposition candidate, Andrei Sannikov.



Demonstration in Minsk.

The regime still denies citizens the freedom of association. For the third time the Ministry of Justice refused to register the NGO umbrella organisation the Belarusian Assembly of Pro-democratic NGOs in March. The offices of the newly established public campaign, "Tell the Truth", were raided by officials in May. The campaign's founder, Uladzimir Niaklayau, had just announced his intention to run for presidency and the leadership of the campaign was accused of spreading lies about Belarusian society.

In May, Belarus saw two new political prisoners, as Mikalaj Autukhovich and Uladzimir Asipienka were convicted in May and handed prison sentences, officially for illegal arms possession, but in reality for civil activism. Belarus refuses to abolish the death sentence, and in March the sentences against Andrej Zhuk and Vasilii Yuzepchuk were carried out, even though their cases were pending before the United Nations Human Rights Committee. Human rights defenders protesting against the execution, among them Sakharov Freedom Award recipient Ales Bialiatsky, were arrested and fined.

NHC Secretary General Bjørn Engesland was refused entry into Belarus when he applied for a visa in December.



Youth activist Zmitzer Dashkevich was arrested on 18 December and charged with hooliganism.



Presidential candidate Andrei Sannikov with his wife Irina Khalip and their son Danil.

ACTIVITIES

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee continued its active involvement for the improvement of the human rights situation in Belarus, including support for civil society. We are frequently asked to give lectures and reports to the media on issues related to Belarusian human rights and current affairs.

Aleh Byabenin.



The NHC issued several statements in connection with human rights violations in Belarus, and in March protested against the arrest of human rights defenders who demonstrated against the death penalty. We also condemned the raids against the offices of the website www.Charter97.org and newspaper *Narodnaya Volya*. In September we issued statements in connection with the death of journalist Aleh Byabenin arguing for an international investigation and against the threats against the journalists Natalia Radzina, Svetlana

Kalinkina and Nicolai Khalezin, all friends of Byabenin. In December we issued several statements, both prior to the elections and after the election, condemning violence and human rights abuse.

In December the Committee arranged a seminar in connection with the upcoming elections in Belarus, "Revolution, reform or stagnation." We invited the human rights defender Tatiana Reviaka from the Human Rights Centre "Viasna" and prominent journalist and author Pavel Sheremet.

The NHC visited Belarus twice in 2011, first in June to follow up on contacts and developments. Three staff members travelled to Minsk in December to follow the events related to the presidential elections and were eyewitnesses to the violence against the peaceful protesters in central Minsk on 19 and 20 December.



Left: Berit Lindeman.
Right: Tatiana Reviaka
and Pavel Sheremet.



Ukraine

In Ukraine, the year began by the turbulent first round of presidential elections, which saw two familiar faces emerge as the final candidates. On the one hand, Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, well known from the dramatic images in Kiev during the Orange Revolution – and on the other, the Revolution's bitter opponent, and now the leader of the opposition, Viktor Yanukovich. With influence between the two candidates being perceived as divided between the parts of the population who would see closer ties with Europe and those who wished for better relations with Russia, the situation was more complex on the second round of the elections on 7 February. Yanukovich, supported by his Party of Regions, came out as the winner in an extremely tight race and was inaugurated as President in spite of post-election legal struggles that continued throughout the year.

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee was present with accredited observers during both rounds of the presidential election. Visiting polling stations in the capital Kiev, as well as in the southern towns of Kherson and Kakhovka, the observers found the elections were being held in a good manner. The

NHC was active in communicating the events to the Norwegian media, whilst also cooperating with our partners in Ukraine.

Several significant developments took place in the wake of new presidency. In April 2010, an agreement between Ukraine and Russia stirred passions among the Ukrainian public and in political circles. It prolonged the lease of the port city Sevastopol to the Russian navy base for the next 25 years after the old one expires in 2017, in exchange for discounted gas prices. In September, the Constitution was changed to the 1996 version, making Ukraine once again a presidential republic, giving back to the president the authority that President Kuchma had before 2004. In the second part of the year several criminal cases were initiated against former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and a number of former officials from her government.

In September, almost exactly 10 years after the disappearance and murder of the journalist Georgy Gongadze, the Prosecutor General's office finally announced officially the name of the ex-Minister of Internal affairs, Yuriy Kravchenko, as the person

NHC staff observing
presidential elections in Ukraine.



who ordered him to be killed. The investigation is pending. As the present report goes to print, Ukraine's ex-President Leonid Kuchma faced his first questioning as a suspect in the murder of a journalist.

The year finished even more turbulently than it had begun, with chaos and fist fights in the Ukrainian parliament, when the President's supporters tried

to end a sit-in by opposition members protesting against the criminal prosecution of Tymoshenko. Even the famous Independence Square in the centre of the capital re-lived the Orange Revolution days, as thousands of entrepreneurs and businessmen from Kiev and other Ukrainian cities sat up a tent-city demanding the government make amendments to the new tax code.



Outside local party headquarter in Ukraine.

South Caucasus

A negative trend has tarnished Armenia's human rights record since the disputed presidential elections on 19 February 2008 and the excessive use of force by police on 1 March 2008. The government followed up these events by putting hundreds of people on trial. Many were sentenced to five years in prison for violence against a government official, whereas no policemen were investigated or charged for the excessive use of force. Some of the demonstrators have been released through amnesties, but the famous journalist Nikol Pashinyan who returned to Armenia after some time in exile was sentenced and imprisoned.

Freedom of the press and freedom of assembly remains severely restricted following these events. Several journalists have been assaulted, and the new media law failed to meet the recommendations from the Venice Commission. The TV channel A1plus was again denied a broadcast license, despite a European Court of Human Rights ruling to the contrary. The right to hold demonstrations have been denied in certain parts of central Yerevan.

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

PROJECTS

The NHC supports a range of organisations in Armenia. They focus on monitoring conditions in closed institutions, providing a hotline for torture victims, education for young journalists, freedom of religion, legal advice in human rights-related questions and equal rights for sexual minorities.

- › The Armenian Helsinki Committee has carried out an extensive study into the situation for freedom of religion in Armenia, where believers that do not adhere to the state Armenian Apostolic church are subject to discrimination. Several Jehovah's Witnesses are imprisoned in Armenia for conscientious objection to serving in the army. People on the street, religious heads, government officials and media representatives have been interviewed about their opinions. The study was published in English and Armenian and discussed at a round table in Yerevan.

Armenia



Nikol Pashinyan.

