



ISHR NEWSLETTER

January 2019

IMPORTANT DATES

15 January

National Religious
Freedom Day (US)

19 January

World Religion Day
(Baha'i/ interfaith)

27 January

Day of Remembrance for
the Victims of National
Socialism (Germany) /
International Day of
Commemoration of the
Victims of the Holocaust
(UN)

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REFLECTION ON THE PAST & PRESENT

This month, we reflect on the past by remembering the victims of some of the worst human rights violations in history during the Holocaust in Ukraine (pg. 1.), and by discussing the contributions of activists such as Mart-Olav Niklus (pg. 2), Lev Ponomarev (pg. 3), and Lyudmila Alexeyeva (pg.4). In 2019, may we learn from the past to meet the challenges of the present and forge a better future.

*“And I myself, like one long soundless scream
Above the thousands of thousands interred,
I’m every old man executed here,
As I am every child murdered here.*

No fiber of my body will forget this.” - Excerpt from ‘Babyn Yar’ by
Yevgeni Yevtushenko



Board of ISHR Ukraine, incl. Boris Glasunov
(l.), Director of the Holocaust memorial site of
Babyn Yar near Kiev & T. Schirmmacher

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Reflection on visit to Babyn Jar, Holocaust memorial site in Ukraine

In honor of the International Day of Commemoration of the Victims of the Holocaust on January 27, Thomas Schirrmacher, president of the International Council for International Human Rights (ISHR), shares an account of his visit to the memorial site of Babyn Jar near Kiev, Ukraine last year:

The memorial site of Babyn Jar commemorates the Jewish and Roma victims of mass murder committed there by the German Wehrmacht during WWII. During my visit there, I was accompanied by the director of the site and ISHR Ukraine board member, Boris Ivanovich Glazunov, as well as by the founder of the section, Prof. Andrei Suchorukov and the current director, Anton Alekseyev.



T. Schirrmacher (r.) & ISHR Ukraine board members at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews in "Babyn Jar"

Babyn Jar is a 2.5 km long gorge in the territory of the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, which is located outside of the city. In 1941, this gorge was the scene of the largest single massacre of Jewish men, women and children during the Second World War, which was carried out with the participation of the German Wehrmacht. The Security Police, SD, Ukrainian collaborators, and the 6th Army under Field Marshal Walter von Reichenau shot dead 33,771 Jews on September 29 and 30, 1941.

Only in 2007 was the greater part of the site closed for further development and named a memorial. In 2010, the President of Ukraine raised the memorial to the rank of national monument. Since then it has been called "National Historical and Memorial Reserve Babyn Yar". Boris Ivanovich Glazunov has been the director of the memorial since 2008. He has also been the deputy chairman of the Ukraine section since 1993. Under Glazunov, each group of victims received its own monument and documentation on the site. There is also an older, very large monument at the entrance of the gorge.

I visited the extensive grounds together with the management of the memorial and the board of Ukraine section, and knelt at the place of remembrance for the Jews and for the Roma. I also visited a dilapidated building donated by the state to the memorial to set up a museum there. At present, however, the necessary donations for the creation of the exhibition and the ongoing operation are missing.

FROM THE SECTIONS

ISHR Belarus

Commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the UN-UDHR, 25th Anniversary of the Belarusian section



Commemorative meeting held on Dec. 7 at Brest State University

The Board of the Belarusian Section of the ISHR cordially wishes you a happy New Year for 2019! We wish you health, well-being, and success in pursuing the noble cause of protecting human rights.

2018 was the year of 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Brest Human Rights Group (1993).

To celebrate these anniversaries, the Belarusian section of the ISHR held a number of events. On December 7, the commemorative meeting dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration

of Human Rights, and the round table on the 25th anniversary of the creation of the Brest Human Rights Group were held at the Brest State Technical University.

The results of past work were summarized and recommendations for the future were drawn. In addition to honoring the founders of the group (1993), the winners of the country-wide writing competition for university and school-age students' on the theme 'The modern significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' were recognized at the event.

Gratitude was expressed towards Karl Hafen, a prominent human rights activist (long time Executive Director of ISHR Germany and current Treasurer of the International Council), for his cooperation and assistance rendered to the organization. Participants of the meetings also warmly welcomed the Secretary General of the ISHR, Professor Marat Zakhidov.



Prof. Kotlyar addresses the audience on Dec. 8, 2018.

On the second day, December 8, the Board and the Scientific and Expert Council of the organization, together with the Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, held a seminar on the theme 'Human Rights and Personality: On the role of the individual in the implementation of human rights' in the Brest City Library. Reports included homages to the contributions of academics such as Andrei Sakharov, writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Nelson Mandela, M.L. King Jr., Václav Havel, Mother Teresa, and other famous personalities in the world. The seminar, as well as the jubilee meetings, was a success. We will publish its materials. Gratitude for the preparation of the jubilee meetings and the seminar was issued to the Chairman of the Board, Professor Ivan Kotlyar.

Materials of the meetings were covered in the press: a reportage was aired on the Bug TV channel, and the articles "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is 70 years old" by Professor Ivan Kotlyar and "Personality in the fight for human rights" by Professor Mikhail Stralets and journalist Alexey Korneychuk were published in the newspaper "Brestskiy Vestnik".

