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Highlight of FIDH activities

Istanbul hosts FIDH 38th Congress



From 23rd to 27th May, Istanbul will be, for one week, the world's human rights capital. FIDH 38th World Congress will be exceptional with the participation of more than 200 NGOs, including FIDH's 164 member organizations and local civil society organizations.

The International Criminal Court's President and Chief Prosecutor will both participate in this event as well as eminent human rights defenders from all over the world. FIDH Asian member organizations will represent Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Tibet and Vietnam.

A major international event taking place every three years, FIDH Congress will this time focus on "Political transition and human rights: experiences and challenges", which is a relevant issue for Turkey in its current situation. On April 24th, FIDH delivered a letter to the Turkish Prime Minister, Mr. Erdogan, calling on him to implement eight key measures for Turkey to comply with its international human rights obligations. To read the letter as well as the program of FIDH congress, please visit: <http://www.fidh.org/istanbul-hosts-the-38th-fidh-congress-13192>.

KontraS and CLB

Two FIDH new partners in Asia, the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (KontraS), and China Labour Bulletin (CLB), will be present in Istanbul.

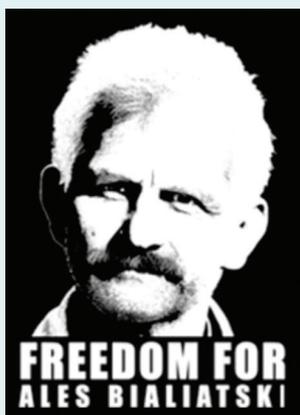


KontraS is a nation wide human rights NGO based in Jakarta, Indonesia. The NGO was founded on March 20th, 1998, by activists and organizations that initially wanted to seek justice for many cases of forced disappearances in Indonesia. FIDH and KontraS, jointly with another Indonesian partner, Imparsial, published a report in 2011, "Shadows and Clouds: Human Rights in Indonesia—Shady Legacy, Uncertain Future". From 18 to 24 May, KontraS will attend, in collaboration with FIDH, a hearing at the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission in Washington DC.



CLB is a Hong Kong-based organization, that promotes and defends workers' rights in the People's Republic of China (PRC). It was founded in 1994 by labour activist Han Dongfang, and advocates for stronger protection for the rights of Chinese workers, supporting the development of democratically-run trade unions, encouraging respect for and enforcement of the PRC's labour law, as well as the full participation of workers in the creation of civil society. In May, FIDH released, in partnership in CLB, a report on labour rights in China (see page 9).

Continued solidarity with Ales Bialiatski...



Ales Bialiatski, FIDH Vice President and Chairman of the Human Rights Center "Viasna" is sadly still imprisoned by the Belarusian authorities on trumped-up and politically motivated charges. Since the beginning of his detention on August 4th, 2011, his case has become a strong symbol of the constant persecution of human rights defenders and other civil society representatives in Belarus. Last December, FIDH President Souhayr Belhassen dedicated FIDH 90th anniversary to Ales and to 25 other human rights defenders working for FIDH member organizations, who are currently detained over the world.

For more information on the campaign for Ales' release, please visit: <http://freeales.fidh.net>



Nabeel Rajab

... and solidarity with Nabeel Rajab

Nabeel Rajab, Deputy Secretary General of FIDH, President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) and Director of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), has been arbitrarily detained since July 9, 2012 for his tireless efforts at highlighting gross human rights violations in Bahrain. FIDH has been actively campaigning for his and other Bahraini political prisoners' release.

For more information on the campaign, please visit: <http://freedom-in-bahrain.tumblr.com>

Focus: Elections, human rights and transition in Asia

In 2013, several Asian countries will go through key parliamentary and presidential elections, expected to represent turning points in the process of political transition. These include Iran, Malaysia, Maldives and Pakistan. In Bangladesh and Afghanistan, all parties are preparing for crucial elections due in 2014. In the light of FIDH 38th Congress, this issue's focus presents the position of FIDH and its partners, with the intention to draw attention to human rights violations that continue to obstruct an effective transition in three specific countries.

Pakistan: urging for free and fair elections

FIDH and HRCP published six key recommendations to the future Government of Pakistan, ahead of the May 11th general elections that represented the first ever democratic transition between two elected civilian governments in the country. Both organizations urged authorities to take the necessary steps to guarantee free and fair elections in the country, in a context marked by numerous attacks, including against non-religious political parties.

Although significant democratic reforms were undertaken over the past five years, the human rights situation has greatly deteriorated and no progress has been made to reinforce the rule of law in Pakistan. Incidents of violence and intolerance against ethnic and religious minorities have sky-rocketed, displaying the failure on the part of the authorities to protect vulnerable groups, including Muslim and non-Muslim minorities. Summary executions, torture and enforced disappearance have remained widespread, in clear violation of Pakistan's international obligations. Women have continued to be the victims of widespread discrimination and violence across the country. In addition, human rights defenders have been increasingly threatened by non-State actors and Pakistan ranks third most dangerous country for journalists.

