



ISHR NEWSLETTER

February 2019

IMPORTANT DATES

1–7 February

World Interfaith
Harmony Week

6 February

Int. Day of Zero
Tolerance to Female
Genital Mutilation

20 February

World Day of Social
Justice

CONTENTS

From the President	1
Human rights are made of times of unrest	1
From the Sections	1
<i>ISHR Germany</i>	
Assistance for refugees and IDPs living with disabilities, women and children freed from IS	1
<i>Latvia & Bosnia-Herzegovina</i>	
Aid for families in need arrives from Germany.....	2
Current Developments	3
<i>Libya</i>	
EU support drives human suffering in detention centers; 17,500 deaths in the Mediterranean since 2013	3
ISHR Events	4
<i>Cuba's Voices for Diversity</i>	
Spokesman of ISHR Germany in dialogue with Cuban civil society representatives in Berlin	4

SOCIAL JUSTICE?

The UN describes social justice as one of its underlying principles, and marked February 20 as its international day of observance. In accordance with this principle, ISHR-Germany continues to provide targeted support for women, children, people with disabilities, and vulnerable minorities living in refugee/IDP camps in Iraq (pg. 1). Unfortunately, the EU is creating grave injustice for migrants and refugees, as evidenced by the current situation in Libya (see pg. 3). Challenges to social and environmental justice are also ongoing in Cuba (pg. 4). These topics and more await you!

“Social justice is an underlying principle for peaceful and prosperous coexistence within and among nations.

We uphold the principles of social justice when we *promote gender equality* or the *rights of indigenous peoples & migrants*.

We advance social justice when we *remove barriers* that people face *because of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture or disability*”

- UN.org



Participants in ISHR-Germany’s literacy and sewing courses for women IDPs and refugees in Iraq receive their certificates. Jan. 2019

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Human rights are made of times of unrest

The International Society of Human Rights (ISHR) connects sections of human rights defenders from many countries on all continents. On December 10, 1993, on the UN Day of Human Rights, 25 Ukrainian human rights activists and members of the ISHR around the world, established the international public organization "International Society for Human Rights - Ukrainian Section" (ISHR-US). Today, the Ukrainian section has more than 3,500 members. Since 1994 to date, the central and regional ISHR-US offices provide effective legal assistance to citizens. The Board of ISHR-US manages the activities of the section in finding and implementing projects on human rights issues.

The observation of court trials always has been a vital instrument in identifying and addressing human rights issues in the justice system. The founder of ISHR-US, Dr. Andrey Sukhorukov, still personally goes to trials to observe their legality. Anastasia Alekseyeva, a lawyer and the wife of the present Executive Director of ISHR-US, as well as additional lawyers, law students, journalists, and civil society activists in different regions of the country also attend the trials. In 2018, 75 reports on trials in the Ukraine were written. The general report built on these individual reports consists of three parts: first, the identification of the negative trends in the judicial system; second, the analysis of the collected statistics; and third, short reports on monitoring of court sessions.



Former Director General of UNESCO, Mrs. Irina Georgiewa Bokowa (L), and Pietro Cardinal Parolin, the Prime Minister of the Vatican, with Thomas Schirrmacher(r.) in Abu Dhabi, Jan. 2019.

Having met the lawyers involved in writing this report, I have to underline the importance of such unbiased information about the situation in Ukraine and its value to the international community. Unbiased reports like this are an intrinsic part of European civil society and the idea of a modern democracy.

The protection of human rights defenders and lawyers is a prominent concern for the ISHR, the United Nations, and other international human rights organizations. Publicizing the work of human rights defenders often is an effective way to enhance their protection. However, lawyers seeking to protect the human rights of accused persons often face the risk of persecution by those who prefer to keep such criminal cases quiet and out of public view. It is important for human rights

organizations to sensitively balance the value of disseminating information publicly with the potential risk of exposing lawyers or other human rights defenders to physical harm.

Human rights were not hammered out by the global community for sunny weather and vacation time, but in 1948, after the most devastating war of all time. Even before then, rules for times of war, such as the Red Cross rules, set minimum standards during warfare. Thus, times of turmoil, including war, are not times to give up on human rights, but are times place even more emphasis on the fact that all human beings share the same human dignity and human rights and that the major and most honorable task of all States is to preserve them.