Police in Yerevan during a demonstration.

Azerbaijan

The Azerbaijani government, headed by President Ilham Aliyev, continues to hold a tight grip on society by means of corruption and human rights violations. In 2010, much attention was given to high profile political prisoners in the country. In the forefront was the case of Eynulla Fatullayev, the imprisoned editor in chief of "Realny Azerbaijan" and "Gündəlik Azərbaycan" newspapers, who was arrested in 2006 and remains in prison. This is despite the April 2010 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights urging the Azerbaijani authorities to release the applicant immediately. The Court concluded that Eynulla Fatullayev's right to fair trial and freedom of expression had been violated. Despite this, or even as a result of this, the editor was sentenced to an additional two years and six months' imprisonment on charges of drug possession in July 2010. The sentence is seen as politically motivated and the evidence brought up during the court trial, observed by NHC staff, as fabricated to avoid his release.

The persecution of media representatives continued relentlessly throughout the year and more than 60 cases of criminal and civil defamation cases were filed. Many of them were satisfied and criminal defamation remains an important reason for imprisonment of journalists. Other journalists were subjected to violence, incidents never investigated seriously by the authorities. The two bloggers Adnan Hajizade and Emin Milli were finally released after serving more than half of two and two-and-a-half-year prison sentences after orchestrated cases against them. Young civil activists still appear to be particularly harassed.

At the November elections to Milli Majlis, the Azerbaijani parliament, only one opposition candidate was elected to the 125-seat legislature. The NHC abstained from observing the farce.

Freedom of assembly remains restricted and the situation was again apparent during the election campaign. In the exclave of Nakhchivan, the most

serious repression of ordinary people continued to be documented. In an incident in January, police arrested more than 10 people at a religious ceremony in the village of Bananyar, possibly to veil the reasons behind an act of self-immolation in protest against the authorities on one of the last days of 2009. Fear has kept most journalists and human rights defenders from thoroughly investigating the matter.

New legislation required all religious groups to re-register, in which a number of them failed. There are still between 25 and 50 political prisoners in Azerbaijan, several of them opposition activists who were convicted in connection with the elections in 2005, in addition to journalists.

ACTIVITIES

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee organised visits to the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) meetings in January and in June. For both visits, the lack of media freedom and the grave human rights situation in the autonomous region of Nakhchivan were the main issues. Our report describing the human rights abuse in Nakhchivan, "Azerbaijan's dark island", was presented to national parliamentary delegations and major rapporteurs of the Council of Europe. We also presented "A common statement on Human Rights in Azerbaijan" – a report outlining important human rights issues and recommendations for action by Azerbaijan and the international community to improve the serious situation. The common statement was supported by a large number of Azerbaijani and international human rights organisations.

In May the NHC travelled to Baku to observe the court trial against the editor Eynulla Fattulayev. We also assisted in the Erling Borgen documentary film, "The prisoner from Azerbaijan".

Throughout the year, the NHC issued a number of statements concerning the situation in Azerbaijan,



The Prisoner From Azerbaijan.



Leyla Yunus.

PROJECT SUPPORT

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

Heidar Aliyev downtown Baku.



Oilfield outside of Baku.



most notably in connection with the imprisonment of journalists. In June we wrote a letter to the Norwegian minister of petroleum and energy in connection with his planned visit to Baku to participate at a Caspian oil and gas conference, informing him about the important human rights issues in Azerbaijan he could raise with the Azerbaijani authorities.

The NHC nominated, jointly with Human Rights House Foundation amongst others, the journalist Shahvalad Chobanoglu and the ANTV online TV for the Freedom of Expression Foundation/ZEIT Stiftung's press prize for 2010. Chobanoglu and ANTV received the prizes in Hamburg in May 2010.



Eynulla Fatullayev.

In Georgia, tensions stemming from political polarisation and the disastrous August 2008 war with Russia continued. Although Georgia is a freer society than its neighbours Russia and Azerbaijan, significant problems remain: New amendments and regulations for the law enforcement organs provide the police with extensive powers to monitor citizens, including Internet traffic. There were significant problems with the local elections in May. The main media and the judiciary remain heavily influenced by the state, and there were numerous instances of persecution of journalists and human rights defenders.

ACTIVITIES

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee continued to work with our main partner in the country, the Human Rights Centre. During two missions in May and November, we documented human rights

violations around the conflict zones, assisted victims in need of international relocation and protection, and observed the local elections in the Samtskhe Javakheti region by the Armenian border. The NHC was called to a meeting with the Ministry of Reintegration after making public our concerns regarding the proposed new regulations for foreign entities with activities in the occupied territories, which could impose restrictions on journalists and NGOs.

In the framework of the project on war crimes in Georgia, a representative of the NHC travelled to the ICC review conference in Kampala, Uganda, partly in order to lobby for continued ICC attention to the war. Most of the material on war crimes collected by the NHC during autumn 2008, which was presented to the ICC in November 2008, was published in 2010 together with material by a number of Georgian human rights groups in the report "August Ruins", which to date is the most extensive catalogue of crimes committed during the August 2008 war. Our partner, the Georgian Human Rights Centre, had a meeting with the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC in February, June and October. The Georgian situation remains one of those under scrutiny by the ICC.

Georgia

PROJECT SUPPORT

- The Georgian Human Rights Centre and the Caucasian Conflict Resolution Centre: Strengthening the Rule of Law and the Freedom of Expression in Georgia. Legal Aid Programme, Information Programme, Human rights monitoring, International advocacy.

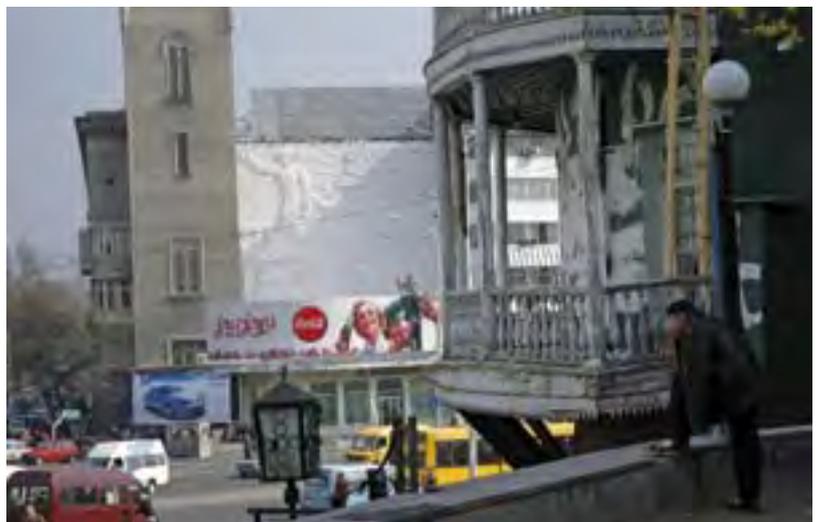


Polling station in Ninotsminda.

