

NORWEGIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE



Annual Report
2014



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Cover photo:
Receiving the Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award on behalf of imprisoned mother, fathers and a brother. From left: Dinara Yunusova, Nermin Kamilsoy and Sanan Jafarov. Photo: Lillian Solheim

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Established in 1977

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

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

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

How we work

Human rights monitoring and reporting

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

Support for democratic processes

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

Education and information

Through education and information about democracy and human rights, international law and multicultural understanding, we work to increase the focus on human rights. 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: What is at stake in Ukraine?

As I write these words, it is exactly a year ago since the hastily arranged referendum on Crimea that provided the final pretext for the annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula by Russia. After Crimea, Russia turned its attention to Eastern and Southern Ukraine, a region President Vladimir Putin has referred to as Novorossiya, employing an old imperial term. The current political climate brings back unpleasant memories of the cold war and a divided Europe.

The armed conflict has so far claimed at least 6,000 lives. About a million people are internally displaced, while roughly 675,000 people are refugees in neighbouring countries, especially in Russia. Grave crimes have been committed, although so far not on level with the disastrous conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo and Chechnya. Since the second peace agreement was signed in Minsk in February 2015, fighting has subsided, but shelling and gunfire is still taking place and it remains unclear if the proposed political process will succeed in putting an end to the bloodshed.

With the breakup of the communist Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, war returned to the European continent after an absence of 45 years. In the Balkans a tenuous peace has been in place for the last 15 years. However, along parts of the Russian border armed conflicts have continued to take place since Vladimir Putin became Prime Minister: first the catastrophe in Chechnya, and the armed insurgency in Russia's North Caucasus region, and then the war Georgia in 2008. However, the war against Ukraine is arguably the bluntest violation of the Helsinki Final Act since it was adopted in 1975.

As a human rights organisation that has its origin in the Helsinki Final Act, which was created in order to avoid the changing of borders by force, the armed conflict in Ukraine faces us with many challenges. It is our task to document war crimes, crimes against humanity and human rights violations. It is our task to try to define the conflict and the patterns of

crime, and this is especially important in an atmosphere of obfuscation and confusion. It is also within our mandate to try to analyse what is in essence a political conflict. Our main task, however, is to promote accountability for crimes.

What is happening in Ukraine is beyond reasonable doubt an international armed conflict in terms of international law. It is not purely a civil war. Russian involvement in the armed uprising, i.e. providing military equipment and personnel, as well as in terms of political support and leadership, is at this stage documented by a wide range of sources: Russian, Ukrainian and international. In a documentary just aired on Russian state TV, the president himself admits to responsibility for the Crimean operation.

Russia has sometimes sought to justify its involvement as a humanitarian intervention. Although the Russian speaking populations of Ukraine had minor concerns, there were no on-going violations of human rights of a grave, large-scale and systematic nature that could invoke the right to protect-doctrine and military intervention. What happened was rather the opposite development. When Russia-backed rebels assumed control of large territories, there was a breakdown of the rule of law and widespread abuses occurred.

In terms of international law, Russia appears to have committed the crime of aggression. Russia is the occupying power, not only of Crimea, but most likely also of rebel-held territories. Even if there is a strong local component in both the political leadership and the various armed factions of the rebels, Russia appears to be in de facto control (it negotiates on behalf of the rebels, for instance). Widespread reports of persecution of political opponents in occupied areas, including extrajudicial killings, disappearances and torture, which has forced thousands of people to flee their homes (19,000 in Crimea alone) may constitute a crime against humanity.



Bjørn Engesland

Bjørn Engesland
Secretary General



Activities in 2014



However, both sides are bound by international law and it appears that both sides have committed war crimes, such as indiscriminate attacks on civilian or mixed targets, abductions, maltreatment of prisoners and harassment of civilians. With our Ukrainian and Russian partners, we will continue to document crimes and promote accountability.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is currently conducting preliminary investigations into the crimes that took place on the Maydan in Kiev last winter. We hope ICC jurisdiction will be expanded to include the rest of the Ukrainian conflict. We also hope that ICC will open an investigation into the crimes committed during the war in Georgia in 2008.

Impunity drives conflict. The weak point of the Minsk peace agreements has been the issuing of blanket amnesty. Accountability in Ukraine may lessen the danger of an overspill of the conflict to other areas of Europe. That is what is at stake in Ukraine today.

The NHC has had a very active and challenging year, with widespread activities in many countries. Our main focus is on the human rights challenges 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 Russian Federation

Given Russia's size, regional influence and the depths of the human rights challenges in the country, the Russian Federation is a significant country we are monitoring. The NHC monitored the human rights situation in the country and had close contact with a string of central Russian human rights civil society actors.

The human rights situation in the Russian Federation worsened significantly during 2014. The year started with Russia's hosting of the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, which had become a very prestigious project for Russian authorities. The anti-extremist and anti-terrorist legislation has been further toughened and the law-enforcement bodies got more authority. This has been especially noticeable in the Southern Region of Russia and North Caucasus. In practice, a ban on criticising the authorities on the preparations for the Olympic Games persisted throughout the games, and several activists were persecuted and had to leave the region. Evgeny Vitishko, the most prominent ecologist in the region was imprisoned for criticising the local authorities for damaging forest in Krasnodarsky Krai.

All these facts were documented in a handbook for journalists, "Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics: Not Just Games", published by the NHC in co-operation with Caucasian Knot. It was presented during a seminar in January 2014 together with Caucasian Knot, Amnesty International Norway, Bellona, Norwegian Union of Journalists and LLH. The seminar was arranged for the Norwegian journalists who were travelling to Sochi, in order to cover the games. The NHC and partners invited Gregory Shvedov, Chief Editor of the Caucasian Knot and Alexander Popkov, a lawyer from Sochi, who described the human rights situation in the region and gave some practical advice. The handbook was published in Norwegian and English, and was widely used by journalists.

Three weeks ahead of the opening of the Winter Olympics Secretary General Bjørn Engesland was denied a visa to Russia, as he had been for several years. One of Norway's leading daily newspapers, Aftenposten, criticized in an editorial Russian authorities for the decision for sending a wrong signal ahead of the Games.



Evgeny Vitishko.



Seminar for Norwegian journalists.



Alexander Popkov.



Gregory Shvedov.



» Seminar: Safeguarding international institutions against authoritarian abuse

The NHC organised a well-attended breakfast seminar in May 2014 on authoritarian states undermining and/or misusing international bodies like the Interpol, the Council of Europe and the UN Human Rights Council. At the seminar, Bill Browder, the leader of the Justice for Magnitsky campaign described how Russian authorities had misused the Interpol to get him arrested. Gerald Knaus, Chairman of the European Stability Initiative (ESI) described how Azerbaijan "corrupted" the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, while Jago Russell, Chief Executive of Fair Trials International, detailed how authoritarian states misuse Interpol to target political opponents. The NHC presented the traditional values initiative in the UN Human Rights Council as a way of undermining the universality of human rights.

Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alekhina from Pussy Riot participated at the seminar, talking about their experiences with the Russian prison system and called for solidarity with political prisoners in Russia, whose number is steadily increasing. The seminar was streamed and aired online.

Bill Browder and Gerald Knaus.



Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina of Pussy Riot.



The annexation of Crimea by Russia followed only a few weeks after the Olympic Flame was blown out. After a short while, the information about Russia's military support of the separatists in the East Ukraine hit the news, and the first facts of the arrival of zinc coffins to Russia came not much later. In parallel, the space for fundamental freedoms in Russia has been reduced. One of the oldest Russian NGOs, the Soldiers' Mothers and its representative offices, were put under pressure from authorities, especially in the regions.

In June 2014, the Russian Ministry of Justice got in charge of including NGOs to a foreign agent register, that is, without any legal procedure. The NGO Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg was among the first to be put on the new register. In August 2014, the NHC published a policy paper on the Foreign Agent Law, detailing how the law violates human rights norms which Russia is under an obligation to respect.