To read the full document: <http://www.fidh.org/human-rights-in-pakistan-six-recommendations-ahead-of-the-elections-13211>



Pakistani women still have limited access to polling stations

Maldives: FIDH and the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) raise their concerns at the occasion of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) meeting in London on 26 April



Demonstration in February 2012 in Male' calling for early elections

Less than six months before the presidential elections in the Maldives, FIDH and the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) jointly declared there were clear signs indicating that the coalition government in power since the controversial change of power of February 2012, had failed to set the conditions for free and fair elections in which all parties and leaders are able freely to conduct election campaigns. The systematic denial of political space, including the detention of political leaders and the restrictions of freedom of association, assembly and expression, have continued to characterise the country.

Concerns regarding police brutality and impunity have been raised by the Human Rights Commission of the the Maldives (HRCM), the Police Integrity Commission (PIC), as well as civil society groups such as MDN. In addition, during its

mission to Maldives in August 2012, FIDH was able to witness first hand the influence of fundamentalist groups on rights of women, who continue to suffer from the absence of a strong legal framework. While welcoming the decision of the CMAG to keep monitoring the situation in the Maldives at its meeting in New York on 28 September 2012, FIDH and MDN recommended that clear benchmarks representing the view of all parties should be defined and acted upon in order to ensure that the transition process remains meaningful and supportive to human rights and democratic values defended by the Commonwealth.

FIDH and MDN called on the CMAG to raise the aforementioned concerns regarding human rights situation in the Maldives, and request to Maldivian authorities to take all necessary measure to prevent violence, respect the due process of law and prevent arbitrary arrests. FIDH/MDN briefing paper available at: <http://www.fidh.org/human-rights-in-the-maldives-situation-update-at-the-occasion-of-the-next-13182>

Elections in Malaysia: violence against migrants is not acceptable

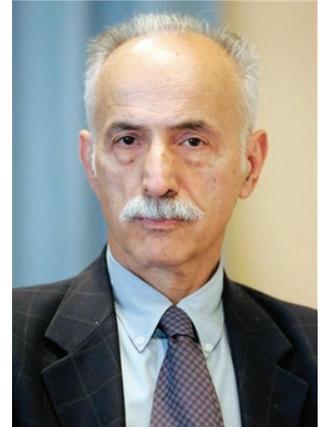
Nalini Elumalai, executive director of Suaram, condemned all acts of intimidation and violence targeted at any community, including migrants, on May 5th, day of Malaysia 13th general election. “In our fight to achieve clean and fair elections for the betterment of our country, we must not resort to violence and intimidation as a means”, she declared in a joint statement with Ivy Josiah, executive director of the Women’s Aid Organisation.

Elections in Iran

Interview with Karim Lahidji, FIDH vice-president and president of the Iranian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LDDHI)

FIDH: The United Nations Human Rights Council renewed in March the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran. What does this mean?

Karim Lahidji: For many years the human rights situation in Iran has been on the agenda of the General Assembly and other UN bodies, because of the ongoing systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country. However, the constant degradation of human rights in Iran made the mission of the Special Rapporteur – appointed in 2011 – crucial. For the victims of human rights violations, for their families and even for ourselves, the Special Rapporteur represents the only way to press the Iranian authorities to abandon its policy of repression. The renewal of the mandate of the UN Human Rights Council was in this sense a strong signal.



Karim Lahidji

FIDH: FIDH and LDDHI published a list of human rights defenders currently imprisoned as a result of their activities. What is the situation of human rights defenders in Iran today?

KL: Iran is one of the largest prisons in the world for human rights defenders. Since 2009 and the repression following the protests against the presidential election's results, many defenders, lawyers and journalists have been arrested, subjected to unfair trials and imprisoned to prevent them from acting. Ten lawyers, around thirty journalists and dozen of Iranian civil society activists are currently in prison. Nasrin Sotoudeh, Abdolfattah Soltani, Mohammade Seyfzadeh and Mohammad Ali Dadkhah were sentenced to prison terms of between 6 to 11 years for having provided legal defence to political prisoners. In this context, what margin of action is there today for human rights defenders? Repression is systematic in the country and the people committed to defending human rights of Iranians have no other choice but persecution or exile.

FIDH: The penal policy, and particularly the reasons for convictions and executions, are major concerns expressed by civil society organizations. Which have been the recent trends in this regard?

KL: The Islamic Penal Code, dating from 1991, has recently been the object of a series of changes, which are not yet put in practice. This reform was a major missed opportunity. Despite repeated recommendations of various UN bodies, by many states in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review as well as several NGOs, the new code remains one of the most “generous” with regard to the application of the death penalty. The death penalty is used and enforced not only for common crimes, but also for crimes of opinion, for drug trafficking or for violations of “public decency”. Iran has not put an end to the execution of minors. As a result, over the last 5 years, 500 to 600 people at the very least have been executed annually in Iran.

FIDH: The next presidential elections are scheduled in June. The 2009 elections were followed by demonstrations resulting in an increased crackdown on freedoms of assembly, association and expression, as well as in the arrest of several candidates, including MM. Mousavi and Karoubi. What is the status of political freedom in Iran on the eve of the elections?