Interviewing a former hostage in the village of Breti.



Tbilisi.



Turkey

Even though the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has initiated reform-oriented policies strengthening human rights in many fields, such as policies to prevent torture and accepting more linguistic and cultural rights for its Kurdish minority, serious human rights concerns remain. Arbitrary detentions, prosecutions and convictions under anti-terrorism laws and for speech crimes persisted.

Amendments to Turkey's 1982 Constitution voted through in September lifted immunity from prosecution for military and public officials for crimes committed during and after the coup of 12 September 1980. It also reduced the role of military courts, instituted changes to judicial appointments, and provided the right of individual petition to the constitutional court. It is noteworthy that the new institution of ombudsperson was created.

However, the government made limited progress towards realising its 2009 plan to improve the human rights of Kurds. A pro-Kurdish political party was closed down for alleged separatist activities, and hundreds of persons faced trial for being connected with the armed Kurdistan

Workers' Party (PKK). The conflicts with PKK resulted in violence and loss of life also in 2010.

There is increasing support for finding political solutions, and the need for a rights-based approach to solving the so-called Kurdish problem. Unfortunately, developments in 2010 did not represent a breakthrough in that regard. There were also concerns that the AKP government used its fight against alleged coup plotters in secularist military and political circles to restrict media freedom and target editors and journalists voicing critical views of the government.

ACTIVITIES

The NHC participated in the 25th anniversary seminar of the Turkish Human Rights Foundation. The Foundation is a long-term partner organisation of the NHC, and is a leading organisation in fighting against torture and in providing treatment services to victims of torture.

The NHC joined several media debates on developments related to democracy and human rights in Turkey, in particular related to the Kurdish minority.

Central Asia

With Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2010, more focus was placed on the countries of Central Asia in general, and Kazakhstan in particular. Several large events took place in Kazakhstan throughout the year, culminating in the OSCE Summit on 1-2 December. However, civil society's hopes that the increased attention would lead to high-level discussions and criticism for lacking implementation of OSCE commitments in the region did not come to fruition.

Norway opened an embassy in Astana, Kazakhstan, in February 2010, covering four of the five Central Asian states in. The Norwegian Crown Prince and the Minister of Foreign Affairs were present at the

opening, and despite holding meetings with civil society actors it seems clear that a more important task of the embassy will be to ensure good business relations between Norway and the resource-rich countries in this strategically important region. Negotiations on extractive energies, air bases and bilateral agreements are ongoing with several of the countries in the region. The NHC continues the work for raising human rights issues in public.

While Central Asian leaders often point to neighbouring countries as having an even more problematic human rights records than themselves, the barrier to accepting well-founded criticism directed towards their own policies remains very high. Common to all five states is that civil society struggles against restrictive legislation on religious activity, the media, freedom of expression and assembly, and against governments seeking to limit critical voices in society.

Kazakhstan has seen significant positive developments in the economic sphere in particular, and much attention was given to its 2010 OSCE Chairmanship. As Chair, Kazakhstan flagged up tolerance and trust as their main priorities, but despite a smooth external performance, the situation within the country worsened. Human rights activist Evgeniy Zhovtis remained imprisoned

Left: Bjørn Engesland.
Right: Meeting with Foreign
Minister Kanat Saudabayev
in Astana.





Flowers in front of the presidential palace in Bishkek.



People's meetings in Bishkek.

under conditions that are harsher than those of his fellow inmates, and was unable to come to Norway to receive the Sakharov Freedom Award in September, which was presented to Zhovtis and his organisation by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee. Civil society and the media are not allowed to fulfil their natural functions in a democratic society, and the government-sponsored NGOs take up an increasing part of the space, complicating the work of genuine NGOs.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, 2010 proved to be the most dramatic in the country's modern history. On 7 April, the government led by President Kurmanbek Bakiev, was toppled when furious crowds fought back heavily-armed riot police, storming the Presidential Palace in Bishkek and leaving 90 demonstrators dead from gunshot wounds. Bakiev fled – first to his home village outside Jalalabad in the south of the country, before accepting an invitation from Belarusian president Aleksander Lukashenko to find refuge in Minsk. Kyrgyzstan had seen its second revolution in a decade. Over the next few days, an Interim government led by Roza Otunbaeva was formed and the work began to reshape a country that had gradually fallen back to an authoritarian leadership. Under the new system, Kyrgyzstan became the first country of the former Soviet Union outside the Baltics to adopt a parliamentary system, and also the first to elect a woman as head of state. However, when the reform work had only just begun, the south of the country exploded in ethnically-based violence.

In **Tajikistan**, the stand-off between radical groups and the authorities has been hardening, and this has in particular influenced the situation for religious minorities. Due to the financial crisis and increased labour control in Russia, several labour migrants have returned home without money or prospects for work. Restrictive legislation continues to keep civil society, media and even the private life of citizens under strict control, contributing to a strained atmosphere. Fraudulent parliamentary elections in February only prolonged the almost 20-year rule of President Emomali Rahmon,

and poor governance on all levels maintains the complicated situation.

Uzbekistan remains one of the most repressive regimes in the world. Over the last year there has been increasing pressure on religious groups under the pretext of anti-terrorism policy. Human rights activists, opposition figures and believers were routinely imprisoned, the use of torture is common, and civil society organisations have all but ceased to exist. There are at least 14 human rights defenders in prison or prison camps along with probably several thousand other political prisoners. An Andijan refugee who returned to Uzbekistan in January 2010, Diloram Abdukodirova, was sentenced to 10 years and two months in prison despite assurances she would not be harmed if she returned. According to observers of the trial, Abdukodirova appeared at a court hearing with bruises. Despite the dismal human rights record, western governments continue to develop relations with the country, something that raises concerns about our own commitment to human rights abroad. Refugees from neighbouring Kyrgyzstan were given assistance in refugee camps on the border over the summer, but were soon persuaded to return to Kyrgyzstan.