Ella Kesäeva.

A policy paper, "Russia's traditional values initiative result in abuse at domestic level", was published early in 2014.

2014 marks the 10th anniversary of the terror attack in Beslan, where 385 persons lost their lives, including 186 children. Ella Kesaeva, the head of the organisation *Voice of Beslan* participated in the NHC Anna Politkovskaya seminar in October 2014. She presented a new book, "A Road to the Truth", sponsored by the NHC. The book includes documentation on the terror attack and how authorities have failed to investigate the crimes and compensate victims.

The NHC invited Alexey Simonov, the Head of Glasnost Defense Foundation, Maria Kravchenko from the Analytical Centre Sova, Gregory Shvedov from Caucasian Knot and Julia Sereda, the editor from Ryazan based portal *Human Rights in Russia* in order to discuss the increased propaganda in Russian state media. Other topics addressed were the use of extremist legislation, violations of the rights of independent media and journalists as well as further perspectives for freedom of expression in Russia.

In November 2014 the NHC was invited to participate in the Rafto Prize Award in Bergen, which was awarded to the Interregional Human Rights Organisation Agora for their work in defence of Russian NGOs, activists and journalists, as well as other groups which are subject to repression by Russian authorities. In the framework of the Award, the NHC contributed with information during the nomination process and talked about Russian civil society at the award ceremony. During a working meeting for the laureates, the NHC participated in discussions about NGO legislation as well as security measures for the activists from Russia.

Together with Rafto Foundation, the NHC arranged a seminar in Oslo on internet regulation with participation of Pavel Chikov and Damir Gainutdinov from Agora, and Jon Wessel-Aas, a Norwegian lawyer and member of the Board of the International Commission of Jurists Norway. The seminar was called "Protecting freedom of expression and privacy on the internet: What should be the response of the human rights community to the new wave of internet control in Russia and in other countries?"



Julie Sereda, Gregory Shvedov and Maria Kravchenko.



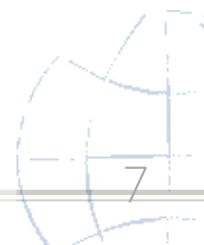
Alexey Simonov.

The NHC took part in a meeting of the PACE Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights in Paris 10 December, and the Nordic Security Forum in Tromsø 12–13 November, which included human rights activists and representatives of indigenous populations from Russia.

During 2014, the NHC also had various activities on international human rights advocacy in different fora, i.e. in Brussel, London and Warsaw. It also participated in activities of the international Justice for Magnitsky campaign, including by presenting an application of investigation of those who tortured and killed Sergei Magnitsky.



Pavel Chikov.



Belarus



Ales Bialiatiski released from prison.
Photo by Andrei Aliaksandrau.

From our perspective, the single most important event in Belarus in 2014 was the release of Ales Bialiatiski, political prisoner and leader of the Viasna Human Rights Centre, in June after having spent three years in prison. Despite this joyful piece of news, Belarus continued to be as authoritarian as ever, no major human rights improvements were made. The practice of death penalty, torture in the penitentiaries, restrictions of civil society and a general government control over society are among our main concerns. Although Belarusian top officials are under EU bans, Belarus' geographical position at borders with both Ukraine and Russia made an impact on president Lukashenko's role in the European context: Lukashenko was the chosen host for peace talks between Ukraine, Russia and the representatives from the European Union. The NHC is a strong supporter of the sanctions against the regime. Together with our partners we underline that as long as the Belarusian regime has not fulfilled the requirements for lifting the sanctions, they should remain in place.

The NHC continued activities in monitoring human rights situation; support and advocacy for human rights initiatives related to Belarus. We have arranged and participated at

events in Norway, where the human rights situation has been a theme. We have also participated in international campaigns, meetings and discussions about the situation in Belarus.

In February, the NHC invited Belarusian Andrei Sannikov, the former presidential candidate and former political prisoner and Natallia Radina, the chief editor of the website www.charter97.org to speak at the opening ceremony at the documentary film festival Human Rights Human Wrongs in Oslo together with the NHC. The film festival screened "Dangerous Acts", a film about the acclaimed underground theatre, Belarus Free Theatre. Sannikov and Radina, both exiled, are well acquainted with how the authorities persecute the theatre troop for their critical and outstanding performances about life under repression in Belarus.

Ahead of the 2014 Ice Hockey World Championship in Belarus, the NHC wrote a handbook for journalists, "Don't Play with the Dictator", presented during a seminar in January 2014 together with Human Rights House Foundation, Norwegian PEN and Norwegian Union of Journalists. The seminar was

Andrei Sannikov, Natallia Radina and Berit Lindeman.



Ane Bonde, Marina Lobau, Berit Lindeman, Andrei Aliaksandrau and William Nygaard.





Ales Bialiatski speech at Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award.

arranged for a handful of journalists who were travelling to Minsk to cover the championship. The event marked the end of the international campaign "Don't Play with the Dictator", in which the NHC had taken part for two years.

In November Ales Bialiatski participated at the ceremony of the NHC's Andrei Sakharov Award underlining the importance of common action in release of all political prisoners.

- "A clear position from the European politicians on human rights and our relentless solidarity with the political prisoners, will give results".

In December the NHC spoke at a seminar entitled "The Situation in Belarus in the Context of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict" organised at the University of Warsaw, with former Polish ambassador to Belarus Mariusz Maszkiewicz, the leader of the civil campaign "European Belarus" Andrei Sannikov, the Executive Director of the European Academy of Diplomacy Katarzyna Pisarska.

The NHC has for several years conducted a human rights education programme in Belarus, with educational activities directed towards young people, activists, journalists and women. By means of seminars, lectures and round-table discussions we are contributing to greater knowledge and awareness about human rights in general, activism, journalists' rights, women's rights, and domestic violence in particular.



The NHC is a proud partner of the theatre group Belarus Free Theatre, which does not officially exist in Belarus. Still, the Free Theatre has performed at home and abroad since 2006. In Belarus, their performances are only shown in bars, private homes or in the forest, and the performances are announced through a string of SMS or e-mails, they are popular, despite the risk of arrest even for audience. Outside Belarus, the Free Theatre is celebrated by large audiences, and has admirers such as Tom Stoppard, Jude Law, Mick Jagger and Vaclav Havel. The founders and the troupe actors have long since lost their jobs at the Belarusian institutional theatres and many are exiled.

Their strongest performances are those using their own scripts and production. Here, the theatre gives you goose bumps, with a deep understanding of what it means to live in an authoritarian regime and the need to call out for protest. No wonder the regime fears them.

Nicolai Khalezin, co-founder of Belarus Free Theatre.



Ukraine



Volunteer during Euromaidan.



NHC's Olga Shamshur Flydal commemorates the victims of Maidan.

The year of 2014 will be written into Ukrainian history books as both deathly and fateful. Ten years after the Orange revolution, the country was in turmoil again. During the protests, 114 were killed. 94 of them were peaceful protesters falling victims of the bullets fired by the infamous Ukrainian riot police *Berkut*, but also several police lost their lives. After the three months of mass protests which led to the fall of the regime of the corrupt president Yanukovich, came the annexation of Crimea by the neighbouring Russian Federation, two election rounds and, finally a bloody military conflict in the Eastern Ukraine which has so far claimed close to six thousand lives and displaced nearly 1.5 million Ukrainians.

Ukrainian citizens displayed monumental will and courage fighting for democracy, human rights and European integration. And it is indisputably Ukrainian civil society actors, volunteers and grass root initiatives who remain the main driving force behind the processes of redefining Ukrainian political culture and landscape by demanding effective reforms, more transparency and public control. Civil society also stood at the frontier and became main actors in addressing the multitude of challenges which the military conflict brought onto Ukraine during the last year, especially the flow of IDPs. "Ukrainians have become a nation of volunteers", was a comment often voiced in conversations with the NHC in Ukraine.