KL: The already critical situation has further deteriorated in recent months. Hundreds of people arrested right after the peaceful demonstrations in 2009, are still behind bars. MM. Karroubi and Mousavi and his wife has been under house arrest for 2 years. FIDH and LDDHI obtained from the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention the confirmation of the arbitrary nature of these detentions and calls for their immediate release. Lately the pressure on the media has intensified and twenty journalists were arrested for having contacts with foreign media. In short, on the eve of the elections, all possible means of pressure and intimidation are used to prevent events like the 2009 demonstrations from occurring once again.

International justice and fundamental freedoms

The Afghan government and the international community must reinvigorate their engagement to protect human rights in Afghanistan

On March 19th, 2013, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2096 renewing the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) until March 2014. Following the resolution, FIDH and Armanshahr Foundation/OPEN ASIA welcomed this mandate renewal, but urged the Afghan government and the United Nations, to take all necessary measures to safeguard democratic achievements and protect human rights in the country. The human rights situation in Afghanistan is extremely worrisome. In addition to its inability to protect the population from countless human rights violations, until now the Afghan government has been unable to effectively establish the rule of law and eradicate corruption. As the time of the presidential elections nears as well as the withdrawal of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in 2014, the Human Rights Council and other United Nations bodies must send a clear message to the international community to remain actively engaged in Afghanistan. The UN Human Rights Council should consider the establishment of an independent mechanism that would monitor the human rights situation and provide technical assistance to the Afghan government in order to strengthen the rule of law in the country. To read FIDH/Armanshahr-OPEN ASIA briefer: <http://www.fidh.org/The-Afghan-government-and-the-13068>

First-ever International Women's Film Festival in Afghanistan

FIDH supported the first-ever International Women's Film Festival in Afghanistan, which took place from 7th to 9th March in Herat. The festival was initiated by Armanshahr Foundation and Roya Film House, with the support of 40 human rights and women's organizations and media partners. It was held at the Herat Citadel, also known as the Citadel of Alexander, in North-West Afghanistan.

"The cinema is a powerful medium to raise awareness on problems people face on a daily basis, sometimes without seeing them. This festival, organized in a context full of risks and challenges for women, heralds a breakthrough in today's Afghanistan"

Guissou Jahangiri, Executive Director of Armanshahr Foundation, FIDH's member organization in Afghanistan.



Guissou Jahangiri

We are all Vietnamese bloggers!

FIDH and the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights have documented over the years numerous violations of the rights to freedom of expression or opinion in Vietnam. In a joint report, entitled “Bloggers and netizens behind the bars”, released in January, both organizations documented the violations and the harsh forms of punishment Internet users face in the country.

FIDH/VCHR 42-page report highlighted the Internet as an increasingly popular source of independent news and a platform for civic activism in Vietnam. Millions of blogs have sprung up recently and human rights defenders, online journalists and dissidents increasingly resort to the Internet to voice their political opinions, expose corruption, and draw attention to land-grabbing and other official abuses of power. At the same time, Internet users in Vietnam also face long-standing restrictive legislation, policies and practices, while the government has intensified its crackdown on freedom of expression, both online and offline. While actively promoting the expansion of Internet access in order to support economic development, the Vietnamese Communist Party also perceives the web and its blogs as potential threats to its political monopoly.

In September 2012, the assault on Internet freedom was taken to a new height when the Vietnamese Prime Minister himself issued an order to punish critics of the Party and of the government. The three bloggers Nguyen Van Hai (aka Dieu Cay), Ms. Ta Phong Tan and Phan Thanh Hai Van Hai, founders of the Club of Free Journalists, were sentenced respectively to twelve, ten and four years for “circulating propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam”. Their detention caused widespread international outcry as well as tragic consequences in Vietnam. The Vietnamese crackdown on Internet freedom, intensifying censorship, arrest and harassment of “netizens” are clear violations of Vietnam international human rights obligations. FIDH and VCHR called on the Government of Vietnam, as well as the international community, including ASEAN, the EU and the UN to end, prevent and redress all human rights violations affecting freedom of expression and opinion.

FIDH/VCHR report available at: <http://www.fidh.org/Bloggers-and-Netizens-Behind-Bars-12866>.



A policeman trying to stop a journalist from taking photos during the trial of a blogger in Ho Chi Minh, August 2011

FIDH/VCHR Thunderclap campaign for vietnamese bloggers

Nguyen Van Hai

Thư Cuối Năm

Aka Dieu Cay

With passion, patriotism and a will to serve our country, we vow to work alongside the people, especially those who are poorest and most in need. We are committed to objectivity and not motivated by profit. However, reflecting the truth is a difficult and often very dangerous task in Vietnam.

We are constantly confronted by forces bent on stifling our voices. We are regularly harassed, molested, threatened, slandered and even physically assaulted in broad daylight. Such treatment is illegal. As citizens of Vietnam, we pledge to denounce these anti-constitutional and unlawful deeds.

We appeal for the support of all those who have a conscience and who care about the destiny of their country and people.

We promise to do our utmost to uphold freedom of expression and ensure that the truth is fully exposed.

