

Together for Human Rights: a Year in Review



2019

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IPHR International
Partnership
for Human Rights

Introduction

Recent developments in the international world order have sent chills through the human rights community and supporters of democracy throughout the world. The worrying political climate in Europe and the United States has challenged IPHR and our partners to uphold international standards and human values of tolerance more than ever at this time when fewer and fewer countries serve as champions of human rights and models of inspiration.

Nine years after IPHR was set up by a small group of friends and colleagues with a passion for promoting justice and freedom in the former Soviet Union, it has grown into a solid and well-respected organization. This is primarily thanks to the unique relationship we have with human rights defenders in the wide region we cover, and the strategies we use that are of mutual benefit to us and our partners. In these troubling times, civil society plays a more important role than ever, and throughout 2016 we continued to build alliances with our colleagues on the ground who are confronted on a daily basis with attempts to obstruct their human rights work.

One of the main priorities of our work in 2016 was to counter the unabated erosion of civil society space in the former Soviet Union, which serves as a negative precedent for the whole world, including Western Europe. Human rights defenders faced increasing security threats to their security because of the adoption of restrictive legislation on the registration, operation and funding of NGOs; arrests and trials of human rights defenders on charges brought in retaliation for their work; and politically motivated pressure directed at defense lawyers. IPHR and its partners addressed these challenges by mobilizing solidarity and support for human rights groups and individual defenders at risk in target countries, undertaking monitoring missions, publishing reports, carrying out international advocacy initiatives, and providing direct emergency assistance to activists and their families.

At the end of 2016, IPHR and partners from Central Asia entered into partnership with CIVICUS on an initiative aimed at tracking the state of civil society in various regions of the world. This resource, which features an interactive world map, provides regularly updated information on the evolving situation regarding fundamental freedoms in individual countries,

which allows for comparing and assessing these developments in relation to other countries around the world.

International human rights standards unequivocally protect the rights of human rights defenders to carry out their legitimate work without fear of reprisals. However, today these are increasingly challenged by governments that brush aside their obligations and fail to acknowledge the value of civil society actors as constructively critical partners, perceiving them instead as threats to their power. Through the various networks in which IPHR participates, it consistently works to promote a better understanding of the key role of civil society in the protection of human rights, and it will continue to do so as long as necessary.



Another important focus of our work in 2016 was meticulously documenting violations of international humanitarian law eastern Ukraine and in Crimea. The monitoring and research work carried out in Crimea by Crimea SOS, Truth Hounds and IPHR in the framework of the Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP), resulted in the publication of a landmark report, *International Crimes in Crimea: An Assessment of Two and a Half years of Russian occupation*. The substantial report presents evidence of serious human rights violations and international crimes such as extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, illegal detentions, and torture and forced displacement, which took place in occupied Crimea in 2014. The report drew international attention to these issues and the evidence documented in it was handed over to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. While the Russian president announced that Russia will not ratify the Rome Statute of the ICC, Ukraine has done so, meaning that international crimes perpetrated on Ukrainian territory are subject to its jurisdiction.

I am happy to invite you to peruse this report, which includes narratives from the field and photos of partners, friends, colleagues and beneficiaries of the joint work we have carried out over 2016. I would like to express our deep gratitude to our valuable supporters, and thank them for their faith in the cause we defend.

*Brigitte Dufour,
IPHR Director*

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Field missions

1600+

pages of evidence submitted to the ICC



Advocacy & Support

8

submissions for UN human rights reviews

23

HRDs and their families received emergency support

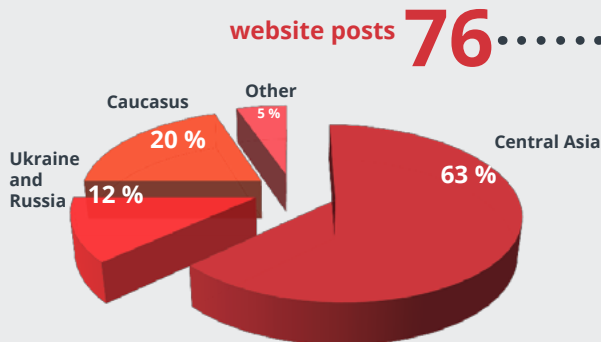
4

OSCE briefings featuring speakers from the region

27

advocacy visits of partner HRDs to Brussels

Outreach



1200

new IPHR facebook community members



IPHR: Achieving change through partnership

International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) is an independent, non-governmental organization which was founded in 2008. Based in Brussels, IPHR works closely together with civil society groups from different countries to raise human rights concerns at the international level and promote accountability for human rights violations in repressive environments. Currently we work mainly on countries in the region of the former Soviet Union (FSU), in particular the Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), the countries of the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), Russia and Ukraine.

IPHR's work is based on the recognition that a strong civil society is essential for the development and consolidation of a truly democratic society and for the effective protection of fundamental rights in any country. IPHR's core values are: partnership, responsiveness, commitment and integrity.

The report, *Together for Human Rights 2016: A Year in Review* describes the activities and achievements of IPHR and its partners with respect to dealing with human rights challenges and threats to civil society in the former Soviet Union in 2016.