In March, after the illegitimate referendum determining reunion of Crimea with the Russian Federation we published a Policy Paper, Q&A: breaches of international law and human rights issues – related to the situation in Ukraine. The NHC repeatedly denounced the Russian intervention in Ukraine, at the same time as we urged the new Ukrainian leadership to accountability for human rights by thoroughly investigating all abuse no matter who committed it.

Gennadiy Krocha, is a 52 year old volunteer with a fresh scar across his forehead and nose. The NHC met him soon after his escape from captivity in the basement of the separatists in Donetsk people republic, which lasted for twenty-four days. His story of daily beatings, physical and psychological torture and forced labour was not unique, but made a lasting impression. He was lucky to escape after the suspicion of him being a spy was "confirmed" by the fact that he did not wet himself after the heavy beatings.

Through our membership in the European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE) the NHC was present in Kiev both during the Presidential election in May and during the Parliamentary election in November. The purpose was, in addition to observing the election, to support domestic observers at an international press centre set up for the purpose of reaching an international audience with the observations. Observers concluded for both elections that one of the successes of Maidan is generally free and fair democratic elections, although corruption and cronyism is far from removed from Ukrainian political scene. The war raging in eastern Ukraine and the Russian occupation of Crimea made it impossible to hold elections in those areas.

During one-week travel in Ukraine in September 2014, the NHC met with Ukrainian officials, activists, journalists, volunteers, and internally displaced, recording gripping accounts of people deeply affected by this infinitely tragic year.

This and many other stories recorded during the travel to Ukraine are tragic in their universality. Whether it was the deaths of demonstrators in Kiev during clashes with police, or Malaysian MH17 flight shot down over separatist-controlled territory; flight from the conflict areas or daily survival in the crossfire between the fighting armies, down sliding economy and mobilisation waves - each and every person in Ukraine is affected.

The NHC was represented on numerous instances in the media and at public events discussing Ukraine.

Parliamentary elections in November.



Berit Lindeman and Stefanie Schiffer of EPDE during Presidential election in May.



Berit Lindeman and Bjørn Engesland on Maidan in September.



Meeting with refugee from Eastern Ukraine in Odessa.

Press conference.



State secretary Morten Høglund meeting with Olena Shevchenko from Ukraine and delegates from Moldova, Belarus, Lithuania and Latvia during Oslo EuroPride.

» The LGBTI project

A picture of Kyiv's Independence Square, Maidan, in flames adorns the front page of LGBT Human Rights Nash Mir Centre's report "From Despair to Hope – LGBT situation in Ukraine in 2014". As with all human rights reports from this year, the political and military conflict is in the foreground. The story which Nash Mir tells, however, is not essentially a story of the path towards political change – rather one of fear of stagnation and missed opportunities, and continued assaults.

The project "Human rights and rule of law of LGBTI persons in Ukraine" is the most comprehensive the NHC project on sexual and gender minorities; supporting the organisations LGBT Human Rights Nash Mir Centre, Insight Public Organisations and Centre for Liberties in their efforts to maintain their every-day work to improve the situation for LGBTI persons; legal aid to victims of hate crimes, lobbying for LGBTI sensitive legislation, training of activists and the LGBTI community and even providing emergency aid to LGBTI refugees from the eastern Ukrainian regions. The first project meetings took place in January 2014; only days before the peaceful campsite on the Independence Square turned into a battleground. Apart from all political tumults or changes; fundamental human rights problems like those of LGBTI persons have been there for a long time, and will not go away unless there will be a substantial change of policy. "For every step we take, it feels like we take two steps back. Why is it always sexual minority rights that are sacrificed?" Olena Shevchenko, Chair of Insight, asked while visiting Oslo on occasion of Oslo EuroPride in June 2014.

South Caucasus



Project Coalition for Trust in the South Caucasus

The Coalition for Trust is a three-year project funded by the European Commission – with co-financing from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway. It is a co-operation with local partner organisations in all entities of the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, as well as Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Our common aim is to restore people-to-people contacts and trust within and between societies divided by violent conflict. To do so, we carried out a comprehensive education programme for students, media professionals and those engaged in civil society that will build their capacities in human rights questions, cross-cultural dialogue, transitional justice, advocacy and public outreach, as well as confidence-building. The project's education component is intended to lay the foundation of a regional network of peace activists engaged in and supporting the rebuilding of trust across borders and conflict divides in the South Caucasus. However, 2014 was a difficult year as tensions rose along several borders in the region and repression against civil society increased in Azerbaijan.



Georgian President's residence in Tbilisi.

Still, during 2014 we worked with young people, journalists and human rights defenders, engaging them in debate on how human rights can be viewed as elements of conflict transformation, and how intercultural tolerance and understanding can be cornerstones for the peaceful resolution of conflict. Participants were very involved and highly motivated.

Senior advisor Aage Borchgrevink was appointed to the International Advisory Board of the Public Defender in Georgia, Mr Ucha Nanuashvili, in 2013, together with three international human rights experts, and served on the board throughout 2014. The Defender is the national human rights institution and reports to the Georgian parliament.

Rasul Jafarov, Enver Djuliman and Marion Kipiani.



Aage Borchgrevink with Georgian Public defender.



Coalition for trust Seminar in Turkey.



Armenia

Armenia has carried out a range of legislative reforms through the framework of Council of Europe and European Association Agreement processes over the last years. Armenia held the presidency of the Council of Europe in the first half of the year and although tolerance was flagged as one of the priorities of the presidency, the situation worsened for vulnerable groups like the LGBTI-community and their defenders. Several of the traditional human rights challenges related to media freedom, torture and abuse in closed institutions and a corrupt court system remain undealt with in practice. What is more, the repressive practice seems to flourish now that Armenia has been intensifying its co-operation with the Russia-led Customs Union since September 2013 and throughout 2014. From 1 January 2015, Armenia is a member of the Customs Union.

President Sargsyan's U-turn in the decision on membership in the Customs Union provoked protests, and people turned out in unprecedented numbers to protest the decision and the lacking public debate in advance. However, increased activism has also spurred increased counter activity by the authorities and police in particular, and the mostly government – or oligarch-controlled media increasingly defame activists and the vulnerable groups they defend, spreading hatred and intolerance. In June, the NHC was co-signatory to a statement condemning the spreading of hate speech and intolerance through media against activists and the vulnerable groups they defend.

The year provided an opportunity to evaluate the NHC's democracy support program which contributes to the development of civil society in Armenia through co-operation and financial support to NGOs, close follow-up with events in the country and international advocacy.

The report "Armenia: Between Hope and Distrust", which was published early 2014, describes civic activism in Armenia from the 2008 disputed elections till the latest developments in connection with the Customs Union, presenting the theories of a range of the most central activists in Armenia today. Advocacy activities related to the report continued throughout the year, also in meetings with the Armenian Ambassador



Bjørn Engesland in Gyumri.



Meeting local organisations.

to Norway. The NHC sent an open letter to President Sargsyan in June – urging him to respond to the recommendations from the report and offering to discuss them at a meeting during our visit to Yerevan in June.

The NHC Secretary General visited Armenia in June, including the country's second largest town, Gyumri. Here, large numbers of those suffering from the devastating 1988 earthquake still live under poor conditions. The NHC also visited long-term partner Helsinki Citizen's Assembly Vanadzor.

In co-operation with the local partners, the NHC develops recommendations and present them to the international community. On 15 June the NHC and partner Helsinki Citizen's Assembly Vanadzor submitted an alternative report to the 21st UN Universal Periodical Review of Armenia, drawing attention to the increasingly difficult working conditions for human rights defenders and civic activists in Armenia today, and the lack of implementation of obligations in this regard.