Go to,
<http://www.fidh.org/We-Are-All-Vietnamese-Bloggers-12831>

Blog of Nguyen Van Hai
(aka Dieu Cay)



The hidden face of Taiwan: lessons learnt from the ICCPR/ICESCR review process

In a joint report entitled “The hidden face of Taiwan: lessons learnt from the ICCPR/ICESCR review process” published in April, FIDH and Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR) highlighted the most pressing human rights issues to be dealt with by the Government of Taiwan to comply with international human rights standards.

Since the end of Martial Law in 1987, Taiwan undertook numerous legislative reforms, among which the remarkable ratification in 2009 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), signed in 1967, prior to its exclusion from the United Nations in 1971. Although progress has undoubtedly occurred in Taiwan, there remain major shortcomings opposing domestic laws, policies and regulations to international human rights standards.

From 25th February to 1st March 2013, a ten-member expert committee visited Taiwan to assess Taiwan’s compliance with the self-ratification of both ICCPR and ICESCR. Prior to this visit, FIDH and TAHR organised a joint mission in Taiwan from 5th to 14th November 2012 to assess the human rights situation in the country and the government’s on-going efforts to address core human rights challenges highlighted in its initial report. In addition to the critical issue of capital punishment, FIDH and TAHR documented serious human rights violations in the country, resulting from the pursuit of rapid economic expansion. Land expropriation in both rural and urban areas, lack of concern for environmental rights, violations of migrant workers’ rights and the persistent marginalisation of indigenous peoples continue to take place.

FIDH/TAHR report available at: <http://www.fidh.org/the-hidden-face-of-taiwan-lessons-learnt-from-the-iccpr-icescr-review-13175>



Assembly hall of the Control Yuan



Panel of international experts



FIDH/TAHR meeting with representatives from autochthonous communities

Chinese workers in the global supply chain

Last November, FIDH sent a mission to Hong Kong and China's Guangdong Province, within the framework of FIDH's cooperation with the international retailer Carrefour. The resulting report, published in partnership with China Labour Bulletin and entitled "China's workers calling for change. Which role for brands?", aimed to give an overview of the current challenges regarding labour rights in China, and to identify measures that international brands can implement to contribute to improving the situation on the ground in accordance with their responsibility to respect human rights in their supply chains.

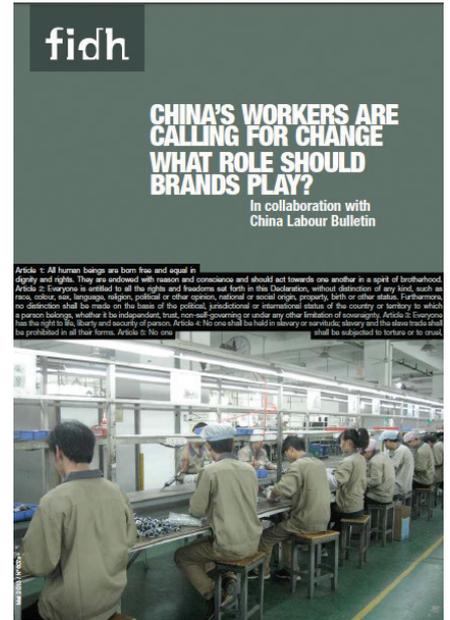
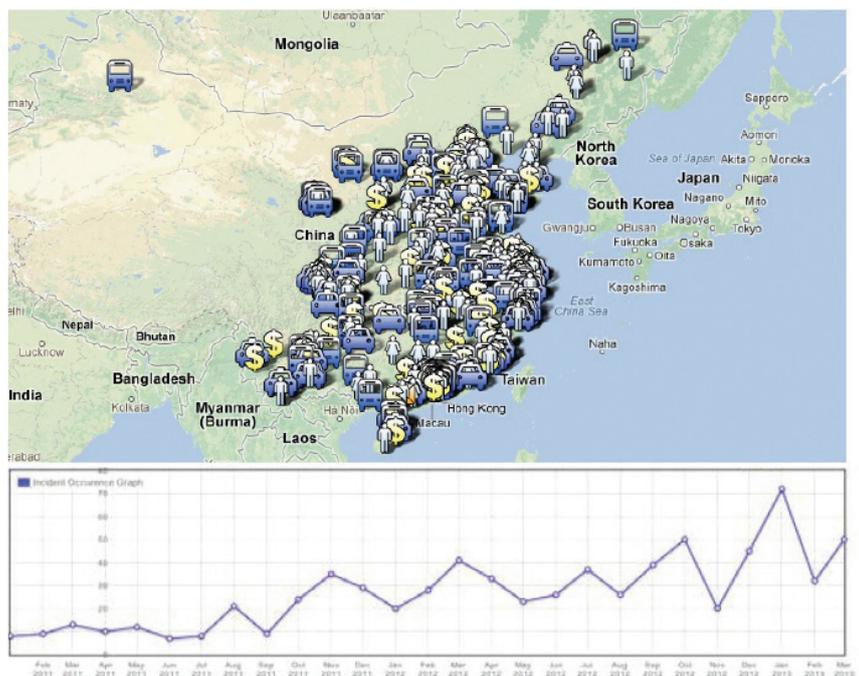
Cooperation between FIDH and Carrefour, which relates to the supply chain only, was initiated in 1998. Since then, it has enabled FIDH to visit any supplier of the corporate group (including in China, Bangladesh, India or Spain) and to make recommendations on the improvement of human rights. During its recent mission to China, FIDH visited five factories supplying Carrefour in Shenzhen, Foshan, Dongguan, and Huizhou (Guangdong province), where social audits documented persistent problems concerning overtime work. In at least three of these, the management said that they had faced a reduction in orders from customers. In addition, Chinese factories are trying to reduce their workforce by increasing automation and international buyers tend to progressively shift part of their sourcing from China to countries offering cheaper labour. This shift is worrying where social and environmental issues are not taken into account, as it then represents a race-to-the-bottom.