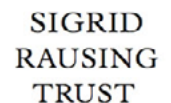


"Persistence and tenacity are vital to confront challenges in a region like the former Soviet Union where change comes slowly, but where – now more than ever – it is vital to keep relationships and connections alive. With its work to foster meaningful partnerships and its dedication to the region, IPHR embodies such qualities. I particularly admire the persistent efforts of IPHR staff to ensure the concerns of civil society organizations and human rights activists working in some of the most constrained and repressive environments are made visible to European and International policymakers.

IPHR places an important – and I think unique – emphasis on listening to its partners' priorities and amplifying their voices. Nurturing such relationships is often demanding, requiring patience and staying power, all of which the organization has demonstrated time and again in its work supporting individuals and groups from Eastern Europe and Central Asia. As a board member it's a pleasure to be associated with a team of people who value partnership to a great extent and act as a much-needed bridge between regional and international action in fostering change".

Jacqueline Hale,
IPHR Board Member

In 2016, IPHR and its partners worked on the implementation of numerous projects. Our team would like to thank all our donors for their generous support.



South/Caucasus

Overview of our work

IPHR worked on countering the continuing crackdown on dissent in Azerbaijan, where dozens of human rights defenders, bloggers and political activists remained imprisoned on politically motivated charges and domestic legislation put excessive limitations on the freedom of association of NGOs. Throughout the year IPHR and partner NGOs engaged in trial monitoring, international advocacy and campaigns to draw attention to the plight of political prisoners and call for their immediate and unconditional release. Several political prisoners were released during the year thanks to international pressure, but their convictions have not been quashed and many others remain behind bars.



"I was in the detention centre of the Ministry of National Security of Azerbaijan, where I was subjected to torture [...] They handcuffed one of my arms to the ceiling; they beat and tortured me and got me to sign a document saying I was an Armenian spy [...] The support of our colleagues from international organizations, the threat of sanctions [against Azerbaijan] – those were contributing factors that led to our release [...] Today [the fight] against torture, against violence, is very topical. We monitor trials [...] and we can see already that the number of incidents of abuse, of torture of detainees in Azerbaijan has risen sharply."

Arif Yunus,
Director of the Institute for Peace and Democracy

IPHR and partner NGOs sent a fact-finding mission to Armenia shortly after police were reported to have used excessive force against predominantly peaceful protests in July 2016 and issued a report on the findings.

In October, IPHR and partners from the CSP network deployed observers to monitor the parliamentary elections in Georgia and issued a detailed assessment of the elections in view of international standards.

IPHR worked together with local NGOs, NGO networks such as the CSP and the Sport for Rights platform, as well as international NGOs committed to promoting human rights in the South Caucasus such as Amnesty International, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, International Media Support (IMS, Denmark), Norwegian Helsinki Committee, European Human Rights Advocacy Centre (EHRAC, United Kingdom) and People in Need (Czech Republic).

Given IPHR's Brussels location and its close contacts with EU institutions, particular emphasis was placed on EU advocacy. IPHR consistently raised concerns about the human rights situation in the South Caucasus with representatives of relevant EU institutions, including with EU member state representations, the Council Working Groups for Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Russia (COEST), the European External Action Service (EEAS), and the European Parliament. IPHR also carried out advocacy activities with the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations.

IPHR engaged with local and international media to ensure coverage of its findings and conclusions.

Highlighted activities

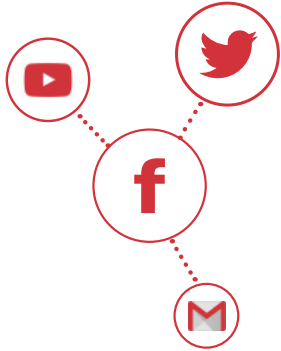
In this section, we describe some examples of the activities that were carried out during the year to draw attention to human rights violations in the South Caucasus.

CAMPAIGNS ON INDIVIDUAL CASES

Public campaigns and advocacy for the release of political prisoners in Azerbaijan: Thanks to international pressure the Azerbaijani journalist Khadija Ismaylova was released on 25 May 2016 after spending almost 18 months in detention, but the charges against her were not quashed and she was subjected to a travel ban. Two days later, with other members of the Sports for Rights platform, IPHR and NGO partners launched a global birthday celebration to mark Khadija Ismaylova's 40th birthday. The platform coordinated a series of parallel protests in 40 cities around the world calling on the Azerbaijani government to make her release unconditional and to promptly and unconditionally release all other political prisoners in Azerbaijan.



#FreeIlkin



IPHR launched a campaign in support of Ilkin Rustamzade, a human rights activist who has been imprisoned since 2013 for speaking out against violence and suspicious deaths in the army. The organization released a video to highlight his case, collected signatures in his support and campaigned for his release on social media.



RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY

Report *Beaten, Burnt and Betrayed: Armenians Awaiting Accountability for Police Violence*: At the request of Armenian civil society organizations IPHR dispatched a fact-finding mission to Yerevan from 28 July to 1 August to investigate the use of excessive force by Armenian police to quell predominantly peaceful protests held in the capital. The monitors interviewed victims, witnesses, lawyers, journalists and NGO leaders who had been personally affected by the events. The report describes dozens of cases of beatings of journalists, the detention and severe beating of peaceful protesters, and pressure and harassment by law enforcement officials of civil society and opposition leaders during the July protests. The Armenian NGOs Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, Helsinki Association and Protection of Rights without Borders contributed to producing the report, as well as the Norwegian Helsinki Committee. IPHR and partners subsequently presented the findings at public events in Yerevan, Brussels and Warsaw, providing first-hand accounts of events to decision makers, media and civil society. IPHR and partners also met with representatives of the Armenian authorities to discuss the report's findings and recommendations.