The situation in **Turkmenistan** is deteriorating, despite an already dismal situation. Since 2010 activists living in exile in Europe are also among those experiencing increased pressure through threats, warnings and increased harassment of family members in Turkmenistan. Turkmen activists were initially denied entry to OSCE Review Conferences in Warsaw and Vienna, family members of Radio Free Europe staff have been dismissed from their jobs and activists in Europe have been warned of assassination plans. The number of political prisoners is in practice unknown as it is too difficult to access the information. Gulgeldy Annanyazov, the dissident who had asylum in Norway and was arrested upon return to Turkmenistan in 2007, is still kept incommunicado and the state of his health is unknown. Blacklists for students and activists still exist, no international

The Somoni statue in Dushanbe.



PROJECT SUPPORT

SMALL GRANTS FUND.

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

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

- In Tajikistan, one project has focused on the prohibition of child labour, and local leaders have participated in training to raise awareness of farmers' rights and duties. Another project has raised awareness of girls' right to education in the increasingly paternalistic society.

> In Kyrgyzstan, projects have been inspired by the distrust between peoples of Kyrgyzstan and the potential for more violence, and aim at mutual understanding and consolidation. "Nash Vek" has travelled all over the country with their "Consensus Caravan", raising awareness of human rights and making short film clips on social issues. In some villages in the south, "Kosh Araket" has increased the interest and knowledge of youth in labour rights in order to ensure secure working conditions and concentrate on education which meets local demands.

> In Kazakhstan, the projects have focused on the country's implementation of OSCE commitments. Also, the NGO Legal Policy Research Centre monitored the extent to which Kazakhstan has met commitments regarding local participation in decision-making and the right to a clean and healthy environment.



Tajik-Russian friendship.



The Pamir Valley.

human rights activists or organisations are allowed entry or existence in the country, and despite increased contact with multinational oil and gas companies, there is no improvement for the citizens.

ACTIVITIES

An NHC representative office was registered in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in May 2010. Parvina Abduvakhobova was selected as the new Programme Manager of the Representative Office, and started her work in October. The office will be officially opened in spring 2011 but has started work on developing a network of good cooperation partners. The NHC was present at the formal opening of the Norwegian embassy in Astana in February and participated in the civil society meeting with Norway's Foreign Minister.

The change in government in Kyrgyzstan meant that one of our employees, who had been banned in 2008, was again allowed to visit. The NHC travelled to Bishkek a few days after the revolution, attending people's meetings in Bishkek, where citizens loudly exchanged ideas for the new make-up of the country. They also discussed plans with local human rights activists who were eager to help Kyrgyzstan leave repressive practices in the past.

Beyond covering the violence in the south in June and meeting with President Roza Otunbaeva, the NHC was very active in relaying general developments in Kyrgyzstan to Norwegian and international media throughout the year. We participated as observers at the June referendum on the constitution and Parvina Abduvakhobova also participated as an election observer during the October parliamentary elections.

The representative office has followed the treatment of the human rights activist Evgeniy Zhovtis, and the NHC has issued statements on his situation throughout the chairmanship year. The NHC Secretary General visited Zhovtis in the prison in eastern Kazakhstan in August in order to congratulate him on the Sakharov Freedom Award which had been granted to him and the Kazakhstan

International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law. The visit was broadly covered in opposition media and appreciated by the laureate. Particular attention was given to Kazakhstan in 2010 because of the OSCE Chairmanship, and the NHC has participated in several campaigns on various issues throughout the year. When possible, the issue of Turkmenistan has also been addressed through campaigns between the NHC and other organisations.

The NHC has coordinated a project with the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights, Forum 18 News Service, Norwegian Mission to the East and the Oslo Coalition for Freedom of Religion or Belief, aimed at improving the freedom of religion in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The report "Broken Promises: Freedom of Religion Issues in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan" was launched at a side event during the OSCE High Level conference on tolerance in Astana, Kazakhstan, in June. The launch provided an important platform for discussions between NGOs, religious groups and government representatives. This success was repeated at the Supplementary Human Dimension Implementation Meeting on Freedom of Religion or Belief in Vienna in December.

In January and later in May, a delegation from the Oslo Center and the NHC travelled to Astana for meetings with Kazakhstani officials, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kanat Saudabayev, and the head of the State Committee on Religious Affairs. The government representatives were presented with a draft of the report and invited to provide their comments.

The NHC was also present at the parliamentary elections in Tajikistan in February, a flawed process that demonstrated particular insufficiencies in the tabulation and aggregation of the results.

We continued to address the issue of travel bans for journalists and human rights defenders in Central Asia through the report "Persona Non Grata: The CIS ban system for human rights defenders and

journalists”, which was published in November. The report was the first of its kind to give a systematic overview of the practice of imposing travel bans on foreign human rights activists working in the former Soviet Union. While the NHC presented the report in Astana in autumn 2010, the author of the report, Ivar Dale, was unable to be present as he is still barred from entry to Kazakhstan.

The action for the release of the Turkmen dissident Gulgeldy Annaniyazov also continued in 2010,

along with campaigns for other political prisoners in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and Turkmen activists in exile. One political prisoner in Uzbekistan was released in connection with a visit by the US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in December. On the eve of the visit, Clinton had responded positively during a public event in Astana, Kazakhstan, to a question posed by the NHC on whether she would raise the issue of political prisoners during her visit to Uzbekistan.



Bukhara.

Western Balkans

In 2010 international attention in the Western Balkans was focused on the trouble spots of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. Compared to the previous year, there was less concern for Serbia but an increased one for Albania. EU enlargement fatigue and the impact of the global economic downturn cast shadows over the prospects for the region.

Institutional paralysis and dividing nationalist politics continued to plague **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, both at the state level and within the Federation. These tendencies were only exacerbated by the electoral campaign. The November 2010 elections saw voting mostly along ethnic lines. By the end of the year, a new state government had yet to be formed and wrangling continued over the formation of the federal government. In a judgment of 2009, the European Court of Human Rights found electoral provisions of the BiH Constitution to be in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights due to the ineligibility of minorities to certain positions. BiH politicians were unable or unwilling to amend the provisions in question before the elections, as a result the conduct of elections constituted a new breach.

Serbia, hit hard by economic crisis, followed a more distinctly pro-western course, but Serbia’s policy towards Kosovo is still not in tune with its

major western partners. Security concerns for human rights activists and journalists remained in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

Albania’s positive political and economic development culminated in full NATO membership in 2009. Since then, positive trends have reversed and a deepening crisis has emerged between the major political parties about the fairness of the 2009 parliamentary elections.