Meeting with Helsinki Citizen's Assembly Vanadzor.

Bjørn Engesland and Marion Kipiani. Lene Wetteland.



ABOUT ANDREI SAKHAROV FREEDOM AWARD

The Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award was established in 1980 by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, with the consent and support of Andrei Sakharov himself, to assist and support people who were imprisoned or persecuted because of their opinions, beliefs or conscience. The first Sakharov Freedom Award was awarded in 1984.

Past recipients include the Russian election monitoring organisation Golos, led by Lilia Shibanova in 2012, renowned human rights defender Ales Bialiatski from Belarus, the Kazakhstani human rights defender Evgeniy Zhovtis and Svetlana Gannushkina from Russia.

Azerbaijan

2014 was a disastrous year for human rights in Azerbaijan. The year brought an unprecedented string of arrests and sentencing of human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists and other activists. In all some 35 human rights defenders, journalists, activists and lawyers were arrested or convicted on political grounds during the year, many of them our friends and partners during many years. The award-winning journalist Rauf Mirgadirov was extradited from Turkey and arrested in April, accused of treason. Our partner on election observation in the country, Anar Mammadli, was convicted to five and a half years in prison, along with his deputy Bashir Suleymanli. Leyla Yunus, one of the country's most experienced human rights activists was arrested in July, accused of several crimes, the most serious that of treason. Arif Yunus, her husband was also arrested in the same case. Rasul Jafarov the young lawyer, a talented campaigner who organised the "Sing for democracy" campaign during the Eurovision song contest in Baku in 2012, who was arrested in August, as was renowned lawyer Intigam Aliyev. Investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova, a frequent visitor to Oslo, was arrested in December after years of government-led harassment of her. They all risk many years in prison. Also in August the journalist Ilgar Nasibov, husband of Rafto laureate Malahat Nasibova, was brutally attacked and almost beaten to death in their office in the enclave Nakhchivan. Despite obviously being the victim, he found himself under investigation for the attack, although the case was dropped after protests.

The NHC has consistently protested the arrests and attacks against civil society. Azerbaijan held the presidency of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers from May to

Rauf Mirgadirov.



Bashir Suleymanli and Anar Mammadli.



Leyla Yunus.



Arif Yunus.



Khadija Ismayilova.



NHC staff congratulates Rasul Jafarov on his 30th birthday.

November, and given the Government's blatant disregard of the European Human Rights Convention the NHC and partner organisations of the Civil Society Platform urged the Council of Europe to suspend Azerbaijan's membership. Moreover, we expressed our belief that Norway and other European countries should introduce targeted sanctions against main perpetrators of human rights violations, much in the same pattern as those in force against a number of Belarusians and Russians. We also raised the situation of political prisoners in Azerbaijan at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation meeting in October.

The human rights challenges in the South Caucasian Republic of Azerbaijan have been increasing by the year after President Ilham Aliyev took over as head of state after his father. Aliyev rules a state rife with manipulated elections, corruption and abuse of power. In 2014 the authorities also adopted legislative changes further restricting work of non-governmental organisations, amendments which requires that foreign donors must be licensed and each project must be registered by the authorities. In practice,

MY DEAR ARIF

Well, after 36 years of life together we're in different cells in different prisons...

My dearest, perhaps you're unaware, I can bear it all: Terrible physical pain, pressure from a hardened prisoner and even visits from those jackals in the prosecutor's office. I endure the lack of communication (I know that you are completely without communication, without a change of clothes and medicine). I am also without food and medicine. But most difficult of all is that you are not nearby. For 36 years we have almost never been apart! I can't take being denied the right to communicate with you even through letters, so I decided to write you through these open letters. Somehow they will reach you.

Hugs, Leyla (Excerpts from a published letter Leyla Yunus wrote to her husband from prison).

NGOs who are perceived as critical towards the government will simply be unable to receive funding.

In June the NHC participated at a conference organised by European Stability Initiative and agreed the co-operation on a campaign given the name Europe without political prisoners. Although Azerbaijan is the main target of the campaign, it also includes political prisoners from other European countries, including Belarus and Russia. For the NHC, the campaign started by the Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award to political prisoners in Azerbaijan and would last through 2015.

Rasul Jafarov.



Intigam Aliyev.



» Andrei Sakharov award to political prisoners

The NHC awarded The 2014 Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award to all political prisoners in Azerbaijan.

The authorities in oil and gas-rich Azerbaijan by the Caspian Sea have for years brutally silenced critics by accusing them of fictive crimes and then sentencing them to lengthy prison terms. By July 2014, local human rights activists had, by applying the Council of Europe's criteria, identified 98 political prisoners in the country. On this list we found some of the most knowledgeable, experienced and visible human rights defenders, journalists, youth activists and opposition politicians. Several of the NHC partners and friends are behind bars, either on remand or already sentenced to many years of incarceration. Civil society in Azerbaijan is being crushed. In fact, some of those who compiled the list of political prisoners by thoroughly going through all the cases, were themselves to be found on that list before the end of the year.

We have a shared responsibility to recognise the terrible situation all these political prisoners are in. We must give them the status they deserve and make a concerted effort to demand that the authorities in Azerbaijan free prisoners and stop their abusive attacks on legitimate expression of opinion, said Secretary General Bjørn Engesland in the announcement of the award. European institutions and the diplomatic community have not honoured their responsibilities when it comes to Azerbaijan.

The award was celebrated at hotel Bristol in November. To receive the award, we had invited relatives, lawyers, friends and colleagues of some of the political prisoners. Dinara Yunusova, Nermin Kamilsoy and Sanan Jafarov received the award on behalf of imprisoned mother, fathers and a brother. "I would like to thank you all for giving my parents and all the political prisoners in Azerbaijan this support. I am sure that this award will warm their hearts," Dinara Yunus said in her speech.



Dinara Yunus.



Ragnhild Astrup Tschudi, Dinara Yunus, Nermin Kamilsoy, Sanan Jafarov and Bjørn Engesland.



Mausoleum outside Turkestan, Kazakhstan.

Central Asia

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee has had a permanent NHC Representative Office in Central Asia since 2006. Through an office located in Almaty, Kazakhstan we are involved across a wide spectre of initiatives, ranging from our own monitoring of ongoing events and the use of that information in publications and submissions to international treaty bodies, to our popular Small Grants Program for NGOs in the Central Asian republics and participation in important events in the region.



As our office is located in **Kazakhstan**, the NHC is part of a large local community of human rights defenders, who frequently meet to discuss ways to work together. We often hosted visiting foreign delegations who were interested in learning more about the human rights situation in Kazakhstan and the region in general, ranging from diplomats, UN-representatives and institutions such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Among human rights issues in Kazakhstan that we continued to raise internationally in 2014 were the dwindling space for independent media as well as ongoing violations of freedom of assembly, as Kazakh authorities closed down newspapers and broke up peaceful demonstrations. Towards the end of the year, the NHC was active in helping to prepare the upcoming visit of the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Assembly and Association. Our grants program this year focused on regions outside the major cities of Almaty and Astana, where civil society is often less developed, focusing on human rights training especially in Kazakh language.



President of the EBRD Sir Suma Chakrabarti and Ivar Dale.

President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev looking towards 2050.



Lene Wetteland speaks at press conference in Almaty.

Uzbekistan remains one of the most oppressive regimes in the region, and indeed in the world. While the country rarely makes the news in Norway, the story of six Uzbek asylum-seekers who were sentenced to 12 and 13 years of prison on trumped-up charges following their return from Oslo caught media attention also at home. The NHC provided Norwegian migration authorities with information about the situation as it developed, and contributed to raising the topic in Norwegian media. Soon after, the Appeals Board for Immigration (UNE) announced a temporary halt to deportations of Uzbek asylum-seekers from Norway. While the situation for these men remains very serious, the case of Sergey Naumov earlier in the year proved that international pressure can sometimes be successful, even in Uzbekistan. Independent journalist Naumov was released from custody after a campaign led by the NHC and our colleagues in the Civic Solidarity Platform.