Haykuhi Harutyunyan of the NGO Protection of Rights without Borders (Armenia) cooperated with IPHR to investigate allegations of human rights violations during the July 2016 protests: *"It's very important to have international partners to advocate and to draw more international attention to the human rights situation."*



Coordinated HDIM advocacy: Together with Amnesty International, International Media Support (IMS) and the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (Azerbaijan), IPHR held a side event at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw on 22 September to draw attention to the shrinking space for civil society activism in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani civil society activists Gulnara Akhundova, Turgut Gambar, Emin Huseynov, Rasul Jafarov and Anar Mammadli spoke at the event that was moderated by IPHR's Simon Papuashvili.

Observation mission to monitor Georgia's parliamentary election: Together with the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, the International Elections Study Center (Lithuania), and the NGO network European Platform for Democratic Elections, IPHR deployed 36 observers who visited more than 200 polling stations across Georgia during the October parliamentary elections. In a 20-page **report** the NGOs concluded that the elections were generally in line with international standards and showed that the democratic process is gradually being consolidated in the country. However, the mission also identified a number of issues of serious concern. For example, in some electoral districts voters were intimidated and attacked by what appeared to be supporters of the ruling party and in one case, NGO election observers were **attacked** as they were filming how unidentified men were trying to disrupt the vote in a polling station. The attackers seized the observers' mobile phones and destroyed video recordings. Police officers were present but did not intervene.

Impact of our work

Through advocacy, media work and public campaigns IPHR and partners promoted international awareness of human rights violations in the South Caucasus. International pressure led to some tangible successes in 2016, including:

- In Azerbaijan, over a dozen people who had been imprisoned on politically motivated charges, including the human rights defender-s Intigam Aliyev, Rasul Jafarov and Anar Mammadli, (activists of the Nida Civic Movement that peacefully campaigns for democratic and social change in Azerbaijan), the journalists Rauf Mirgadirov and Parviz Hashimli and the bloggers Siraj Karimli and Omar Mammadov were released from prison. However, campaigning is continuing to secure the unconditional release of all political prisoners in Azerbaijan .
- Publicity and follow-up meetings with the Georgian authorities about the attack on a team of election observers deployed by IPHR and its partners led to the opening of a criminal investigation and internal inquiries by the Interior Ministry and the Office of the Prosecutor General of Georgia. The perpetrators were identified and brought to justice.

"This is arguably the first high profile case where an attack on election observers in Georgia has been properly investigated."

Simon Papuashvili,
project coordinator at IPHR



For more information about IPHR's work on the South Caucasus, including publications see:
<http://iphronline.org/about/where-we-work/south-caucasus>



Central Asia

Overview of our work

Twenty-five years after the Central Asian states gained independence with the fall of the Soviet Union, the human rights situation in this region remains highly problematic. Major challenges include: shrinking civil society space, serious violations of freedom of expression, association and assembly, politically motivated prosecution, selective justice and widespread impunity for torture and ill-treatment. During 2016, IPHR worked closely with its partners on addressing these issues.

IPHR's major Central Asian partners, with which it implemented joint projects, included: The Association for Human Rights in Central Asia (AHRCA); Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (KIBHR); Nota Bene; Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR); the NGO coalitions against torture in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan; and Central Asian members of the Civic Solidarity Platform. IPHR also cooperated with other human rights NGOs, NGO coalitions and individual human rights defenders from Central Asia, as well as European and international NGOs committed to promoting human rights in this region.

IPHR and its partners worked on raising human rights issues at the international level through the preparation of tailored publications, as well as coordinated and timely advocacy. Particular emphasis was placed on EU advocacy. IPHR kept EU contacts informed about human rights developments in Central Asia and worked with its partners on highlighting key concerns and recommendations in connection with relevant EU events, including the EU's Human Rights Dialogues with the five countries of the region, high-level EU-Central Asia political meetings and European Parliament sessions. IPHR and its Central Asian partners also prepared alternative reports and carried out follow-up advocacy in connection with important UN human rights reviews, and engaged in coordinated efforts to draw attention to pressing issues among OSCE stakeholders, in particular during the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM). In addition, IPHR and its partners reached out to the broader international community to mobilize support on human rights causes in Central Asia.

IPHR supported networking and capacity-building among Central Asian partners and cooperated with them on ensuring redress for victims of human rights violations and providing emergency assistance to individuals at risk.

Highlighted activities

IPHR and its partners worked on human rights promotion in Central Asia on an ongoing basis in 2016. Below we describe a few examples of activities that were carried out during the year.