The ensuing political stalemate included a boycott of parliament by the opposition Socialist Party for much of the year and a paralysis of decision-making in several fields, including the appointment of the People’s Advocate (ombudsperson).

Macedonia’s name dispute with Greece continued to hamper the prospects of its Euro-Atlantic integration and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Macedonia continued to point out numerous shortcomings in the rule of law.

Transitional justice is a still a key concern and priority area for the NHC. As the case against Radovan Karadzic is ongoing at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Ratko Mladic and Goran Hadzic have still not been apprehended. On a positive note, the UN has established a new mandate to deal with their cases

PROJECTS

Project co-operation with partner committees in the Western Balkans continued to be an important part of the NHC’s work.

In particular projects have involved monitoring, reporting and consciousness-raising in the field of human rights in Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia and Macedonia.

► Helsinki Committee for human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Monitor and lobby for human rights compliance of parliaments and at the municipal level. Additionally, training in human rights has been provided to politicians, administrators and civil society in municipalities.

Elma Kovačević, Gry Larsen and Bjørn Engesland.



Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal.



Aleksandra Letić, Sonia Biserko and Espen Barth Eide.



Poster encouraging to vote in Bosnia.



- Helsinki Committee for human rights in Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Cooperation between five universities in Bosnia has been established on teaching a test groups of students about transitional justice issues and values. Target groups include students in law, political and social sciences and journalism.
- Helsinki Committee for human rights in Macedonia: The Committee has monitored the human rights situation and assessed individual allegations of human rights violations as well as proposed and monitored changes of law. The Committee has reported on a monthly basis, especially on the rule of law in the country.
- Helsinki Committee for human rights in Serbia: The magazine Helsinki Povelja has been published bimonthly and public meetings have been held around the country to present to citizens alternative ideas and to promote human rights and a liberal perspective based on the rule of law.

Vera Jovanović.



Sonia Biserko.



should they be apprehended after the expiry of the ICTY mandate. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the work to address the huge backlog of war crimes cases has moved forward, but the implementation of the War Crimes Processing Strategy adopted by the Council of Ministers has fallen seriously behind schedule and the work of courts and prosecutors have not enjoyed the political support needed for this work to be efficient and take full effect in communities.

Denial of war crimes committed by one's own ethnic kin and a rejection of the findings of international and domestic courts remain regional problems along with relativisation and politicisation of processes and outcomes. In July, a British court turned down an extradition request from Serbia for former BiH President Ejup Ganic, stating that the request was brought and used for political purposes and amounted to an abuse of the court. With respect to reconciliation the NHC has noted with dismay that nationalistic sentiments – tending towards exclusion of people – are on the rise among youth in the region.

ACTIVITIES

To commemorate the 15th anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica, the NHC hosted a conference in Oslo on 3 June with participants from the region and two secretaries of state spoke on behalf of the

Norwegian government. The conference highlighted efforts needed to be taken from Norway to support the Srebrenica remembrance.

In November, Chairwoman of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Sonja Biserko, came to Norway to receive the human rights award of the University of Oslo, the Lisl and Leo Eitinger award. On this occasion the NHC co-organised the additional seminar "Dealing with War Crimes in Serbia" with the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights. The NHC fully supported the selection of Biserko for the award.

The NHC observed parliamentary elections in November 2010 in co-operation with the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights. We concluded inter alia that more domestic election observers are needed to pursue more actively the collection of observations, especially during the counting phase.

Delegations from the NHC visited BiH in May, September, and November and took part in human rights monitoring and the development, planning and execution of projects, for instance by giving lectures to university students. During these visits the NHC met with representatives of civil society, the media, international organisations and decision-makers in the justice and education sectors.

A delegation from the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska visited Norway in June. The delegation met with a number of Norwegian actors in the reconciliation and transitional justice field to learn from experiences and explore possible partnerships. A delegation from the NHC visited Serbia in November to follow-up on our co-operation with the Helsinki Committee in Serbia.

Human Rights Education

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

Our human rights education programme focuses on four main areas:

1. Monitoring human rights education, with the aim of influencing the commitment of the individual states in this area
2. Human rights education as a means 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.

2010 has been an important year with new developments within several of our projects. Russian human rights monitoring committees in closed institutions from Arkhangelsk, Kareli and Murmansk have been the focus for several training activities within the Barents project. A semester-long course in Human Rights Education has been taught for the first time at a university in Mostar within the West Balkan project. The "Build Bridges, Not Walls" book containing 97 exercises in human rights, multicultural understanding and peaceful conflict resolution has been included in "Human Rights Education in the School Systems of Europe, Central Asia and North America: A Compendium of Good Practice, a joint publication by OSCE/ODIHR, Council of Europe, OHCHR and UNESCO.

THE BARENTS REGION

The Barents project is a collaboration between Sør-Varanger and Tromsø municipalities in Norway, the Severomorsk city administration, the City of Murmansk and the Murmansk region in Russia, and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee. The project includes partners from the civil sector such as Barents Press, Memorial, Uteshenie and Rassvet. The aim is to contribute to a positive development for human rights in the region and increase cross-border cooperation between Norway and Russia, particularly in relation to Murmansk, Kareli and Arkhangelsk counties.

Despite practical problems experienced in the recent years, one of the specific goals for 2010 – the expansion and intensification of activities in the north-western area beyond Arkhangelsk – was achieved. The events within the working plan were conducted with strong contribution from our partners. Youth and teachers, prison and police officers, as well as people working with the disabled have received training. In Helsinki, members of Russian monitoring committees of closed institutions attended training with contributions from Norwegian experts in human rights monitoring.

The tutorial book, "Build Bridges not Walls", written by Enver Djuliman and Lillian Hjorth was translated into Russian and published in Arkhangelsk in March 2010. A total of 3,300 books were published and distributed under the supervision of the Arkhangelsk partner, the public organisation Rassvet.

BELARUS

The human rights education programme in Belarus started in 2006 and continued to develop as a partnership between the Norwegian Helsinki Committee and several Belarusian human rights organisations. Since the start many journalists, young people, teachers, and human rights activists have participated in human rights schools and seminars.



Compendium



Build bridges not walls

2010 was marked by the preparations for the presidential elections held on 19 December. The political atmosphere in the country worsened as the elections drew closer and this impacted negatively on the participation in our activities. Many were reluctant to attend because of security concerns, some activities were postponed and others changed in character and content. Other activities had their target groups altered. This has not however hindered our partners from continuing to be active and finding creative solutions to implementation problems.