The Belarusian section of the ISHR will continue to increase its efforts in the field of human rights protection. We welcome further cooperation and sharing of information. In our opinion, we can fully unite our efforts in such areas as the rights of the child, the fight against corruption, the reflection of human rights activities and the activities of our organizations in the media. We are ready to explore your suggestions.

The Board of ISHR Belarus

ISHR Germany

Former Soviet dissident and political prisoner joins Board of Trustees



Katrin Bornmüller (center) & Edgar Lamm (right) present a certificate of thanks to Mart-Olav Niklus (left).

ISHR Germany is honored to have Mart-Olav Niklus, well-known Estonian activist and political prisoner in the former Soviet Union, join our Board of Trustees at the beginning of January this year.

Mart-Olav Niklus was a political prisoner in the former Soviet Union from 1959 to 1966 and from 1981 to 1988. After Estonia gained independence in 1991, he became a Member of the Estonian Parliament from 1992 to 1995.

ISHR Germany had repeatedly campaigned for him in the 1980s to demand his release. His case was documented by the section in petitions to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

In July of 2017, ISHR Deputy Chairwoman Katrin Bornmüller and Chairman Edgar Lamm presented a thank-you certificate to Mr. Niklus in recognition of his great commitment to the freedom and independence of Estonia and his long-standing fight for human rights in the capital of Estonia, Tallinn (see photo right). Mr. Niklus was also a speaker at the ISHR-Germany event '100 of Communism: Utopia vs. Reality' in Frankfurt in November of 2017, during which he reported on his experiences as a dissident and political prisoner.

Edgar Lamm
Chairman of the Board, ISHR Germany

What is the danger posed by a 77-year old human rights defender?

As the most famous human rights activist of Russia, 77-year-old Lev Alexandrovich Ponomarev was arrested for reposting a publication on the website of Ekho Moskvyy (Echo of Moscow) radio station of a man who was convicted in early December of the past year by a judge of the Tver court of the city of Moscow to 25 days of detention.

The former Deputy of the Duma of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic with a Doctorate of Physical and Mathematical Sciences was defended by one of the most well-known and reputable lawyers in Russia - Chairman of the Moscow Chamber of Advocates and member of the Moscow Helsinki Group Henry Markovich Reznik, who is known for his principled stand on matters related to the defense of human rights defenders, political and civil the rights of Russians, who called the proceedings "shamefully bogus".

Unfortunately, the defense's position based on the correct interpretation of the law did not convince the court of appeals, and on December 7, the Moscow City Court did not overturn the decision of Moscow's Tver Court from two days earlier to detain Lev Ponomarev, the leader of the 'For Human Rights' movement, instead only reducing the term of detention from 25 to 16 days.

What had Lev Ponomarev, who enjoys absolute authority and respect, done that was so dangerous and criminal, that even requests for his release issued by Tatiana Moskalkova, a human rights activist of the Commissioner for Human Rights in Russia, as well as by Mikhail Yabloko, the head of the Presidential Council for the Development of Civil Society, were unsuccessful in convincing the Moscow City Court not to imprison a 77-year-old for 16 days?

As it turns out, two or three clicks with a mouse to repost a publication over Facebook from the Echo of Moscow website about the campaign "For ours and your children" were sufficient grounds for the arrest of Lev Ponomarev. This was a protest organized by the mothers of young people involved in the 'Seti and New Greatness'* cases, which took place near the FSB building on Lubyanka on October 28, 2018. By the way, towards those whom the leader of the movement 'For Human Rights' sought to protect, Russian Lady Liberty was more favorable: the girls were released from prison and placed under house arrest.

The story of the detention of Lev Ponomarev has worked out well so far. But the question remains: Why? What was the anticipated result of such an obvious abuse of the right to arrest by the state? If one of the zealous officials sought to belittle and humiliate the famous human rights activist in this way, the result was the opposite. Many, if not all, online media outlets have responded to this event criticizing such actions by law enforcement and the court.

*Note by the editor: 'New Greatness' is a group of young men and women that was accused by the state of plotting to overthrow the government and are being prosecuted under 'anti-extremism' laws, most of whom are still imprisoned awaiting trial



Lev Ponomarev in 2010. Photo by: Valerij Ledenev.

Eastern Europe Department
ISHR Germany

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Russia



Lyudmila Alexeyeva. Source: Voice of America (VOA)

Farewell to Lyudmila Alexeyeva

On December 11, the memorial service for Lyudmila Alexeyeva, Chairwoman of the Moscow Helsinki Group for the past 30 years, took place in Moscow.

Lyudmila Mikhailovna Alexeyeva, the co-founder of the Moscow Helsinki Group on May 12, 1976, left the Soviet Union only eight months later, in February 1977, due to increasing reprisals. She returned to Russia from exile in the US in 1993, immediately proving herself to be a principled, demanding, and talented leader one of the oldest human rights organizations of the Russian Federation.

Lyudmila Alexeyeva managed to bind active young people who are seeking to strengthen democracy and human rights to her and the old guard of human rights activists.