EU ADVOCACY

Turkmenistan: Power, Politics and Petro-Authoritarianism briefing: In cooperation with Chatham House and the Open Society European Policy Institute, IPHR organized a March 2016 *event* at the European Parliament to discuss the current repressive situation in Turkmenistan. This event fed into the discussion about the EU-Turkmenistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement,



IPHR's Advocacy Manager Tika Tsertsvadze, TIHR Chair Farid Tuhbatullin and other participants at European Parliament event on Turkmenistan, March 2016

which the European Parliament has declined to ratify (see also the impact section below). It highlighted the urgent need for human rights reform in the country, but also linked human rights issues to crosscutting issues regarding economic and political monopolization and served as an important opportunity to reach out to a broader audience.

Brussels advocacy with Kazakhstani, Kyrgyzstani and Tajikistani partners: During a Brussels *advocacy visit* organized by IPHR in April 2016, colleagues from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan had the opportunity to meet and discuss pressing human rights issues with representatives of different EU institutions, including the European External Action Service, the office of the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, the European Commission and the European Parliament. IPHR and its partners also prepared briefing papers for these meetings aimed at informing the EU's human rights engagement with the three Central Asian countries.

UN ADVOCACY

IPHR worked with Central Asian partners to promote attention to civil society concerns in the context of several key UN human rights reviews, which took place during the year. This work included:

- Cooperation with Nota Bene and Tajikistan's NGO Coalition against Torture on the preparation of written submissions on torture and fundamental rights, as well as on *advocacy* with UN missions in Geneva ahead of the second UN Universal Periodic Review of Tajikistan that was held in May 2016.
- Assisting the KIBHR and a broader coalition of Kazakhstani NGOs with the preparation of a comprehensive alternative report for the UN Human Rights Committee's second review of Kazakhstan under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as with *advocacy* during the Committee's June 2016 session in Geneva; and
- Cooperation with TIHR on the preparation of alternative reports for the UN Human Rights Committee's July 2016 *pre-session review* of Turkmenistan and the November-December 2016 reviews of this country by the **UN Committee against Torture (CAT)** and the **UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**, as well as on follow-up advocacy with the CAT in Geneva.



Tajikistani NGO representatives at UPR pre-session briefing in Geneva on 1 April 2016.



"To our regret, most of the recommendations made by the Human Rights Committee in 2011, as well as dozens of other UN human rights body recommendations issued to Kazakhstan since then have gone unfulfilled [...] The human rights situation in Kazakhstan has not only not improved, but it has got drastically worse in a number of areas during these five years."

Yevgeniy Zhovtis, KIBHR

speaking at *briefing* with the Human Rights Committee in Geneva in June 2016.

OSCE ADVOCACY

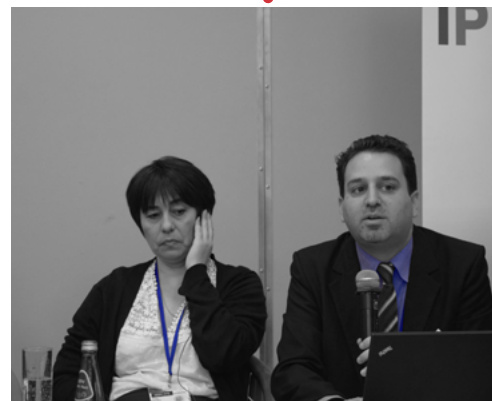
Coordinated HDIM advocacy: IPHR and its partners delivered statements and organized briefings at the HDIM in Warsaw to draw attention to the *worsening civil society climate* in Central Asia, the persistent problem of *torture and ill-treatment* in the region and the urgent need for *human rights reform in post-Karimov Uzbekistan*. The speakers at the briefings included representatives of leading Central Asian NGOs and coalitions, prominent international human rights NGOs and independent media covering developments in the region. The briefings were well attended and generated lively debate among participants, including both civil society and government representatives.



Speakers Tolekan Ismayilova from Bir Duino, Farid Tuhbatullin from TIHR, Yevgeniy Zhovtis from KIBHR, moderator Brigitte Dufour from IPHR and participants at HDIM briefing on civil society in Central Asia, September 2016



Anna Smirnova and Anastasia Miller from KIBHR together with IPHR's Brigitte Dufour at HDIM briefing on torture in Central Asia, September 2016



Nadejda Atayeva from AHRCA and Steve Swerdlow from Human Rights Watch at HDIM briefing on Uzbekistan, September 2016.



"People of my generation remember what preceded the collapse of the USSR: First, cigarettes disappeared from the stores, followed by alcohol, and then the USSR itself vanished [...] Recently cigarettes have again disappeared in Turkmenistan and black market trade in tobacco and foreign currencies has emerged. There cannot be a well-functioning economy in countries where there are no basic freedoms. And freedom is still non-existent in our country."

From the speech of

Farid Tuhbatullin, TIHR, at HDIM briefing on civil society in Central Asia, September 2016.

OTHER WORK

Solidarity initiatives: During the year, IPHR and its partners worked on mobilizing support for human rights defenders at risk and victims of human rights violations in Central Asia, and issued several statements to this end. These included: an **appeal** for solidarity with Central Asia's civil society; a **statement** on two Uzbekistani brothers subjected to torture for opposing extortion; an **open letter** on the attack on a justice-seeking Turkmenistani mother; and a Civic Solidarity Platform **statement** on two Kazakhstani civil society activists who were imprisoned over peaceful protests. IPHR also launched an **online campaign** in support of torture victims in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, encouraging website visitors to take action to demand accountability on their behalf.