One of the most significant efforts of this programme in 2010 was made on gender equality, after the start of the cooperation with a local NGO which carried out educational seminars on women's rights all over Belarus. These seminars were aimed at increasing interest in the issues of human rights within the context of women's rights, increasing the legal competency of women, as well as their political and social engagement throughout the country.

UKRAINE

The programme "Let Us Understand Human Rights" is run by the Ukrainian Helsinki Union of Human Rights (UHUHR). The UHUHR has the main responsibility for planning and carrying out activities, while the NHC provides professional support and the administrative framework for the cooperation. The NHC's professional contribution is an essential part of the human rights education



Human rights seminar for police in Chernigov, Ukraine.

programme that is carried out all over Ukraine. The programme has several donors and partners.

In 2010 the partners of the programme have been the International Renaissance Foundation, the non-governmental organisation M'ART, Human Rights Centre 'Postup', Kharkiv Regional Foundation 'Hromads'ka Al'ternatyva' (Public Alternative). Youth, teachers, activists, journalists, people working with the disabled, police and prison officials as well as members of the Ministry of the Interior's Human Rights Monitoring Group receive training through the programme. The programme for journalists, teachers, law enforcement agents and the representatives of the prison system shifted from single courses to long-term training, in order to strengthen the influence on these spheres.

Youth at human rights school.





Conference in Sarajevo .



Norwegian Ambassador Jan Braathu.

The journalists who take part in the educational course "Role of Journalism in Human Rights Advocacy and Support" become real partners in human rights advocacy. Professional writing together with an ability to identify problems of the violation of human rights, journalists' materials have become more relevant and had a stronger impact on social issues. Journalistic activity combined with active citizenship has become one of the most important achievements this year. For example, one of the participants initiated and signed a public petition concerning the pressure by STB TV channel on journalists and a hidden censorship of journalistic articles.

Under the programme, a conference on the development of human rights education was organised and drew 158 participants. The conference concluded a list of recommendations for the development of formal and informal human rights education in Ukraine.

WESTERN BALKANS

In 2010 our commitment has been to increase young people's participation in processes of transitional justice, their contribution to truth commissions and the dissemination of information about war crimes. We have also motivated and trained them to be active partners in promoting the rebuilding of confidence in their local communities. As in previous years, we have focused on giving youth opportunities to participate in specific activities that target regional human rights challenges. This year the central elements of activities have been on the rights of gays, lesbians and transsexuals. Our partner organisations have developed a regional strategy to remind national authorities of their responsibilities and commitments regarding their obligations in education. As part of this, the young activists have had regular contact with local institutions.

The NHC has worked on human rights in the Balkans since the 1990s, and with human rights education since 2000. We have conducted schools for about 10,000 young people and teachers. More than 50,000 young people have participated in our activities in local communities, educational materials have been published in local languages, and we have succeeded in introducing an elective course in teaching methodology for intercultural understanding and human rights at two universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Efforts to expand cooperation with several Bosnian universities, as well as with universities in Serbia and Kosovo, are under way. We work with a broad network of partners in the region, which includes civil society organisations, educational institutions, regional structures and experts.

NORTH CAUCASUS

During 2010 we established a comprehensive training programme in Chechnya, Ingushetia and North Ossetia. We provide systematic training and competence building in intercultural understanding, conflict resolution and human rights. Young people, teachers, educational trainers and journalists are now taking part in the various processes that are intended to enable them to contribute to a positive development in their communities.

We especially highlight the work being done in the ethnically divided regions of North Ossetia, where young people develop and participate in common activities across ethnic divides, after having completed training in intercultural communication and conflict management. In addition, the work done with Chechen youth in highlighting alternative ways to contribute to peace rather than joining a growing conflict situation has resulted in the development of concrete peace-promoting activities with their peers.

Human Rights in Norway

The NHC was actively involved in activities related to Norwegian human rights protection in 2010. We published several reports and engaged in the protection of refugees and asylum seekers in our country. For the first time since the establishment of the UN Human Rights Council, Norway was scrutinised through the Universal Periodic Review, and the NHC was a central NGO partner for submitting a written report about main human rights concerns in Norway to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

REFUGEE PROTECTION ISSUES AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE 'PAPERLESS'.

Given our knowledge about the human rights situation in the countries where we are active, as a human rights organisation we have the 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 an intervention may be valuable and necessary to receive protection by Norwegian immigration decision-making bodies. We provide information to asylum lawyers, to the immigration services and to other authorities, both generally and in specific cases. In 2010 we engaged particularly in asylum cases from North Caucasus, writing several well-sustained letters to Norwegian authorities questioning their strict practices. We also followed up on our engagement from preceding years and advocated a full suspension in returns of asylum seekers to Greece with reference to the Dublin II regulations. We criticised the – in our opinion – badly reasoned immigration appeals board's Grand Chamber decision which went the opposite way, and supported a dissenting member of the Chamber who resigned in protest.



Conference regarding the 'Paperless' at the House of Literature.



Alem, 15 years in Norway. Photo: Grete Bro Thuestad.

In August, we joined a campaign supported by 28 Norwegian organisations to promote a mechanism to ensure a permanent solution for the so-called "paperless" – immigrants with rejected asylum claims who for various reasons have stayed in Norway without documents and legal rights. The issue was the subject at a hearing in the Norwegian parliament in October and the NHC provided an analysis from a human rights law perspective. The campaign also organised a well-attended seminar, concert and other activities.

In our efforts related to refugees in Norway we enjoy good cooperation with other organisations in Norway, most notably NOAS and Amnesty International Norway.



Belarus Free Theater performing their play Discover Love.

Evgeny Zhovtis



Meeting at Stortinget with member of parliament Morten Høglund.



ABOUT THE SAKHAROV FREEDOM AWARD

The Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award was established by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in 1980, with the consent and support of Sakharov himself. It aims to support those who, because of their opinions, faith or conscience, are persecuted or jailed. The first Sakharov Freedom Award was awarded in 1984.



Svetlana Vitkovskaja, Yurij Gussakov, Rosa Akyzbekova and Bjørn Engesland at The Norwegian Theatre.

ANDREI SAKHAROV FREEDOM AWARD

In September, the Kazakhstani human rights activist Evgeniy Zhovtis and the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (KIBHRRL) was awarded the 2010 Sakharov Freedom Award at a ceremony at the Norwegian Theatre in Oslo.