*Thomas Schirrmacher, Prof. Dr.
President of the International Council of the ISHR*

FROM THE SECTIONS

ISHR Germany

Assistance for refugees and IDPs living with disabilities, women and children freed from IS

From November 28 through January 10, Khalil Al-Rasho, the Director of Humanitarian to Iraq of ISHR-Germany traveled between refugee camps, health centers, and offices arranging and carrying out the distribution of targeted aid items for those displaced by conflict in his home of Kurdistan, northern Iraq.



Khalil Al-Rasho with three children who were former captives of IS.

He personally drove a donated ambulance from Germany across Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey to deliver it to the Directorate General of Health in Duhok, Kurdistan (Iraq). The ambulance, along with further donated medical equipment brought by semi-truck, will support the health center's ability to provide medical assistance to refugees living in camps throughout the region, as well as to the local population.

In addition to medical equipment, many wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, and other forms of assistance were delivered to families with disabled children or family members in refugee/IDP camp Mamrashan and various villages, including Bozan, Seje, Baadar, and Kalakchi (part of Mosul). Donated clothing and toys were also distributed to orphans living in the camp, as well as to children who had formerly been captives of

the Islamic State (IS). One example are the three children in the photo to the left, who were freed from captivity and now live with their mother in Camp Mamrashan. The ISHR-Germany provided support in the form of household goods and appliances, as well as toys and clothing for the children; these include the dolls that the girls are clutching with joy on their faces, despite their traumatizing ordeals of living under unimaginably cruel conditions at the hands of IS.

In Camp Sheikhan, plans were made to implement the upcoming training courses for refugees in firefighting, first aid, sewing, and hairstyling. Sewing machines were given to the Harikar Organisation to carry out the sewing courses in the camp. 17 bicycles were donated to each for the top achievers at school that semester (see photo to the right) and Christmas decorations were distributed to Christians living in the camp.

Of 900 displaced students from Mosul, ten of those with the least resources were selected and given \$250 of financial support by Katrin Bornmüller. Finally, 150 women who had participated in the literacy course and/or the sewing courses provided by the ISHR Germany in conjunction with the Barzani Foundation received their certificates of completion.



Children from the top of their class receive bicycles in camp Sheikhan.

Khalil Al-Rasho
Director of Humanitarian Aid to Iraq, ISHR Germany
Translated by Maya Robinson

Latvia & Bosnia-Herzegovina

Aid for families in need arrives from Germany



Semi-truck is loaded with aid in Germany, after many complications.

Since 1991, nearly 100 truckloads of aid have been sent to Latvia from the ISHR working group in Wittlich. In January of this year, the 98th transport of humanitarian aid took place to Tukums, Latvia. Unfortunately, this transport was met with several complications. The semi-truck was confirmed to arrive in Wittlich at 8:00 a.m. on the morning of January 18. The loading papers were written, Toll Collect was prepared, many volunteers came to help load the boxes full of aid items, but no trucks arrived. We were postponed hour after hour by the company in Latvia, until finally the crew dissolved.

Only Abbas Kashefy and I remained by the time a different semi-truck arrived at 12:00 p.m.; new papers had to be written and Toll Collect re-explained. Finally, on the morning of January 19, the loading was able to begin. A small crew, including the driver, helped to load the trucks. Our ladies from the IGFM working group in Wittlich prepared breakfast and made coffee. In icy cold conditions, the long semi-trailer was fully loaded. Thank you to all those who were prepared to help with loading on that beautiful Saturday. Thank you also to Roberts and Eviana Lazda, section leaders of ISHR Latvia, who coordinated the distribution of the aid items, including clothing, toys, furniture, medicine, diapers, hospital beds and more to people in need in Tukums.

The next transport of 15 tons of relief supplies was undertaken on February 2, headed to Prijedor in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Mirsad Duratovic coordinated the transport on the ground on behalf of the aid organization MDD Merhamet. The supplies will help to benefit the 700 impoverished families of all ethnic backgrounds who receive support from MDD Merhamet, some of whom have never had a bed. I thank everyone for their material as well as financial support, and of course the ISHR team for their work.



Loading of the trucks for transport to Prijedor

Katrin Bornmüller

Deputy Chairwoman of the Board, ISHR Germany

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Libya

EU support drives human suffering in detention centers; 17,500 deaths in the Mediterranean since 2013



Mural depicting the famous photo of 3 year old Alan Kurdi in Frankfurt/M, Germany. Source: Frank C. Müller, CC BY-SA 4.0

On September 2, 2015, the lifeless body of 3 year old Syrian refugee Alan Kurdi washed up on a beach in Turkey; the photo of his body became a symbol for the tremendous loss of innocent lives of those desperate enough to risk crossing the Mediterranean Sea from the Middle East or North Africa to reach Europe.