Despite significant improvements in the legislative framework, especially concerning working hours, labour contracts and social security, wages remain largely inadequate in light of soaring prices. Migrant workers originating from China's rural areas thus accept long working hours that infringe local labour laws which limit daily working time to 8 hours, and overtime to 36 hours per month. In factories visited by FIDH, staff worked between 60 and 80 hours per week.

Workers have little leeway to enforce their rights. The only authorized Chinese union (the All China Federation of Trade Unions - ACFTU), an arm of the Communist Party, focuses more on maintaining social stability than defending workers. Social audits do not allow for the advancement of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. As a result, social conflicts have increased dramatically in China over the last ten years. In some cases, mobilisation, including through strikes, has allowed workers to secure tangible improvements in wages and social benefits, and sometimes even in workers' representation. Workers communicate increasingly via social networks and mobile phones thus multiplying their capacity for action. Younger generations also increasingly refuse to endure the same working conditions as their parents.

To access FIDH China page and read FIDH report on labour rights in China (published in collaboration with China Labour Bulletin): <http://fidh.org/-China,227->

-  Wage Arrears
-  Majority Male
-  Majority Female
-  Taxi Strike
-  Bus Strike
-  Shipping Industry Strike
-  Railroad Strike



CLB map of strikes for the year 2012, available at: <http://www.numble.com/PHP/clbmap.html>

International and regional human rights mechanisms

FIDH/Altsean-Burma mission to Burma: the country is not ready for rights-compliant investment

A team representing FIDH and its member organization Altsean-Burma visited Burma last February, in order to meet with stakeholders from across the country, including affected communities, human rights defenders, legal practitioners, and labour activists, and to conduct a two-day training for civil society groups on business and human rights, jointly with Burma Partnership. Fifty human rights defenders from different regions joined the training.. Based on its interviews, meetings, and other interactions and considering the current reforms and re-engagement of the international community, FIDH and Altsean-Burma concluded that the country continues to lack the legal and institutional framework necessary in order to allow responsible investment.

Burma remains plagued by widespread corruption and impunity, which prevents the effective implementation of the rights of individuals and communities affected by business operations in the country. In addition, ongoing human rights abuses related to land, labour, access to justice, and freedom of expression and assembly continue. In this environment, the engagement of foreign companies is serving to compound, either directly or indirectly, the ongoing human rights abuses in the country.

FIDH and Altsean-Burma do not support the European Union's Council conclusions on Burma/Myanmar adopted on 22nd April 2013, which lifted sanctions against the regime. While the resolution reiterated the need for European companies to conduct any activities in Burma in accordance with the UNGPs and OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, FIDH and Altsean-Burma consider these insufficient to overcome the structural flaws that are obstacles to businesses' abilities to respect human rights through their operations. Thus, both organizations demand that the international community steps up efforts to ensure that the Government of Myanmar effectively implements reforms, in particular, protection of civilians from human rights violations and access to remedy.

Full document: <http://www.fidh.org/lifting-eu-sanctions-will-unlikely-lead-to-an-improved-human-rights-13187>



“Lifting sanctions completely when there have not been any clear reforms to stop impunity and violence in Burma, essentially means that there will be more violations”.

Debbie Stothard, FIDH Deputy Secretary General and Coordinator of Altsean-Burma

Establishment of a UN Commission of Inquiry in North Korea

FIDH, as a member of the International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK) welcomed on March 22, 2013 the establishment of a special UN Commission of Inquiry to examine human rights abuses in North Korea by the UN Human Rights Council at its 22nd session.

The UN appointed on May 7th two independent experts of significant stature to join the Special Rapporteur Marzuki Darusman in carrying out an in-depth investigation of human rights violations committed by the North Korean government. As defined by the resolution on North Korea, the commission will have a mandate to “investigate all systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.” The

commission will report to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, and will be tasked to examine the issue of accountability for any crimes against humanity and other rights violations it finds.

The commission will give all the victims of human rights abuses in North Korea an opportunity to ensure their voices, and their experiences, reach decision-makers in the UN and the international arena. In this way, it will serve as an entry point to ensure that North Korea’s human rights record – and the issue of accountability - will be increasingly placed at the core of the international community’s approach vis-à-vis North Korea.