Sergey Naumov.



Meeting with regional partner Spravedlivost in Jalal-Abad, South Kyrgyzstan.



Meeting in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, in framework of Freedom of Religion or Belief project.



Botakoz Iliyas and Lene Wetteland in Osh, South Kyrgyzstan.

Related to **Kyrgyzstan**, we repeatedly raised our concerns around two draft laws largely copied from Russian legislation, concerning foreign funding of local non-governmental organisations and with so-called “propaganda” of homosexuality. While the democratic room is greater in Kyrgyzstan than in its neighbouring states, we are alarmed by continued violations of human rights particularly in the south of the country. In June, the NHC detailed these concerns in its submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of

Man and child, Jalal-Abad, South Kyrgyzstan.



Kyrgyzstan, underlining instances of ethnic discrimination, torture and ill-treatment particularly of ethnic Uzbeks. At times, urgent action was necessary, as in the case of Shokhrukh Saipov, an independent journalist from Osh who was charged by security services for slander. Again, the case was dropped after a campaign led by NHC and the Civic Solidarity Platform. The NGO community in Kyrgyzstan is quite well-developed, allowing us to support projects focusing on legal aid and human rights trainings for young lawyers, as well as continued monitoring of the situation in the south of the country.

While **Turkmenistan** remains off-limits to international human rights organisations, much can be done from outside the country. The NHC has been engaged in keeping Turkmenistan’s extremely poor human rights record on the agenda in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in the UN and among European Union member states. The case of Gulgeldy Annaniyazov, a political refugee formerly living in Norway, who was sentenced to 11 years of prison in a closed court after returning to his native Turkmenistan in 2008, was among the cases we continued to raise. The NHC also participated in the “Prove They Are Alive!” campaign alongside several other organisations seeking to uncover the truth about Turkmenistan’s prisoners of conscience.



Gulgeldy Annaniyazov.





Small grant fund partner, Khujand.

In **Tajikistan**, we chose to give particular attention to the rights of women and children, supporting projects from Kurgan Tybue in the lowlands to Khorog in the highlands. During our monitoring of Tajikistan's Presidential elections in 2013, we concluded that the space for democracy was indeed small in the country, and the same remained true in 2014, as authorities frequently blocked social media sites and news agencies deemed critical of government policy.

As troops withdraw from nearby Afghanistan, international attention towards Central Asia may dwindle in the years to come, even though these states still have a long road ahead towards democracy. The NHC intends to stay focused on this important region, keeping human rights at the forefront of the agenda.



Small grants fund, NGO RUSHD, Kurgan Tybue.

Small grants fund visit, Khatlon region.



Small grants fund project "Youth Forum", Kurgan Tybue.



Small grants fund project "Mobile theatre", Khatlon region.



Small grants fund partner Tomiris, Kurgan Tybue.



Western Balkans

Role of Universities in Peacebuilding

Nearly 20 years after the end of the war in Bosnia Herzegovina, the echo of those then promoting nationalism and ethnic hatred still resounds in the University hallways all over the region. The NHC's work with promoting the role of youth in peacebuilding processes could hardly find a more important arena.

From irregular meetings in NGO premises with representatives of a few Universities present, we have formed a large regional network where Universities from Kosovo, Bosnia Herzegovina and Serbia (Mostar, Tuzla, Novi Sad, Novi Pazar and Pristina) co-operate with civil society to promote human rights and intercultural understanding within their general education programs. The dialogue between students of different cultural and religious backgrounds has been established through student exchanges, webinars and conferences debating the role of the universities in peacebuilding. The dialogue has similarly allowed for teachers from different Universities to meet and exchange materials, unite curricula, and to share best practices and lessons learned.

Mina Skouen at conference in Belgrade.



In 2014 more than 100 people from this program came together and formed a joint declaration where the role of Universities in peacebuilding was publically recognised: "We, the participants to the conference "Role of Universities in Peacebuilding", aware of the fact that higher education plays an exceptional role of in post-conflict, often divided, societies such as Western Balkan ones, wish to point out to the importance of the education for peace, and of enhancing the co-operation in this field between the higher education and non-governmental sector in local communities and societies of the region". (Sarajevo Declaration on the role of higher education and civil society in education for peace, available from our web-page)



Participants at conference.



Enver Dzuliman.



Bjørn Engesland in panel.



Cooperativa in Peris village.

Romania

Roma minorities

The NHC has observed with great concern the situation of the migrant Roma minorities that have arrived to Norway in the recent years and the negative tone of the public debate that their presence has caused. More recently, the NHC has had a focus on the Roma minorities in Romania, since a vast majority of the newly arrived migrants to Norway come from this country.

In 2014 the NHC made a study trip to Romania. The aim was to assess the general situation from a human rights perspective having a particular focus on the situation of the Roma minorities in the surrounding areas of Bucharest and Cluj as well as finding potential partners for a larger project encompassing Norway, Romania and Hungary.

In both Bucharest and Cluj the NHC has had meetings with among others representatives of Romanian Roma organisations all describing a difficult situation for the Roma minorities and emphasising some of the biggest challenges they are facing in the Romanian society: lack of identification papers and a lack of political will from local and national authorities to engage in positive measures. The NHC has also had meetings with representatives of both local and national authorities describing, in their turn, the complexity of the situation.



Meeting a local politician outside Cluj.

The NHC has established good relations with a number of organisations in Romania with whom it intends to continue to co-operate on Roma related issues.



Roma family in Cluj.



Museum of Roma culture.

The NHC has identified a number of successful initiatives from the Romanian civil society such as the RomanoButiq driven entrepreneurial projects called Cooperativa where traditional craftsmen families receive support to establish their own manufacturing workshops to produce and sell their goods on both local, national and international markets. One such family that the NHC visited is located in a small village in the vicinity of Bucharest. All members of this family, from the youngest boy and up to the grandmother, are involved in producing wooden tools, bowls, platters and cutlery that are sold from the local market all the way to rustic restaurants in France.



Meeting the youngest member of the Cooperativa.

Turkey

Monitoring the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey

Religion plays an important role in Turkish society and politics. The current AK Party government, as well as President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, puts unprecedented emphasis on the positive role of the majority religion (Sunni Islam) in building the nation. However, Turkey lacks legal and policy safeguards to ensure that freedom of religion or belief is guaranteed for all. There is a rich diversity within the Turkish society; in addition to the majority Sunni Islamic community, there are Alevis, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic and members of other branches of Christianity, Judaism as well as atheists and agnostics.

The NHC launched its freedom of belief project in March 2013. The project builds on an already existing initiative, The Freedom of Belief Initiative (İÖG). Within three years, 2013-2015, the project aims at laying the foundation for a permanent Turkish human rights organisation specialising on freedom of religion or belief. The key activities of the project are monitoring, documentation, reporting, policy recommendations and advocacy. The project is headed by Mine Yildirim, who has established an office for the project in Istanbul.

During 2014 a series of activities took place, including publication of monitoring reports both in Turkish and English, arrangement of public seminars and roundtables, as well as advocacy and fact-finding meetings with a large number of stakeholders.

The NHC İÖG organised a roundtable on 11 November 2014, focusing on general trends and issues related to religious



Roundtable in November.

freedom. The discussions focused on attacks on worship places and Turkey's failure to fully implement European Court of Human Rights judgments that have implications for the right to freedom of religion or belief. The second part of the discussion centred on the intersection between the right to freedom of religion or belief and the right to education.