"The Ibodov family needs more than our sympathy [...] They need justice, swift action from Uzbekistan's international partners, and an end to the impunity for torture and abuse that reigns supreme in Uzbekistan."

Nadejda Atayeva, AHRCA president

in a **statement** calling for investigations into the alleged torture of two brothers in Uzbekistan, as well as the death in custody of one of them



Re-trial proceedings in the case of human rights defender Azimjan Askarov in Kyrgyzstan, captured by monitor Giorgi Marjanishvili

Field missions: IPHR carried out a fact-finding mission to Tajikistan in October-November 2016 to conduct research into human rights problems affecting women and minorities. IPHR's researchers Anne Sunder-Plassmann and Rachel Bugler interviewed NGO representatives, lawyers and victims in several different cities and gathered first-hand information for forthcoming publications. Within the framework of the Civic Solidarity Platform, IPHR coordinated a trial monitoring mission to observe the October 2016 opening of the re-trial against human rights defender Azimjan Askarov, which was **ordered** by the Supreme Court following a UN Human Rights Committee decision in this case.

Impact of our work

Through our work, IPHR and its partners promoted international awareness of human rights issues in Central Asia and provided important input into the review and policy processes of international target institutions, thereby helping to ensure that the Central Asian authorities were held to account for human rights violations. Examples of such impact include:

- The European Parliament adopted several resolutions on human rights in Central Asia that prominently reflected NGO concerns, including an **urgency resolution on freedom of expression in Kazakhstan** passed in March and an **urgency resolution on human rights in Tajikistan** passed in June, which was the first resolution of this kind on this country. Both resolutions sent an important message to the governments concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in the two countries.
- Following coordinated NGO advocacy, including an **open letter** to MEPs signed by 27 NGOs from 15 different countries, the European Parliament continued to withhold approval for the EU-Turkmenistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement because of the lack of human rights progress in this country.
- When reviewing the situation in Central Asian countries, UN human rights bodies prominently addressed human rights issues raised by IPHR and partners. For example, the UN **summary of stakeholders' information** that was compiled as a key reference document for the UPR of Tajikistan extensively quotes the reports prepared by IPHR and Tajikistani partners, and the **outcome document** of this review features recommendations that correspond to major concerns voiced by them. The **list of issues** adopted by the UN Human Rights Committee for its upcoming review of Turkmenistan covers a number of principal issues that IPHR and TIHR outlined in their report to the Committee.

The European Parliament, (...) Expresses its concerns about the climate for media and free speech in Kazakhstan; is very concerned about the pressure on independent media outlets and the possible negative implications of new draft legislation on the funding of civil society organizations; points out that freedom of speech for independent media, bloggers and individual citizens is a universal value that cannot be bargained away;

Excerpt
from
**European
Parliament
resolution on
freedom of expression
in Kazakhstan** from March
2016

“During the second UPR cycle of Tajikistan, IPHR and other international NGOs, including the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organization against Torture (OMCT) helped us organize an excellent advocacy campaign [...] As a result of this campaign, all our recommendations were included in the outcome document adopted by the UPR Working Group.”



Tahmina Juraeva,
the Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law,
a member of Tajikistan's NGO Coalition against Torture



Uzbekistani human rights defender Bobomurad Razzokov (middle) upon his release in October 2016, together with Abdurakhman Tashanov (left) and Vasiliya Inoyatova (right) from “Ezgulik” Human Rights Society. Copyright: “Ezgulik”

While the Central Asian authorities failed to initiate systematic human rights reforms, they did sometimes take steps to reverse abusive policies and improve compliance with international human rights standards as a result of civil society campaigning and international interventions. These are a few examples of such outcomes:

- Kyrgyzstan’s parliament **rejected** a widely criticized draft “foreign agents” NGO law that had been pending for two years. Together with other NGOs, IPHR and its partners had been advocating against the “foreign agents” law since it was first introduced and welcomed this outcome.
 - Tajikistan adopted legislation strengthening fundamental safeguards against torture and ill-treatment in detention, which the Coalition against Torture, IPHR and other NGOs had long pushed for. It is now crucial that the authorities **follow through** in practice on this legislation.
- Individuals arrested on politically motivated grounds were released thanks to sustained civil society advocacy and international pressure. For example, in Uzbekistan, political activist Samandar Kukanov finally walked free after 24 years in prison and human rights defender Bobomurad Razzokov was **released** on health grounds. While these releases were a relief, numerous other individuals convicted on politically motivated grounds remain in prison in the country.

For more information about IPHR’s work on Central Asia, including publications see:

<http://iphronline.org/about/where-we-work/central-asia>

Ukraine

Overview of our work

In 2016, IPHR's Ukraine team continued to closely monitor the human rights situation in the conflict-affected Donbass region in eastern Ukraine and in occupied Crimea, focusing on violations such as extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, illegal detention, torture and forced displacement. IPHR also worked to support Ukrainian partners to secure accountability for human rights violations perpetrated during the Maidan protests in 2013-2014.