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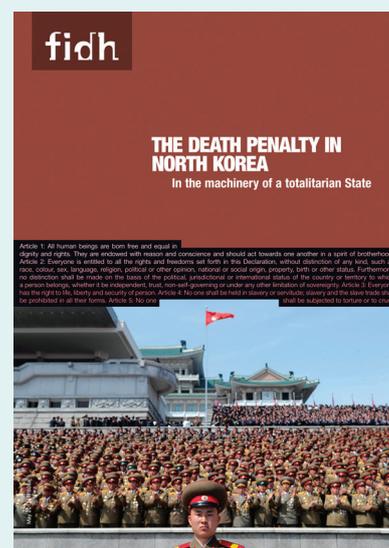
Drawing of a public execution

A report on the death penalty in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

In a report entitled “The death penalty in North Korea: in the machinery of a totalitarian State”, FIDH called on the North Korean government to immediately put an end to all executions and to establish a moratorium on the death penalty as a first step towards abolition. FIDH urged UN Member States to call upon North Korea to improve the overall human rights situation in the country.

Last December, FIDH organized a fact-finding mission to investigate the application of the death penalty in North Korea, just one year after the death of the North Korean Supreme Leader, Kim Jong-il. Given that human rights organizations have never had no access to the country, FIDH collected testimonies from North Korean witnesses now living in South Korea, as well as human rights NGOs and government representatives from the Republic of Korea monitoring the human rights situation in North Korea. North Korea is among the 58 countries in the world that retain the death penalty, and one of the only 21 countries still reportedly carrying out executions in 2012. The death penalty is a violation of the right to life. In North Korea, the death penalty has consistently been used as a tool for social order and political control. Testimonies of the systematic use of extra-judicial mechanisms, summary process and arbitrary applications, lead FIDH to conclude that it is applied in a way that is an arbitrary deprivation of life. Moreover, the death penalty in the DPRK is interlinked with other systematic and widespread human rights violations, including torture, arbitrary detention and violations of fundamental rights and freedoms.

To access FIDH page on North Korea and read FIDH report on the death penalty in North Korea: available at: <http://fidh.org/-North-Korea->



Japan's CAT review

In April, FIDH and the Center for Prisoners' Rights (CPR) made a joint submission on the application of the death penalty in Japan to the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT). Since Japan's CAT review in 2007, the country has executed 45 people, including one woman. The latest executions took place on April 26th.

According to FIDH and CPR, the fundamental rights of death row inmates in Japan remain clearly violated. In order to maintain a so-called "peace of mind" (as stipulated in Article 32 of Japanese Penal Law), death row prisoners are separated from the other prisoners, which makes contacts with people outside particularly difficult. In addition, death row inmates are not informed of the date and time of execution until just an hour before it actually takes place. This inhuman treatment deprives them of the opportunities to challenge the legitimacy of executions. In addition, the Japanese government has failed to establish a review mechanism to identify death row inmates who may be suffering from mental illness. As a result, although the Code of Criminal Procedure prohibits the execution of an inmate in a state of insanity, Japanese government has continued to execute those who suffered mental illness. FIDH and CPR have repeatedly urged the Government of Japan consider the abolition of death penalty, in line with international trends.

FIDH/CPR joint submission available at: <http://www.fidh.org/submission-to-the-committee-against-torture-13177>

Iran: FIDH and LDDHI raise concerns about serious violations of labour rights at the occasion of the 50th CESCR session



Protests in Iran

At the occasion of the review of Iran's second State report by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights (CESCR) on 30 April, during its 50th session, FIDH and LDDHI made a joint submission to outline, outlining the progressive deterioration of social and economic situation in Iran, which directly impacts on the living conditions of the Iranian population.

On a worrying background characterized by increasing unemployment and inflation rates, discrimination remains pervasive in all fields related to labour, both in law and in practice, in Iran. Various policies marginalize women in blatant contradiction with the universal principle of equality between women and men. Afghan migrant workers suffer from racism and are blamed for unemployment. Discrimination at work on the ground of religion or ethnicity remain widespread while activists and their relatives are victims of discrimination and persecution at work as a consequence of their political opinions. These serious violations of labour rights are further compounded by extremely repressive policies in the field of freedom of opinion, expression, association and assembly, as well as a total absence of effective judicial remedies.

FIDH and LDDHI noted that Iran has failed, since its first report was examined in 1993, to act upon the recommendations of the CESCR. Besides, Iran has not heeded the recommendations made by other treaty bodies, which asked to amend the discriminatory and restrictive provisions of its Constitution as well as other discriminatory laws such as the Civil Code, the Labour Code, the Selection Law and others. Relevant laws and regulations in Iran remain discriminatory and restrictive.