The IOM reported that from October 2013 through November 2017, over 15,000 men, women, and children have drowned in the Mediterranean in their attempt to reach Europe. These deaths total over 50% of ALL migrant or refugee deaths worldwide over the same four year period. UNHCR adds an estimate of

2,275 deaths over the course of 2018, with other estimates being even higher. To add to this horror, instead of becoming safer, this journey is only becoming more deadly; on the route from Libya to Europe, the rate of deaths rose from 1 in 38 in 2017 to 1 in 14 arrivals in 2018 (UNHCR), though the overall number of sea deaths has dropped. However, another 200 have already died in first 21 days of 2019; in total, this means around 2,500 people have drowned on this journey in the past 13 months alone, and the deadliness of the journey itself has nearly tripled. In total, approximately 17,500 have lost their lives since 2013.

Though the EU and its politicians are fully aware of the scale of this threat to the right to life, the most fundamental of human rights, instead of increasing aid to rescue activities, it has concentrated funding and policy on trapping migrants in Libya to prevent them from crossing in the first place. This includes setting up the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), to ‘fight the root causes of irregular migration’, with a budget of 4.3 billion as of last year. According to its own report from 2018, nearly a third of this funding is in fact directed towards ‘Improved migration management’, not root causes. 90 million Euros is earmarked for Libya alone, the intended result of which is essentially to close this last major migration route to Europe.

Meanwhile, this has doomed hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees from African countries to suffer in miserably overcrowded, unsafe, and unsanitary conditions in Libyan detention camps, which have included extensive reports of extortion, torture, rape, and even slavery. Deaths from inadequate medical care and lawlessness in the camps have also been reported. Libya is considered a failed state without effective rule of law and therefore does not have a legal framework or practical means to safely manage refugee intake or asylum cases; detention is therefore arbitrary and indefinite. Instead of working to create a humane alternative solution, the EU has been pouring funding into Libyan law enforcement agencies, including the coast guard, to continue this unfathomably horrible situation that violates the human rights of those held in Libya. This is absolutely unacceptable and incompatible with the fundamental values of the EU; alternatives should not be encouraged but instead demanded.

Maya Robinson, ISHR Germany

ISHR EVENTS

Cuba's Voices for Diversity

Spokesman of ISHR Germany in dialogue with Cuban civil society representatives in Berlin



Martin Lessenthin (2nd from right) speaks with representatives of Cuban civil society at the panel. Dec. 12, 2018.

Cuba is diverse, from its nature to its people. Even if the official leadership of the country suggests an image of a unity, there is a pluralistic landscape of opinion in the island nation. However, diverse social actors have to fight for their voice over and over again and take considerable risks in doing so. Whether as scientists, artists or representatives of different interest groups, people who point out grievances, criticize, or suggest alternatives to the officially proclaimed positions are in danger or in exile. On December 12, 2018, the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) invited representatives and advocates

of this Cuban diversity to a dialogue on the current situation in Cuba at a panel discussion in Berlin.

The participants held a vibrant discussion during the two panels. The first round of discussion, titled "My will, my constitution" was moderated by Stefan Reith, the head of the regional team Latin America KAS, and included: Boris González Arenas, historian, journalist and civil society activist, Roberto Ernesto Diaz Vazquez, spokesman for the alliance "Mesa de Unidad de Acción Democrática", Amir Valle, Cuban writer in exile, and Michaela Noll, MdB. They discussed the constitutional debate currently underway in Cuba, the threat to artistic freedom from Decree 349/2018, and the significance of these issues for Germany.

The second round of discussion, "Welcome to the Havana Club? Nostalgic Cuba vs. Reality", was moderated by Martin Lessenthin, Spokesman of the Board of ISHR-Germany and focused on protecting the unique nature of Cuba, which is a major concern of scientists and environmental activists. Rosa María Payá Acevedo from "Cuba Decide", Pastor Manuel Alberto Morejón Soler, representing "Sociedad Internacional Derechos Humanos de Cuba" and Valerio Krüger, an Ambassador for Human Rights, delivered shattering accounts of the destruction of the environment in Cuba. Urgent problems include contaminated water, deforestation, and the disappearance of biodiversity. Although there are official environmental regulations, effective regulation and enforcement of violations is lacking. An additional issue is the inadequate disposal of industrial waste, including from the "Havana Club" factory in Santa Cruz del Norte. The participants called for a critical assessment of developments in Cuba and to continue work to support its diversity.

ISHR Germany

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