IPHR was involved in training, equipping and dispatching field monitors to investigate and document alleged war crimes and to highlight violations of the rights of religious minorities and other vulnerable groups in the context of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Over the year, eight such missions were conducted. Based on the evidence gathered during the missions, IPHR and partners produced reports and undertook related advocacy.



"We carried out thorough investigations and gathered over 100 witness testimonies concerning gross human rights violations. In order to ensure that our findings were reliable, we cross-checked evidence with multiple additional sources."

Svitlana Valko,
coordinator of IPHR's field missions in Ukraine and founder of the NGO Truth Hounds.

Highlighted activities

In this section, there are some examples of the activities that were carried out during the year to draw attention to human rights violations in Ukraine.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

Where Did the Shells Come From? – Investigation of Cross-Border Attacks in Eastern Ukraine: Published in June by IPHR together with the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC) and the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (UHHRU), the report presents evidence of cross-border shelling carried out as part of the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine which proves that these hostilities can be qualified as an international armed conflict.

International Crimes in Crimea: An Assessment of Two and a Half Years of Russian Occupation: In September, IPHR, and NGO partners Crimea SOS and the Truth Hounds in the framework of the Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP) published a report documenting evidence of serious human rights violations perpetrated in Crimea since the onset of the Russian occupation which include killings, enforced disappearances, illegal detention, torture and forced displacement. Those primarily suffering from these human rights violations are Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians who are targeted on politically motivated grounds. The report found that those responsible for these violations included leading figures of the occupying authorities and proxy paramilitary groups. The report concludes that there is a reasonable basis to believe that war crimes and crimes against humanity, as defined by the Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), have been committed in Crimea.

ADVOCACY

In September, IPHR, NHC, Crimea SOS, Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union and the Ukrainian NGO AGORA organized a side event on Crimea during the OSCE HDIM to draw attention to the human rights violations and international crimes taking place since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. Panelists including lawyers working on Crimean cases and NGO representatives spoke at the event, which was attended by over 100 representatives from the OSCE participating States, institutions and civil society.

Parallel Civil Society Conference to the OSCE Ministerial Council: During the Parallel Civil Society Conference that took place ahead of the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Hamburg on 6 to 7 December, Ukraine's security situation, human rights and democratic transition featured as a main theme. IPHR organized a cultural event at the end of the first day of the conference with the participation of Crimean musicians. The event, which drew attention to the human rights situation in Crimea, was attended by over 100 representatives of civil society and OSCE participating States.

Impact of our work

Filing evidence of human rights violations and international crimes with the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Evidence and cases set out in IPHR's report *International Crimes in Crimea: An Assessment of Two and a Half Years of Russian Occupation* satisfy the ICC Statute admissibility criteria – complementarity, gravity and the interests of justice. Based on these findings, IPHR filed an **Article 15 Communication** with supporting evidence with the ICC in October 2016. This is an important step towards ensuring accountability for the human rights violations committed in Crimea.

The report *Where did the shells come from? – Investigation of cross-border attacks in eastern Ukraine* was widely covered in the media, with over 120 Ukrainian, Russian and international media outlets reporting on it. Close to 40 Ukrainian media outlets covered the report *International Crimes in Crimea: An Assessment of Two and a Half Years of Russian Occupation*, and around 60 articles were published about it.

"I am convinced that the work we have done with IPHR will bring concrete results. Not in one year, not in two, but eventually it will. And those people who committed those crimes, they will have to answer for them."

Tamila Tasheva,
co-founder of Crimea SOS



IPHR: What are the main obstacles the activists who document crimes in eastern Ukraine and Crimea face?

Svitlana Valko: Of course, in eastern Ukraine it's firstly the situation of martial law, in which it can be quite terrifying to work: curfews, military checkpoints, people carrying arms. In Crimea we have to operate with great caution as there's always the risk of arbitrary detention and other very unpleasant repercussions. We cannot work openly. Plus, the fact that we document crimes committed by both sides of the conflict. That is never popular.

For more information about IPHR's work on Ukraine, see: <http://iphronline.org/about/where-we-work/ukraine>

Russia



Overview of our work

The human rights situation in Russia continues to be of serious concern. Major challenges include: the clampdown on freedoms of expression, assembly and association with over 150 civil society organizations included in the Justice Ministry's list of so-called "foreign agents"; serious systematic violations of the freedoms of religion and belief; and widespread impunity for violent attacks motivated by xenophobia and nationalism.

IPHR worked with SOVA Centre for Information and Analysis (SOVA) on a joint project to combat discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief and promote religious tolerance in Russia through monitoring and documentation, advocacy, public outreach and legal assistance to victims of alleged violations.

Highlighted activities

RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY

In July 2016, SOVA and IPHR issued a policy report entitled *Brief overview of developments concerning Xenophobia, Violations of Freedom of Religion and Inappropriate Use of Anti-Extremist Legislation in the Russian Federation in 2015*. IPHR organized advocacy meetings with key representatives of the EU in Brussels where SOVA experts presented the concerns included in the report and shared their analysis and assessment of the human rights situation in Russia and opportunities for EU engagement.

IPHR additionally briefed EU officials about human rights in Russia, particularly the situation of civil society activists and groups, at advocacy events that were jointly organized with other Brussels-based and international human rights groups in June and July.