FIDH/LDDHI reports available at: <http://fidh.org/-Iran,228->



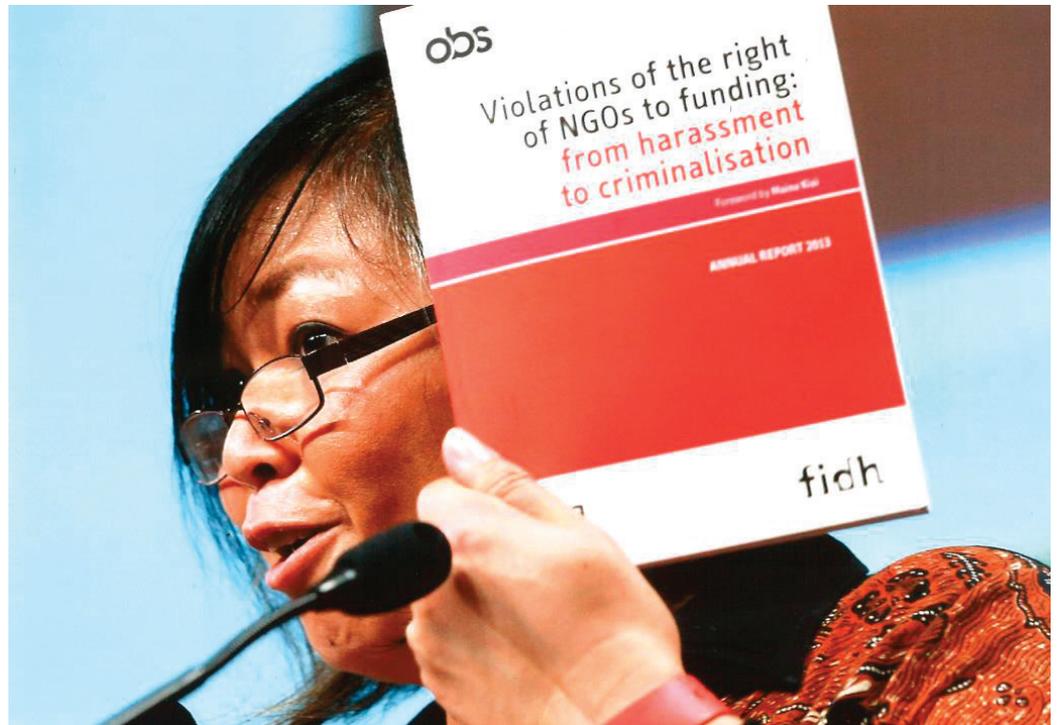
Mine workers

Human Rights Defenders

OBS annual report 2013: focus on NGO funding

In February, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders – a joint programme between FIDH and the World Organization against Torture (OMCT) - published its annual report, focusing on obstacles impeding access to funding for NGOs. Access to funding, in particular foreign funding, is increasingly being hindered by governments, whose primary intentions are to silence human rights defenders.

Restrictions on the right to funding are less visible than other forms of human rights abuses, and therefore are less likely to incite international condemnation. On the contrary, the capacity of an NGOs to obtain funds pre-supposes that these entities exist, and therefore that freedom of association is respected. Funding restrictions represent a clear violation of the right to freedom of association, enshrined in ICCPR Article 22 and UDHR article 5.



Presentation of the OBS report at EIDHR conference in Brussels, April 2013

Restrictions on Asian NGOs

The report provides a global review of the violations by various States in Asia. In Burma, the process of registration for NGOs is unclear, extremely long and prohibitively expensive. In Bangladesh, NGOs cannot receive foreign funding without governmental approval and in many cases, excessive delays in obtaining authorisations obstruct their activities. In India, NGOs have similar problems, as prior authorisation to receive foreign grants is mandatory, subject to renewal, and refused for certain activities. Some States also use the theory of foreign interference through NGOs funded by foreign donors, as a pretext to adopt laws restricting the work of NGOs, as in Malaysia. In this country, NGOs such as SUARAM – FIDH member organization - have been accused of being part of a “conspiracy to destabilise the government”.

Upcoming: a report on human rights defenders in Bangladesh

The Observatory will soon release a report on the situation of human rights defenders in Bangladesh. The report will be the outcome of an international fact-finding mission organized last November, and which documented the political and legal environment in which human rights defenders operate in Bangladesh. The mission also aimed to identify and assess the responsibility of the various actors responsible for violations of the freedoms of expression, assembly and association of human rights defenders in Bangladesh.

The Observatory's mission found that Bangladesh is confronted with many structural challenges hindering respect for human rights. In this regard, individuals and organisations documenting abuses affecting labour rights, environmental rights, women's rights, as well as those publicly denouncing criminal activities and corruption. Furthermore, no specific legal framework is in place in Bangladesh to facilitate or protect the activities of human rights defenders. On the contrary, the law is often used in a politicised manner to restrict freedom of expression, association and information. One emblematic case affects Mahmudur Rahman, editor of the newspaper Amar Desh, who has faced nearly 50 judicial cases under numerous charges including "defamation", "sedition" and several offences defined in the controversial Anti-Terrorism Act, for publishing a report on the alleged corruption practices of the incumbent Prime Minister and her relatives.