In a 10 October 2014 letter to the Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, the NHC İÖG argued that a recent decision by the European Court of Human Rights, points to the importance of bringing the program associated with the mandatory Religious Culture and Knowledge of Ethics in line with international human rights requirements. The letter argues that these are key issues for Turkey's democratisation and social harmony and it will be followed-up by a conference with the Ankara University Centre for Human Rights in 2015, further deepening the discussion on religious education in Turkey's schools.

On 30 May, in co-operation with the Istanbul Bilgi University Human Rights Law Research Centre, the NHC arranged a conference on the lack of legal personality of belief communities in Turkey. Experts and representatives of faith communities at the conference documented that the lack of legal personality results in a series of problems and weakens the position of faith communities in Turkey, i.e. in relation to local and central authorities.

A published policy paper outlined the refusal to recognise the cemevi (Alevi houses of worship) as a place of worship in Turkey, resulting in a serious infringement on the right to freedom of religion or belief and the identity of the Alevi, who constitute Turkey's largest religious minority.

The NHC İÖG took part in the work of international human rights compliance control mechanisms and published a large number of articles and commentaries on its webpage <http://inancozgurlugugirisimi.org/category/calismalarimiz/>.



Visit to the Ombudsman's office in Ankara.



Gunnar Ekeløve-Slydal and Mine Yildirim meets the Turkish Deputy Ombudsman.

Natalya Estemirova Documentation Centre

The Central market was shelled in the afternoon, at the time when peaceful residents of Grozny were buying their groceries.

Alongside the market, missiles exploded near the Republican maternity home and a mosque at the time of the evening prayer. Photographs and video footage indicate gruesome deaths and injuries caused on civilian victims.

There are different accounts of victim deaths by the witnesses, which the Centre should be able to counter-check through its victim lists and other documentation.



Central market after the shelling, 21 October 1999, Grozny

Keeping record of crimes and human rights violations in the North Caucasus

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

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

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

Archive

The Centre has collected large repository of witness testimonies, videos, photographs, and other first-hand records, as well as prosecution documents, court decisions, and other case materials. To date, Documentation Centre's collection totals to 439,099 files.



Analytics at work.

The Centre works with a cutting-edge documentation system which has a capacity to store and organise transferred archival information in the way that allows its multi-purpose use. Researchers of the Documentation Centre map and describe various military incidents and develop catalogues of missing or killed persons in the region. It enables the entering of individual incidents and crimes into a larger context of military conflict and attacks. To date, Documentation Centre has analysed more than 16000 priority documents. Centre's database currently accounts for around 31,000 profiles of victims, 3,340 profiles of suspects and other implicated persons, 9,360 profiles of witnesses, 1,030 incidents, 3,870 profiles of protected objects, 90 profiles of military units and 320 criminal or civil cases.

Case studies

The Centre is pursuing research into numerous case studies. One such case study is a tragic shelling of civilian objects in Grozny on 21 October 1999.

Human Rights in Norway

NGO Forum for Human Rights

The NHC is the secretariat of the Norwegian NGO Forum for Human Rights. The forum strengthened the visibility, coherence and impact of Norwegian civil society organisations on Norwegian domestic and international policies. In 2014, the NHC co-ordinated the forum's reporting and different initiatives taken by it. The NGO forum promoted recommendations on human rights at the United Nations in 2015 and was supported by 14 Norwegian NGOs, highlighting the need for action on human rights in the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Uzbekistan, amongst 10 priority issues.

The NHC helped to strengthen civil society participation at the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly by coordinating travel support from the Norwegian MFA for Norwegian NGOs.



From our "tea party" outside Stortinget urging Russia to respect freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. From left: Bård Nylund of LLH, Gunnar Ekeløve-Slydal of NHC and John Peder Egenæs of Amnesty Norway.

» Application for opening a case against the torturers of Magnitsky

On 23 April 2014, the NHC applied to Norway's Prosecutorial Services to open a criminal case against Russian officials for their role in the torture and killing of the Russian tax lawyer, Sergei Magnitsky in 2009. The officials named in the application include Oleg Silchenko, Dmitry Markov, and Oleg Kuznetsov.

According to the application, "the investigation should be conducted in order to establish a preparedness to further investigate and prosecute the persons in case they enter Norwegian territory or otherwise appear within the reach of Norway's jurisdiction." There were several reasons for prioritising the case: the crimes were of an extremely heinous character; it has gained a high profile internationally; it is unusually well documented; and it is emblematic in that it represents an example of a wider problem of widespread corruption, torture and lack of justice in Russia.

Norwegian authorities have consistently advocated accountability for gross violations of human rights. An investigation by Norwegian prosecutors would be important in the wider fight against impunity for serious crimes committed with an intent to silence whistle-blowers and human rights defenders.

The application received widespread attention in international media. A 22 April Financial Times article, "Magnitsky campaigners seek justice in Norway", quoted Gunnar Ekeløve-Slydal, Deputy Secretary General, saying that "since there are no investigations in Russia, and there are such strong international calls for ending impunity in this case, someone has to do it ... Norway is in a good position ... We have the resources, we have the legislation, we have a clear interest in fighting impunity in our big neighbouring country."



Human Rights Human Wrongs documentary film festival

Human Rights Human Wrongs, Scandinavia's only film festival dedicated to human rights, was arranged for the sixth time in Oslo in 2014. This year the festival underwent several positive changes. All movies were screened at Victoria Kino, the festival's main hub. In addition, concerts, debates, workshops and performances took place at Parkteatret and other venues throughout the city.

New this year was that Oslo Documentary Cinema took on more of the programming than in previous years, leaving the NHC and other partners with the possibility to get directly involved with the events and issues that matters to us. Together with several other organisations, the NHC is proud to be a partner of the Human Rights Human Wrongs film festival.

This year also marked a move towards an even more professional and institutionalised festival with real staying power, and was bigger and more comprehensive than ever before. 32 screenings of 18 engaging films took place at Victoria Kino over the course of six days. All the screenings was accompanied by an introduction, debate or Q&A. 21 international guests and over 70 Norwegian guests contributed, among them former Belarusian Presidential candidate Andrei Sannikov who gave an inspiring speech to a full theatre on the opening night of the festival. Three nights of debates, performances, concerts and interactions with festival guests took place at Parkteatret.

Human Rights Human Wrongs managed to attract an audience of over 5000 people, more than doubling the attendance of the previous year. At the same time an even greater audience was reached through social media. The media coverage was also extensive.

Panel debate discussing human rights in Russia at Parkteatret.



Natalia Radina at HRHW opening.

Berit Lindeman, Natalia Radina and Andrei Sannikov.





Panel discussion at Handke seminar: Anders Heger, Øyvind Berg, Bernt Hagtvet and Bjørn Engesland.

» The Norwegian Helsinki Committee in the International Ibsen Prize debate (“Handke-debate”)

The jury of the state-funded International Ibsen Prize decided to honour the Austrian playwright and writer Peter Handke with its 2014 award. The decision was controversial because Handke’s essays and articles, as well as a number of high profile interviews and speeches, for more than twenty years have been criticised for being revisionist in content and supportive of hard-line Serbian nationalists. Handke has claimed that the Srebrenica massacre was not a genocide, that the UN Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague is false (“falsch”) court and that the Serbs are the real victims of the wars. The NHC played a central role in what became one of the most heated public debates on culture, art and politics in Norway for many years. The NHC arranged a seminar on Handke’s Ibsen Prize in September, where among others Mariana Toma from our Belgrade partner, Humanitarian Law Centre, participated. We also published several articles where we presented the background to the criticism against Handke, including facts about the war in Bosnia, the context of his public statements, and criticised the jury for ignoring the political significance of the Prize. The writer Karl Ove Knausgård claimed

that the NHC threatened freedom of speech. The NHC answered that to criticise the revisionism and political role of Peter Handke is not the same as denying him the right to express himself. The debate lasted for many months, and has already been subject of conferences, reports and book projects.

Mariana Toma of Humanitarian Law Center.