"Faces of Faith" campaign

IPHR and SOVA ran a social media campaign entitled "Faces of Faith" on a dedicated Facebook page that reaches out to broad groups of Russian society and targets a young audience. The campaign is designed to facilitate discussion about tolerance, freedom of religion and state regulation of religious activities.

Impact of our work

"When we talk about the situation in Russia, it's difficult to talk about progress – frankly speaking it's more about whether things deteriorate quickly or slowly. Sometimes we hope that we influenced the situation in a way that slowed down the negative developments. For example, the famous "Yarovaya package" of amendments to anti-extremism and anti-terrorism legislation. These amendments were not constitutional and led to worrying activities by law enforcement officials [...] However, we joined others in organizing a wave of protests and public discussions, [...] I'm not sure if it solved the issue – I doubt it. But at least it counterbalanced the initial negative impact."

Alexander Verkhovsky,
SOVA Director



While the overall human rights situation in Russia deteriorated, the SOVA/IPHR project achieved some tangible results:

- SOVA provided over 100 free legal consultations to victims of violations of the freedoms of religion, assembly and expression to enable them to pursue their cases in the courts.
- SOVA engaged in more than 20 domestic litigation cases related to the persecution of religious minorities including the prohibition of missionary activities and public religious events.
- Over 30 articles were published in different media outlets covering the work under the joint project.
- The number of followers of the Facebook "Faces of Faith" campaign page has been steadily growing through 2016 and has reached over 1000 likes.



For more information about IPHR's work on Russia, including publications see: <http://iphronline.org/about/where-we-work/russia>

Networking

Overview of our work

Throughout 2016 IPHR continued its collaboration with networks of civil society organizations that work on human rights issues in different countries. In particular, IPHR was actively engaged in the Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP) and the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN).

CIVIC SOLIDARITY PLATFORM

The CSP is a decentralized network of over 80 human rights NGOs from the OSCE region. It was established for the purpose of strengthening mutual support and solidarity among civil society actors and influencing human rights policies at the national and international levels. IPHR coordinates some of the core activities of the CSP and plays a leading role in its advocacy work.

Highlighted activities

CSP annual coordination meeting

IPHR organized the CSP's annual coordination meeting in Warsaw in September 2016, where CSP members discussed priorities and adopted a revised CSP strategy for the period 2017-2019.

"Ever since Switzerland chaired the OSCE in 2014, IPHR and swisspeace have been working together in the OSCE-wide NGO-network CSP. Our common goal is to make civil society voices heard through organizing workshops and conferences aimed at improving the implementation of OSCE commitments and showing that 'comprehensive security' can only be achieved when as much consideration is given to the 'human dimension' as the 'politico-military dimension' and the 'economic and environmental dimension'. In order to further strengthen civil society engagement in the framework of the OSCE, IPHR and swisspeace plan to continue supporting the institutional development of the CSP and ensure that it is able to meet current and future challenges in the OSCE region."



Natascha Cerny, swisspeace

OSCE parallel civil society conference

In cooperation with other CSP members, IPHR coordinated the seventh Parallel Civil Society Conference held on the eve of the annual OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Hamburg in December 2016. The conference was attended by over 120 civil society representatives from 35 countries in the OSCE region. The conference participants adopted a set of recommendations to OSCE participating States, institutions and field offices pertaining to alarming human rights trends in the OSCE region, as well as the "Hamburg Declaration on Protecting and Expanding Civil Society Space", which encourages OSCE bodies and institutions to develop effective mechanisms for protecting and expanding civil society space. The outcome documents were presented at the closing session of the conference, which was attended by OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Austrian Deputy Foreign Minister Michael Linhart from the incoming 2017 OSCE Chairmanship, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatovic and First Deputy Director Katrazyna Jarosiecicz-Wargan from the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).



"2016 has probably been the worst year I can remember in terms of the crackdown on fundamental rights and freedoms [...], not only in the post-Soviet countries, but also in Central Europe, in Turkey (very much so) and, unfortunately, in many of the so-called old democracies to the West of Vienna [...] Therefore, we expect, or rather demand, more active responses by OSCE participating States, as well as OSCE political bodies and institutions, - not just expressions of concern or disappointment, but real intervention on a broad range of human rights issues."

Yuri Dzhibladze,
Center for Democracy and Human Rights

OSCE advocacy

During the annual OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) that took place in Warsaw in September 2016, IPHR and other CSP members engaged in advocacy and networking activities, delivered oral interventions at the HDIM plenary and organized several side events.

At the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Hamburg in December 2016, IPHR facilitated several meetings between civil society representatives and high-ranking officials from OSCE participating States.



Fact-finding, trial monitoring and election observation missions

Together with other CSP members, IPHR carried out fact-finding missions to Armenia and Ukraine, an election observation mission to Georgia, as well as a trial monitoring mission to Kyrgyzstan. The findings of these missions were used as the basis for publications and follow-up advocacy.

Awareness-raising and solidarity campaigns

Together with other CSP members, IPHR issued joint appeals and organized awareness-raising and solidarity campaigns to draw attention to human rights violations and human rights defenders at risk in Azerbaijan, Crimea, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Poland and elsewhere. IPHR was also involved in efforts to improve the external communication work of the CSP. This included increased social media presence, in particular during the OSCE HDIM and the Parallel Civil Society Conference.