Newspapers and media outlets as well as NGOs continue to be particularly targeted, notably by lengthy checks and controls, delays in registration processes or hurdles in the implementation of numerous projects. In its report, the Observatory will give special attention to the state of freedom of association of trade unions and their leaders. The mission found that there are deficiencies in the labour legislation which obstruct the free exercise of trade union and labour rights. An environment of intimidation and repression effectively silence workers, which also face important legal and practical obstacles in setting up trade unions. The mission documented serious violations against labour leaders who defend, protect and promote labour rights. As human rights defenders, labour leaders such as Babul Akhter and Kalpona Akhter, have faced physical abuse and continue to be subject to judicial harassment for their labour activities. Justice has not been made more than one year after the killing of union leader Aminul Islam in April 2012.

To access FIDH page on Bangladesh: <http://fidh.org/-Bangladesh,596->

Tribute to the victims of Rana Plaza incident

FIDH joined Odhikar to express its outrage at the death of more than a thousand and one hundred factory workers, most of whom were women, following the collapse, on 24 April 2013, of a multi-storied building that had extensive, known structural damage, at Rana Plaza in Savar. The Savar incident came soon after a fire that broke out at Tazeen Garments, on 24 November 2012, killing at least 113 workers. FIDH and Odhikar requested the UN Working group on business and human rights to thoroughly look into this matter.

Calendar of recent and upcoming events

29 April:	Bangladesh Presidential Election
29 April:	Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Bangladesh, in the framework of 16 th Session of the working group from 22 April to 3 May
29 April – 17 May:	50 th session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (review of Iran)
6 May – 10 May:	12 th Meeting of AICHR, Indonesia
6 May – 31 May:	50 th session of the Committee against Torture in Geneva (review of Japan)
5 May:	Malaysian Parliamentary Election
11 May:	Pakistani General Election
13 May:	Philippine Legislative Election
21 May – 24 May:	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Pre-Sessional Working Group 51 st Session (review of China)
23 May – 27 May:	FIDH 38 th World Congress in Istanbul
27 May – 14 June:	23 rd regular session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva
14 June:	Iranian Presidential Election (First Round)
27 June:	20 th ASEAN Regional Forum, Brunei Darussalam
28 July:	Cambodian Parliamentary Election
14 August – 16 August:	Additional Meeting of AICHR, Vietnam
7 September:	Maldivian Presidential Election
17 September – 1 October:	68 th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), New York, USA
9 – 10 October:	23 rd ASEAN Summit, Brunei Darussalam
21 October- 1 November:	Universal Periodic Review (UPR) for China and Malaysia, in the framework of 17 th Session of the working group
14 November – 15 November:	11 th ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting, New Delhi, India



Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty. Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. Article 4: No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms. Article 5: No

FIDH Member Organisations in Asia

Afghanistan: Armanshahr/OPEN ASIA
Executive Director: Ms. Guissou Jahangiri
<http://armanshahr-openasia.blogspot.com>

Bangladesh: Odhikar
Secretary: Mr. Adilur Rahman Khan
<http://www.odhikar.org>

Burma: ALTSEAN-Burma
Coordinator : Ms. Debbie Stothard
<http://www.altsean.org>

Cambodia: Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
President: Mr. Thun Saray
<http://adhoc-cambodia.org>

Cambodia: Ligue Cambodienne de Defense Des Droits de l'Homme (LICADHO)
President: Dr. Chhiv Kek Pung
<http://www.licadho-cambodia.org>

China: China Labour Bulletin (CLB)
Director: Han Dongfang
<http://www.clb.org.hk>

China: Human Rights in China (HRIC)
Executive Director: Ms. Sharon Hom
<http://www.hrichina.org>

India: Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative-CHRI
Director: Ms. Maja Daruwalla
<http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org>

Indonesia: Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (KontraS)
Director: Haris Azhar
<http://www.kontras.org>

Iran: Defenders of Human Rights Center (DHRC)
President: Dr. Shirin Ebadi
<http://www.humanrights-ir.org>

Iran: Ligue Iranienne de Defense des Droits de l'Homme (LDDHI)
President: Mr. Abdol Karim Lahidji
<http://twitter.com/humanrightssiran>

Japan: Center for Prisoners' Rights (CPR)
Secretary General: Ms. Maiko Tagusari
<http://cpr.jca.apc.org>

Laos: Mouvement Laotien Pour les Droits de l'Homme (MLDH)
President : Ms. Vanida S Thephsouvanh
<http://www.mldh-lao.org>

Malaysia: Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)
Executive Director: Ms. Nalini Elumalai
<http://www.suaram.net>

Pakistan: Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)
Chairperson: Ms. Zohra Yusuf
<http://www.hrqp-web.org>

Philippines: Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA)
Chairperson: Mr. Max De Mesa
<http://www.philippinehumanrights.org>

Taiwan: Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR)
Chairperson: Mr. Chia Fan Lin
<http://www.tahr.org.tw>

Thailand: Union for Civil Liberty (UCL)
Chairperson: Mr. Danthong Breen
<http://deathpenaltythailand.blogspot.com>

Tibet: International Campaign for Tibet (ICT)
President: Ms. Mary-Beth Markey
<http://www.savetibet.org>

Vietnam: Vietnam Committee on Human Rights & Que Me: Action for Democracy in Vietnam
President: Mr. Vo Van Ai
<http://www.queme.net>

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