Øyvind Berg, Bernt Hagtvet and Bjørn Engesland.



Universal Periodic Review

The Universal Periodic Review of Norway at the UN Human Rights Council took place at Geneva on 28 April 2014. The NHC was present at the hearing and took part in lobby meetings. The NHC and other Norwegian NGOs worked in concert to raise the attention of delegations to human rights concerns in Norway, including prolonged stay in police cells, solitary confinement during pre-trial detention and extensive use of force in mental health care in some regions. Several states addressed issues and made recommendations that were inspired by input from Norwegian NGOs. The NHC had wished for a more forthcoming attitude from the government, especially by acceding to individual complaints mechanisms to treaties that Norway is already a party.

Constitutional reform

The NHC supported proposals for adopting a new chapter in the Norwegian Constitution, protecting human rights. In particular, the NHC argued that the Constitution should

protect all rights as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including social and economic rights and the right to seek asylum. The Parliament adopted a human rights chapter in the Constitution in May 2014 that fell short of protecting the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to health, and the right to seek asylum. The Norwegian Constitution does not fully protect freedom of religion or belief as defined in international human rights law.

Norway's National Institution for Human Rights

The NHC remained active on issues related to the future organisation of Norway's National Institution for Human Rights. During the year, the President of the Parliament proposed to establish a new National Institution with the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The NHC argued at a hearing organised by the Presidency that a separate Human Rights Commission should be established as the National Institution, and that any new Institution should be independent from existing institutions. The proposal was subsequently

Inna Sangadzhieva, Lene Wetteland
and Anders Nielsen outside the
Russian Embassy.



adjusted, introducing a stronger emphasis on the Institution's independence, in line with the recommendations of the NHC and other NGOs. A final decision on law and mandate will be made in 2015. The NHC participated in the Advisory Council of the existing National Institution throughout 2014.

Government Committee on Romani Policies

The NHC was represented in a resource group for a Committee established by the government in 2011, which reviews past and current policies on the Romani people living in Norway. The Committee will recommend improved policies for the future, aimed at strengthening the human rights protection of the group, as well as supporting its cultural survival. The Committee is led by former Foreign Minister and OSCE Commissioner on National Minorities, Knut Vollebæk. It will present its conclusion on 1 June 2015.

Migrant Roma

The NHC took part in political debates about how Norway should deal with the influx of Roma people from Romania and other Central and East European countries. The NHC advocated human rights based approaches, underlining the importance of fighting discrimination against members of the group, and to avoid general measures that were designed to negatively target the group, such as imposing a national ban on begging. The NHC pointed to the need for co-operation and co-ordination between Norway and the countries of origin in developing policies that improve the situation of Roma.

Other issues

The NHC continued to be active on a range of other issues, taking part in public debates, seminars, court hearings, etc., including on asylum seekers from former Soviet countries, protection measures for human rights defenders, Norway's role in advocating human rights during the Sochi Olympic Games, etc. Throughout the year, the NHC visited several Norwegian prisons and participated in an advisory council of Norway's National Preventive Mechanism.

» Pussy Riot to Bredtveit women's prison

Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina of the Russian feminist punk rock collective Pussy riot visited Norway in May 2014. In addition to attend the NHC seminar on Safe-guarding international institutions against authoritarian abuse, the NHC organised a visit to Bredtveit woman prison, where Maria Alyokhina and NHC secretary general Bjørn Engesland were given a guided tour of the prison by prison director Hilde Lundebj. In addition to explore the facilities, and see first hand how women are serving their sentences in a Norwegian prison, Alyokhina had the opportunity to sit down and talk to several of the inmates in person, discussing how they are experiencing their time in prison. This was an impressive encounter for both Alyokhina and the inmates of Bredtveit. Alyokhina and Tolokonnikova have after their own release from Russian prison launched a prisoners' rights organisation called Zona Prava ("Law Zone"). The visit was a part of their new focus on this issue.



Maria Alyokhina and Bjørn Engesland at Bredtveit women's prison.

Maria Alyokhina interviewed by NRK Dagsrevyen outside Bredtveit.



Co-Operation and International Processes

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

National Preventive Mechanism against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Norway's National Preventive Mechanism was established and started operating in the spring of 2014, at long last. The NPM is a department within the Ombudsman's Office. The NHC participated in its Advisory Council in 2014.

Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)/Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM)

The NHC was present at the OSCE/ODIHR Human dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw and held several interventions covering a wide range of the issues in which the NHC is engaged. At a side event we launched and debated our report on Freedom of Religion or Belief in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. As members of the Prove They Are Alive! campaign, we also participated at a side event devoted to people who have disappeared for over ten years in prison in Turkmenistan.

Ivar Dale reading an intervention at the HDIM in Warsaw.



Demonstrating support to the political prisoners in Azerbaijan at HDIM in Warsaw.



From Turkmenistan side event at HDIM.



HDIM in Warsaw.



OSCE Ministerial and Civic Solidarity Platform

For several years, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee has been active in a network of human rights organisations from across the OSCE region who have joined forces to raise important issues together and in solidarity with each other. As of today, the Civic Solidarity Platform has grown to represent over 60 human rights organisations from the entire region – from the US to Kyrgyzstan. The group regularly issues joint statements when we consider that an issue requires the immediate attention of governments and international bodies, providing up-to-date information from the country in question and recommendations from what has become a human rights network to be reckoned with.

Throughout 2014, the CSP raised issues ranging from the violence in Ukraine, the imprisonment of human rights defenders in Azerbaijan to attacks on civil society in Central Asia.

Traditionally, member organisations meet to plan upcoming strategies on the margins of the annual OSCE Ministerial Council. With the Chairmanship of Switzerland in the OSCE, the 2014 Council meeting was held in Basel, where the CSP organised its Parallel Civil Society Conference during the same week. The NHC was among the participants at the Conference, joining the discussions and moderating a session on Freedom of Expression, which included the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatovic on the panel. Participants also met with delegations at the Ministerial Council to present current concerns of the human rights community in the OSCE region, including with US Secretary of State John Kerry.

The Parallel Civil Society Conference concluded with the adoption of a Basel Declaration, in which member organisations of the CSP raised the rise of intolerance, discrimination and hate crimes in the OSCE region, calling on the OSCE to adequately address what is becoming a major risk for security.



International Partnership for Human Rights

In 2011 the NHC entered into a formal collaboration with Brussels-based NGO International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) to represent the NHC in EU bodies and to serve as a two-way information channel between the EU and the NHC. The agreement ensures that the NHC can have input to some of the many relevant advocacy opportunities in the EU structures during the year. In 2014, through this co-operation the NHC has been informing the EU institutions of its findings and concerns related to human rights issues in various countries and regions.

Human rights dialogue

The NHC has, since 1999, participated in the official human rights dialogues held by the Norwegian government with Indonesia and Vietnam.

International justice

The NHC is 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.

Oslo Freedom Forum

The NHC is a partner in organising the Oslo Freedom Forum (OFF), an international conference first organised in 2009 to gather activists from across the world to speak about fundamental freedoms and democracy issues. The main organiser is the New York-based Human Rights Foundation. The fourth Oslo Freedom Forum due to take place in May was cancelled due to a strike in the hotel sector. Instead, it was organised in October, and the NHC, together with the London based organisation Fair Trials International, organised a breakfast seminar as a side event to the Oslo Freedom Forum, discussing how INTERPOL is being abused by dictatorships.

International networks

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

Garry Kasparov and Bill Browder at NHC and Fair Trials International breakfast seminar.



Jago Russell, Chief Executive of Fair Trials International.



Bill Browder.



EEA Grants

Strengthening ties in the civil society of Europe

Civil society plays an important role in building democracy and promoting respect for human rights. For this reason, capacity building of civil society has been a key element in our work. Through the EEA and Norway grants, the NHC has been contributing to the strengthening of civil society in EU countries in Central and Southern Europe.