Impact of our work

The 2016 Parallel Civil Society Conference outcome documents, in particular the Hamburg Declaration on Protecting and Expanding Civil Society Space **attracted attention** and support from the OSCE representatives and participating States. Both German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and ODIHR Director Michael Georg Link called for implementation of the Hamburg Declaration and 42 OSCE participating States adopted a **joint statement** in support of human rights defenders in the OSCE region, with reference to this declaration.



"I encourage OSCE participating States to seriously consider the Hamburg Declaration, which outlines many important actions to safeguard human rights defenders from restrictions contrary to OSCE commitments."

Michael Georg Link,
ODIHR Director *in a statement made in Hamburg on 9 December 2016*

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY NETWORK (HRDN)

The HRDN is an informal group of 50 NGOs operating at the EU level in the areas of human rights, democracy and peace. It aims to influence the human rights policies of the EU and the EU member states. IPHR is engaged in coordinated advocacy initiatives within this network and its advocacy manager Tinatin Tsertsvadze is a member of the managerial troika of the network.

Highlighted activities

EU advocacy

In November 2015, the HRDN launched the year-long "Stand 4 Human Rights Defenders" campaign, which aimed at promoting constructive dialogue between civil society and EU actors on improving the effectiveness of the EU's work in support of human rights defenders. As part of this campaign, IPHR monitored and documented EU public statements on individual cases of persecution of human rights defenders.

IPHR's advocacy manager also played a leading role in organizing the annual EU-NGO Human Rights Forum on behalf of the HRDN in close cooperation with the EEAS. The topic of the forum, which was held in Brussels in December 2016, was "United against all forms of torture: Applying a cross-cutting perspective to prevent, prohibit, and redress torture globally". IPHR facilitated the participation of a number of representatives of its Central Asian partners in the forum. Additionally, IPHR Director Brigitte Dufour delivered a speech at the forum, addressing the topic of torture and ill-treatment in the context of today's foreign and domestic security agenda.

Impact of our work

Advocacy carried out as part of the HRDN's Human Rights Defenders campaign helped ensure that the EEAS issued a number of strong statements on the cases of persecution of human rights defenders in Eurasia, which is the region that IPHR and its partners work on. This was particularly important given the current trend of narrowing civil society space in this region.

"In the current climate of a global trend of increasing threats to human rights and shrinking civic space, the work and advocacy carried out by networks such as the HRDN is more valuable than ever. Networks of NGOs can have a much stronger impact than individual NGOs in countering the global backlash against universal human rights values. It is a great honour and responsibility for me to be part of the managerial troika of the HRDN, to handle the day-to-day management of this network, but also to coordinate its advocacy and policy work."

Tinatin Tsertsvadze, IPHR



Our team

In 2016, IPHR's team was made up of the following staff members and regularly contributing consultants.



Brigitte Dufour

Director

Brigitte is responsible for overseeing the management and operations of the organization, representing it in international fora, and taking the lead on fundraising and programme and partnership development.



**Simon
Papuashvili**

Project Manager

Simon is responsible for overseeing projects implemented in cooperation with partner groups. Simon manages projects involving Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the South Caucasus.



**Tinatin
Tsertsvadze**

**International
Advocacy Manager**

Tinatin is responsible for contacts with EU institutions, monitoring EU policies towards Eastern Partnership and Central Asian countries and coordinating advocacy actions.



**Tarana
Akhmadova**

**Administration and
Finance Manager**

Tarana is responsible for administrative & financial support and overseeing the day-to-day operations and staff administration.



**Svetlana
Kniazeva**

Project Assistant

Svetlana assists with project administration and co-ordination.



Ann-Sofie Nyman

Anne Sunder Plassmann

Rachel Bugler

Svitlana Valko

Maryna Zastavna

Nataliya Novakova

Research and Publications

Research and Publications

Research and Publications

Field mission co-ordinator, Ukraine

Communications consultant

Project Officer

Ann-Sofie works on research and publications together with partner groups. Currently she is responsible for publications work on fundamental rights together with Central Asian partners.

Anne works on research and publications together with partner groups of the organization. She is currently responsible for IPHR's publications work on the Central Asia anti-torture project.

Rachel works on research and publications together with partner groups. She is responsible for IPHR's publications work on Uzbekistan.

Svitlana coordinates IPHR project on documenting war crimes and crimes against humanity in the zone of armed conflict in eastern Ukraine and Crimea.

Maryna is responsible for IPHR's social media and for design and layout of publications.

Nataliya works on freedom of religion and belief.

IPHR would like to thank the interns, volunteers, pro-bono lawyers and others who contributed their time and expertise to supporting our work in 2016. Special thanks go to members of the field missions in Ukraine.

Our board

IPHR is governed by a board of directors, who oversee the strategic direction and operations of the organization.



Josée-Anne Simard

is Secretary of IPHR's Board of Directors.



Marie-Hélène Côté

is a member of IPHR's Board of Directors and the organization's Treasurer.



Jacqueline Hale

is a member of IPHR's Board of Directors.

For more information on staff members, consultants and board members see: <http://iphronline.org/about/team-members>.

IPHR International
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for Human Rights

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and many more...