Under her leadership, the Moscow Helsinki Group (in Moscow) has taken on a recognized leadership role among human rights organizations in Russia, delivering great and ambitious projects on protecting political and civil rights, promoting justice, supporting convicts, and much more.

As a member of the Council for the Development of Civil Society under the President of the Russian Federation, Lyudmila Alexeyeva has fundamentally and keenly defended the rights of Russians to free elections, public activities, and to freedom of movement and migration. She resisted legal arbitrariness, and did not shy away from fierce discussions with senior civil servants, including even the president. Over her 91 years, she lived a long and interesting life.

The farewell of Lyudmila Mikhailovna Alexeyeva brought together many people; hundreds of human rights activists, journalists, politicians, diplomats and simply active citizens came to the Moscow Central House of Journalists to commemorate her. Even President Vladimir Putin came, leaving flowers and giving his condolences for her loved ones.

Russia's human rights defense suffered a serious loss. But of course, Russia's human rights community will follow the rules of Russia's oldest human rights activists and be even more uncompromising and more involved in the political, civil, and social rights of Russian citizens.

The Russian section of the International Society for Human Rights, together with all human rights activists in Russia, mourns the leader of the Moscow Helsinki Group and expresses its sincere condolences to the family and friends of Lyudmila Alexeyeva. Vladimir Novitsky, Chairman of the Section Russia of the International Society for Human Rights reflected:

“Lyudmila Alexeyeva, the grand dame of the Russian Civil Rights Movement, was a guest of the annual meeting of the German section on two occasions. In 1999, during the panel discussion on ‘Stability before Human Rights?’, she warned that ‘Russia will only become a stable state if civil society manages to be strong and active enough to force authorities to respect civil liberties, to work with public organizations, and to treat them as equal partners’. Today, 19 years later, this goal is still a long way off, not only in Russia, but in almost all of the former Soviet republics.

“In ‘Documents of the Moscow Helsinki Group’, published in 1977, the ISHR reported on the Group’s work from its founding, regarding the sustained persecution of the organization by the Soviet regime, including the expatriation and expulsion, persecution, and/or imprisonment of its founding members within a year. But everywhere in the USSR, new Helsinki groups and other human rights initiatives were formed, and they networked. Lyudmila Alexeyeva was and remains beyond her death a mentor, motor, and role model.”

*Karl Hafen
Treasurer, International Council*

ISHR EVENTS

Katrin Bornmüller awarded as an ‘Ambassador of Peace’ in Albania

Ceremony in Tirana honors decades of commitment to human rights work and humanitarian aid

The Diplomatic Mission of Peace and Prosperity (DMPP - an international peace mission accredited by the UN, EU, USA, and NATO), as well as the Academy of Universal Global Peace (AUGP) of the United Nations, the American Diplomatic Mission for World Peace (ADMWP), and the Diplomatic Society St. Gabriel (DSSG) awarded the honorary degree of Peace Ambassador to Mrs. Katrin Bornmüller on January 5 in Tirana.

The award honors Mrs. Bornmüller’s great commitment and precious contributions to humanity. She is an inspiration as a philanthropist and an activist for human rights, as well as for her promotion of social coexistence and intercommunity peace, and as a role model in managing humanitarian projects.

Since joining the International Society for Human Rights in 1980 until 1990, she was engaged in aiding political prisoners and persecuted people in the GDR, Romania, Poland and the former USSR. She also participated in 10 OSCE World Conferences over time. Beginning in 1990, she began to organize humanitarian aid transports to these countries as well as Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania. Since 2014, she has organized countless transports of aid for refugees who belong to persecuted religious or ethnic minorities in Kurdistan, Iraq, as well as funding numerous other projects to support the health and well-being of refugees and IDPs living in camps.

In the words of Dr. Sulejman Abazi Neshaj, who delivered the address at the award ceremony: “We understand that in this case we are dealing with a strong, humanist woman up to the sacrifice, with contributions to the protection of human rights. You are a born International Missionary in the service of Peace of Mankind. Our highest gratitude and respect.”



Katrin Bornmüller (3rd from left) receives the honorary degree of ‘Peace Ambassador’ from the DMPP in Tirana on Jan. 5, 2018.

The DMPP was established by former U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower and continued by the Golden American Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, to operate in the Balkans and worldwide to help developing countries, as well as those in political crisis and those affected by war or natural disasters. Today it is registered in Tirana, Albania.

The award was presented in a ceremony in Albania in the presence of academics, diplomats, Board Members of the ISHR Albania, and human rights activists from Albania, Kosovo, and Italy. All participants expressed their deepest gratitude for her contribution and humanitarian support in Albania, Europe, and worldwide. Mrs. Katrin Bornmüller was nominated by the President of ISHR Albania, Dr. Margarita Kola, who had also received the award three weeks prior. The award was delivered by his Excellency, the former ambassador of Albania to the Vatican.

*Dr. Margarita Kola
President, ISHR Albania*

Edited & expanded by Maya Robinson



*Peace Ambassador Award
presented to Dr. M. Kola on Nov.
19, 2018*

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