Together with KIBHRRL, Evgeny Zhovtis has been one of the most significant human rights defenders in Kazakhstan for two decades. Through dialogue with the authorities, reporting on the human rights situation, participation in international forums and by offering free legal aid and human rights education for citizens in Kazakhstan, he has contributed to the strengthening of human rights in his home country. Zhovtis actively helped shape Kazakhstan's human rights plan ahead of the country's chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in close cooperation with the authorities and civil society. Following a highly controversial and much criticised trial in the wake of a tragic car accident, Evgeny Zhovtis was sentenced to four years in prison in 2009. He is currently in prison in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Kazakhstan.

Through the 2010 Sakharov Freedom Award, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee wished to commend a person and an organisation that are highly worthy of such attention, and to focus on Kazakhstan and Central Asia at a time when the

human rights situation in the region is worsening and regional tensions increasing.

Zhovtis' wife Svetlana Vitkovskaja, Rosa Akyzbekova and Yurij Gussakov received the award on behalf of Zhovtis and Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law. "Zhovtis is one of the rare persons, who through patient, sincere and hard work has become much more than a single representative of a human rights organisation – he has become the critic the authorities cannot ignore and one who gives others the courage to take up the battle, simply because they know he is there," Secretary General Bjørn Engesland said in his speech at the ceremony. Zhovtis sent a message from the colony in Ust-Kamenogorsk and wrote: "Ideals of freedom, justice and human rights...are becoming remote and abstract ones; they do not have real concept for the people of many countries. These ideals suffer crushing defeat in the fight for oil and gas, geopolitical considerations and in the war against terrorism."

At the ceremony film-maker Erling Borgen screened for the first time his powerful documentary, "The prisoner from Azerbaijan", about the imprisoned editor Eynullah Fatullayev.

The play, "Discover Love", about Belarusian Irina Krasovskaya and the disappearance of her husband, the opposition businessman Anatoly Krasovsky in 1999, was performed by Belarus Free Theatre. The

theatre group is not allowed to perform freely in Belarus. Just a week before the award ceremony Aleh Byabenin, one of the founders of the most popular independent website in Belarus was found dead in unclear circumstances, and the performance was dedicated not only to the Sakharov freedom Award laureates, but also to the memory of Aleh Byabenin.

HUMAN RIGHTS HUMAN WRONGS DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL

The Human Rights Human Wrongs Film Festival is Scandinavia's only film festival dedicated to human rights, and it was arranged for the second time in 2010. The 2010 event took place at Parkteatret from 3 to 7 February. The NHC co-organised the festival together with Oslo Dokumentarkino and the Human Rights House Oslo. The themes of the festival were built around the following four themes: "Migration and human wrongs", "Worlds without witnesses", "Impunity or justice – How to rights wrongs" and "Big business – Outside the law?" The aim of the festival is to engage the general public in local and international issues relating to human rights and their abuses. A total of 25 films were screened from 12 countries; 19 of the screenings were Norwegian premières. Five major panel debates also took place to allow for additional comments, introductions and Q&As. Seven international guests were invited to Oslo to participate in the thematic discussions. Big names such as filmmaker Rob Lemkin, director of "Enemies of the People", Mads Gilbert, Norwegian doctor and Gaza activist and Paul Kenyon, the BBC Panorama reporter behind the series "Migrant Go Home", made valuable contributions and drew attention to the festival. Additionally, 17 more international and Norwegian experts introduced and discussed the topics raised by the films. An audience of 2,500 people attended the films and discussions that received considerable media coverage.



Panel discussion at HRHW. From left Niels Jacob Harbitz, Nora Sveaass, Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal and Maina Kiai.



Audience at Parkteatret.



Mads Gilbert.



Celebrating Liu Xiaobo.

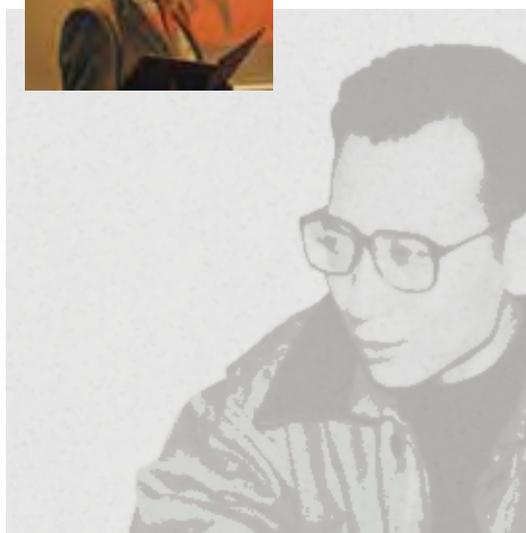
NOBEL PEACE PRIZE RECEPTION

Winner of the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize was the Chinese writer and human rights defender Liu Xiaobo. NHC Secretary General Bjørn Engesland expressed the hope that awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo would contribute to improving the situation for him and other human rights defenders in China. The prize also highlights the fight for democracy at Tiananmen Square in 1989 and the following fight for civil and political rights in China.

To celebrate Liu Xiaobo, the NHC and the Freedom of Expression Foundation organised a reception on 10 December. More than 100 guests from diplomacy, Norwegian officials, media, culture and the NGO community came together in honour of the imprisoned Nobel laureate.



Kai Remlov.



Co-operation and International Processes

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

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

In 2010, Kazakhstan became the first CIS country to hold the chairmanship of the OSCE. The chairmanship year was marred by an increasingly difficult situation for civil society participation. Because of the OSCE Summit in Astana, the first Summit to take place since Istanbul in 1999, the traditional Human Dimension Implementation Meeting was replaced by a three-fold Review Conference. A High Level Conference on Tolerance was arranged in Astana where the NHC organised a side-event on freedom of religion in Kazakhstan. The NHC was visibly present at the essential events and addressed Kazakhstan's lacking implementation of the commitments of the very organisation it was chairing. In Warsaw the NHC made statements on freedom of expression in connection with elections in Belarus and Azerbaijan, freedom of religion in Kyrgyzstan, protection of human rights defenders in Central Asia and the protection of war crime witnesses and victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Vienna, the NHC made interventions on freedom of religion in Kyrgyzstan, and in Astana on the media situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and human rights defenders in Central Asia.