The EEA and Norway Grants are Iceland's, Liechtenstein's and Norway's contribution to reducing social and economic disparities in EU countries. Ten per cent of the total EEA Grants for the period 2009-14 (EUR 1.79 billion) are dedicated in support of civil society through the NGO programmes. The role of NHC is to assist in establishing contact and cooperation between civil society organisations in the beneficiary countries and Norway, and give advice to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in matters related to Norwegian civil society.



Launch in Portugal.

Lillian Solheim and Csilla Czibalmos at NGO event in Bucharest.



Matchmaking conference in Prague.





Discussing bilateral cooperation at seminar in Riga.



Lillian Solheim in Riga.

The main areas of support of the NGOs programmes include democracy, human rights, good governance, anti-discrimination, reduction of social inequalities and gender equality. In 2014 the NHC has been closely involved in matchmaking conferences, launching events, NGO fora and meetings in order to facilitate cooperation between Norwegian organisations and organisations from the beneficiary countries. In addition, the NHC has consolidated its website portal as a tool for sharing information and facilitating the search for project partners. As most of the projects are underway and being implemented, the NHC has started documenting good practices and success stories. So far in 2014, 35 such stories were published.

A SUCCESS STORY

Lithuanian Association of Families with Deaf and Hearing Impaired Children, PAGAVA, initiated a petition addressed to Lithuanian state authorities asking for early primary support to families of children with hearing loss. The on line petition "Reduce Discrimination of Deaf Children and Their Families" (www.manoteise.lt and www.peticijos.lt) was signed by more than 1300 visitors.

The early intervention model suggested by PAGAVA follows a successful example from Norway. In April, two PAGAVA specialists were on a study visit to Norway, funded by the EEA and Norway Grants, NGO funds. "Specialists should provide parents with information on hearing impairment and modern rehabilitation aids, child's communication possibilities, education system and legislation, also to give contacts of competent specialists. It would help parents to understand that their child's disability is not a problem they will not be able to overcome, if the right steps of rehabilitation will be taken on time," said Joana Vanagiene, vice-chairman of PAGAVA.

From project in Lithuania.



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 has set the agenda on several important human rights questions in 2014, and we are continuing to be one of the most visible human rights organisations in Norway, and the visibility is increasing by the year. Additionally, NHC representatives are frequently used as commentators and experts, and in debates on radio and TV programmes. The NHC also had a substantial amount of appearances in international media.

Web pages

The information department communicates the work of the NHC through its own website, Facebook, Twitter and publications. The NHC is also active on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, and use these channels of communication actively to promote and communicate the work of the NHC



Publications

The NHC published the following reports in 2014:

- *Armenia: Between hope and distrust*
- *Below Freedom of Religion or Belief Standards: State policy in Kazakhstan, arbitrary protection in the Kyrgyz*
- *The Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey Monitoring Report January-June 2013 (The report was published in Turkish language in September 2013).*

The NHC introduced Policy papers as a new publication format in 2014. During last year we published six policy papers:

- Q&A on the Ukraine-Russia crisis: Breaches of International Law and Human Rights Issues
- Democracy in Hungary: Neither Saved, Nor Safe
- Alevi cem houses: Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey
- Georgia: Five Years of Non-Action
- UN Human rights Council: Russia's Traditional Values Initiative Result in Abuse at Domestic Level
- Russia's Foreign Agent Law: Violating Human Rights and Attacking Civil Society

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

Membership

As of the end of 2014, the NHC had around 260 individual members.

Finances

The total spending in 2014 was NOK 30 million out of which project support for partners constituted NOK 15.5 million. Total income balance was 30.1 million.

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, OAK Foundation and the European Commission. Gifts, members contribution etc. provided an income of NOK 155,000.

The NHC Secretariat



Bjørn Engesland
Secretary General



Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal
Deputy Secretary General. Russia, Central Asia, Turkey, international criminal courts and justice



Fernanda Zubillaga Nilsen
Head of administration, office management and finance



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



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



Aage Borchgrevink
Senior Advisor, Georgia. On leave in 2014



Ole B. Lilleås
Senior Advisor, Norway, Western Balkans. Co-ordinator of the Norwegian NGO Forum for Human Rights, Project Manager for The Coalition for Trust. IT management



Inna Sangadzhieva
Advisor, Russia and Belarus.



Enver Djuliman
Senior Advisor, Head of the human rights education programme



Mina Skouen
Project manager, Western Balkans and LGBTI-related activities



Veronika Vimberg
Program co-ordinator, Project Administration



Csilla Czibalmos
Project manager, Hungary, Ukraine, Belarus and Roma-related issues



Olga Shamshur Flydal
Project officer, South Caucasus Project Coalition for Trust and Natalia Estemirova Documentation Centre (on leave most of 2014)



Ivar Dale
Regional representative, Central Asia, Almaty Office



Lene Wetteland
Advisor, Armenia, Central Asia programme manager



Lillian Solheim
Project Manager, EEA grants project



Ilya Udmelidze
Project co-ordinator, Natalia Estemirova Documentation Centre



Usam Baysaev
Project co-ordinator, Natalia Estemirova Documentation Centre



Aleksandra Sidorenko
Project co-ordinator, Natalia Estemirova Documentation Centre

Staff abroad:



Adela Galešić
Project coordinator for «Peace Education on Location» in Bosnia Herzegovina



Meirgul Kudabayeva
Administrative Officer, Central Asia regional representative office, Almaty



Elena Saenkova
Project co-ordinator, Murmansk office



Botakoz Iliyaz
Project Adviser at the NHC representative office in Central Asia (Almaty). (From February)

Organisation

**Mine Yildirim**

Head of Project, The NHC Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey, based in Istanbul, Turkey

**Marion Kipiani**

Regional program-coordinator of the project "Coalition for Trust" in South Caucasus, based in Tbilisi, Georgia

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

Board

Chairperson:**Ragnhild Astrup Tschudi**

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

Vice chairperson:**Julie Wilhelmsen**

Research fellow, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

Hauk Lund

Executive director, Hauk Lund Consulting A/S

Eirik Moen

Secretary General of the International Democrat Union

Kari Schage

Management consultant, Resources Global Professionals

Ragni Ramberg

Lawyer at Østgård Wikasteen

Inger Skjelsbæk

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

Ole Benny Lilleås

Staff representative

Council

President:**Kristin Clemet****Vice president:****Anne Marit Bjørnflaten**

Trond Bakkevig

Peter Batta

Helge Blakkisrud

Kjell Magne Bondevik

Bernt Bull

Nils Butenschøn

Juni Dahr

Ole Drolsum

Bente Erichsen

Dankert Freilem

Grethe Fossum

Bjørn Cato Funnemark

Steinar Gil

Jacob M. Godzimirski

Trine Skei Grande

Bernt Hagtvet

Hans Morten Haugen

Anne Holt

Prableen Kaur

Knut Kloster jr.

Idar Kreutzer

Berit Kvæven

Gry Larsen

Ragnhild Lied

Anne Liljedahl Lynngård

Elisabeth Løland

Mette Newth

Manuela Ramin Osmundsen

Victor Roddvik

Jan Tore Sanner

Per Saxegaard

Anne Julie Semb

Marianne B. Skou

Guro Slettemark

Bård Vegar Solhjell

Lars Petter Soltvedt

Atle Sommerfeldt

Bjørn Stordrange

Nora Sveaass

Michael Tetzschner

Annette Trettebergstuen

Magne Ove Warsinski-Varsi

Maria Warsinska-Varsi

Åshild Vige

Svein Wilhelmsen

Stein-Ivar Aarsæther

Kåre Vollan



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Maria Alyokhina, Bjørn Engesland and prison director Hilde Lundebjerg during Pussy riots visit to Bredtveit women's prison.
Photo: Anders Nielsen