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

The NHC served as the secretariat of the forum in 2010. The NHC presided over meetings in the Forum and organised the activities of the Forum and organised the participation of Norwegian NGOs in the work of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

ACTIVITIES INCLUDED:

- Submitting a written alternative report to the UN Human Rights Committee on Norway's compliance with the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights with extensive comment to Norway's official sixth periodic report.
- Issuing of, and lobbying for, 10 written recommendations to the Government of Norway regarding the Norwegian membership of the UN Human Rights Council and human rights promotion at the UN more broadly.
- Facilitation of information exchange and co-ordination between Norwegian human rights NGOs and between them and Norwegian authorities.
- The NHC attended the March session of the UN Human Rights Council at Geneva, inter alia to lobby in favour of the NGO Forum recommendations.

osce



HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE

The NHC, represented by Secretary General Bjørn Engesland, has since 1999 participated in the official Human Rights Dialogues held by the Norwegian Government with China, Indonesia and Vietnam. The effectiveness of the human rights dialogues, especially the one with China, has frequently been questioned, and the Chinese Government's reactions to awarding the 2010 Nobel Peace prize to the dissident Liu Xiaobo may lead to the suspension of this dialogue. Bjørn Engesland, Secretary General, took part in Norway's human rights dialogues with China and Indonesia. Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal, Deputy Secretary General, took part in Norway's human rights dialogue with Vietnam. 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.



OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting in Vienna.



Geneva.

NORWEGIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The NHC has close ties with the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights. We regularly provide briefing lectures for election observers headed to missions in areas where the NHC has key competence. Secretary General Bjørn Engesland is also a member of the board of the Centre for Human Rights. Deputy Secretary General Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal was the secretary for a group evaluation of the functioning of the National institution for human rights, which is part of the Centre.

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 was represented at the ICC Review Conference from 31 May-11 June 2010, which took place in Kampala, Uganda. At the conference, the statute of the ICC was amended to include the crime of aggression in the future.

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

During the year, the NHC cooperated with Georgian human rights organisations to collect and present material to the ICC on war crimes during the 2008 war between Georgia and Russia. The NHC was involved in monitoring Norway's domestic efforts on prioritising and prosecuting international criminal cases in the Norwegian courts. Since 2008, Norway has had legislation and established the investigative and prosecutorial capacity to try persons suspected of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE IN OSLO/HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE NETWORK

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

EEA Grants

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

EEA GRANTS

In 2005 the Norwegian Helsinki Committee was assigned a project by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for coordinating and distributing information for bilateral partnerships under the NGO Funds and the EEA Grants/Norway Grants. The project was taken further by winning a first public tender in 2007. Through this project the NHC cooperates closely with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Norwegian embassies in the beneficiary countries as well as the Financial Mechanism Office.

In the period 2009-14, €988.5 million in financial support is provided through the EEA Grants, jointly financed by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, to 15 beneficiary states in central and southern Europe. The Norway Grants, funded solely by Norway, makes available an additional €900 million to the 12 newest EU member states. The grant focuses in particular on efforts to strengthen democracy and human rights, to fight discrimination and to improve the integration of disadvantaged groups.

MAIN ACTIVITIES IN 2010

In 2010 the main focus was on writing country-analysis of civil society in selected beneficiary countries for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs use in its upcoming negotiation processes. An additional focus for the last part of 2010 was to write a proposition on a new public tender for the coming period, in which the NHC was successful.

The committee continued to gather and publish experiences and results from the bilateral projects under the NGO Funds.

In cooperation with Civil Society Development Foundation (NROS) the NHC participated in the project "Road to Cooperation – Development of a Czech-Norwegian partnership". The project was to support cooperation between Czech and Norwegian NGOs by creating a database of Czech and Norwegian organisations towards the establishment of partnerships and effective and easy



Launching at the House of Literature in Oslo.

communication between potential partners. The project organised further study trips and seminars for representatives of Czech and Norwegian NGOs that have taken place in the Czech Republic and Norway.

The cooperation between the NHC and NROS also resulted in the publication of the book "Norwegian inspiration: culture in Czech-Norwegian dialogue", made possible through the project Norwegian Inspiration: Culture of civic life in the Czech Norwegian Dialogue. Forty people were present at the launch in Oslo at the House of Literature, while 130 people attended the launch at the Czerny Palace in Prague.

The NHC and Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted an information seminar in September aimed at evaluating the NGO funds under the EEA Grants and Norway. In October the NHC participated in a seminar in Warsaw focusing on the presentation of the NGO Funds and the NGO consultation process, and in December the NHC participated in the final seminar for the Portuguese environmental fund.



Vanja Bentsen Kleven.

Anna Sabatova and Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal.



VI

Information



MEDIA CONTACT

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

The NHC subscribes to a service from Meltwater news that tracks media appearances. In 2010 the NHC or its advisors were registered with 1,016 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 an important addition to our visibility. Additionally, NHC representatives are frequently used as commentators and experts in radio and TV programmes. We have also been mentioned on numerous occasions in Russian-language and other international media.

The NHC has set the agenda in several important human rights questions in 2010, and we are continuing to be one of the most visible human rights organisations in Norway.

WEBSITE

The information department communicates the work of the NHC through its own website and publications. In the course of 2010, the NHC published 129 relevant news articles on www.nhc.no, in addition to other postings. On average, the NHC

website was visited 1,053 times per day in 2010. In 2010, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee decided to upgrade the Committee's site. Idium, a Norwegian company providing different web solutions for companies and organisations, was chosen as supplier of our new website. A substantial share of the information department's resources were spent in 2010 to finalise the new web solution. The new website will be launched in March 2011.

PUBLICATIONS

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee published two printed reports in 2010:

- "Broken Promises: Freedom of religion or belief issues in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan". The report was co-authored with Forum 18 News Service, the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief, the Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights and the Norwegian Mission to the East.
- "Persona Non Grata. The CIS ban system for human rights defenders and journalists". The report was the first of its kind to give a systematic overview of the practice of imposing travel bans on foreign human rights activists and journalists working in the former Soviet Union.

Both publications and previous reports can be downloaded from the web page www.nhc.no, or purchased from the NHC information department on request.

MEMBERSHIP

As of the end of 2010, the NHC had 577 individual members.

VII

Finances

The total spending in 2010 was 29,3 million NOK out of which project support for partners constituted 17,4 million NOK. Total income balance was 29,3 million NOK.

The Norwegian Helsinki Committees donors are primary the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

the Freedom of Expression Foundation (Fritt Ord), Open Society Institute, National Endowment for Democracy and the Barents Secretariat. Gifts, members contribution etc. provided an income of 347 736 NOK.



Atmosphere of fear. Kyrgyzstan.





An injured protester challenges the Omon riot police at the Liberty Square in Minsk.

NORWEGIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE

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