FROM THE PRESIDENT

Human Rights Day takes place each year on December 10, and this year, it also marks the special occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This momentous document and the principles established within it lies at the heart of our work as the International Society for Human Rights and represents the ideals that we all strive to protect.

This special issue of the ISHR Newsletter seeks to reflect the hard work that our sections have put into defending and upholding these principles over the past year. In it, you will find highlights from the wide range of activities of our network all over the world that were featured in the ISHR Newsletter in 2018. It also marks two years of the new newsletter, which has been circulating since December 2016. Thank you to all who have contributed!

Next year, we are hoping to take the newsletter online over a newly designed website for the ISHR, in order to reach a wider audience and create a platform for the sections. Until then, I wish each of you a wonderful holiday season and a happy New Year!

Thomas Schirrmacher
President of the International Council

“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 1, UN-UDHR
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ISHR Australia

On the ground news on the situation of refugees from Myanmar in Bangladesh and Thailand (Jan. edition 2018) - In January, the Australian section of the ISHR issued a report from a partner of the section who works to provide medical care to Karen refugees from Myanmar living across the border in Thailand, as well as on her experience (name omitted due to security concerns) in helping to aid Rohingya refugees in the sprawling camps in Cox’s Bazaar in Bangladesh. As of the time the report was issued, over 600,000 Rohingya refugees had arrived in Cox’s Bazaar from Myanmar. Currently, over 725,000 Rohingya refugees have fled to Bangladesh in total.

The scene in Cox’s Bazaar was described as a disaster in front of her eyes: “The tent camps stretch like a sea for miles, with thousands of underweight people who have nothing, including many children who were already suffering from malnourishment after years of hardship in Myanmar. They lack everything, especially drinking water”.

Meanwhile, according to the report, the peace process between other ethnic groups in Myanmar continues, but only very slowly. “There is war in the north against the Kachin and against the Shan continues. It seems uncertain if this country will ever see peace. On the Thai side of the border, refugees from Myanmar continue to face challenges in receiving work permits and other documentation to be recognized in Thailand. They continue to lack economic or physical security in their home country”.

South Korea

From the President: Visit with President of South Korea & military officials on peaceful reunification (Aug. edition 2018) - During a trip to South Korea in March, the President of the International Council of the ISHR, Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher attended the 50th Korea National Prayer Breakfast in Goyang City, near Seoul, as well as visiting the demarcation line between North and South Korea. At the National Prayer Breakfast, he spoke with Lieutenant General Michael A. Bills, the commanding general of the eighth US army stationed in S. Korea and of the Korean border troops, and with Jeong Kyeong Doo, the Joint Chief of Staff of the South Korean Army, who presides over the commanders of the forces. In both of their cases, it was clear to Schirrmacher that they are hoping that there will be no armed conflict with North Korea, despite training intensively for it.

From Schirrmacher’s perspective, the most remarkable aspect of the visit was the complete lack of war rhetoric during the event, during which he also briefly met the President and his wife. “There was only prayer for a peaceful reunification, with Germany repeatedly being named as an example”, reported Schirrmacher. “This is a topic I am frequently asked about in South Korea. The division between North and South Korea has already existed for much longer than the division of Germany, and it goes much deeper”.

Even so, says Schirrmacher, “German reunification is a constant topic of conversation in South Korea, and hopes have been high since 1989 that Korea could experience something similar. There is a parallel as well; German reunification occurred when the Soviet Union no longer supported the GDR. With regard to North Korea, the USSR was replaced by China, which has kept it alive financially through payments for access to the sea; it holds its protective hand over the land. If China were to terminate its support, reunification would only be a matter of time”.

Rohingya children from Myanmar in refugee camps in Bangladesh.
Vietnam

From the President: Lecture on religious freedom at the National Academy of Politics in Vietnam
(June edition 2018) - Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher, President of the ISHR and of the International Institute for Religious Freedom lectured at the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics in Hanoi at the seminar titled “Limits of Religious Freedom Rights” on March 6. The seminar was co-organized by the Institute of Human Rights and the Institute of Religion and Beliefs. Lecturers and researchers from these two institutes participated in the seminar, as well as a large number of master's students majoring in Laws of Human Rights and Religious studies.

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES

ISHR Armenia

Assisting teens with mental disabilities

(April-May edition 2018) - ISHR Armenia informed us about their activities in implementing social welfare projects in their country in the April-May issue of the newsletter this year. With the support of the BEARR Trust Foundation in the UK, they implemented a program for the ‘Care of young people with mental disabilities at home’, which aims to provide professional and legal support to teenagers and their families in communities in Vardashan, in the suburbs of Yerevan. A mobile group of volunteers and psychologists visited participating families over the course of five months, providing practical and professional support. Computer training was also organized for the young people to support them in finding employment. The section has also been actively involved in the development of new legislative proposals and the implementation of anti-corruption monitoring.

Velvet Revolution in Armenia: April - May 2018

(April-May edition 2018) - Bela Shikaryan, President of ISHR Armenia reported on the non-violent revolution that took place in spring 2018, which transformed Armenian politics and placed hope in the hearts of the human rights community:

A historic sudden shift in the politics of Armenia took place through a non-violent, so-called ‘Velvet (or Love) Revolution’ during April and May this year. The leader of the revolution, Nikol Pashinyan, was elected Prime Minister in snap elections on May 8 following mass protests that began in mid-April.

The primary spark for the protests was related directly to the attempt of former president Serzh Sargsyan to remain in power for a third term by adopting the role of Prime Minister. Thousands took to the streets as Nikol Pashinyan carried out his 14-day protest march across the country, which culminated in the capital city of Yerevan on April 13. At their highest points, these demonstrations reached 200,000 people or more. Serzh Sargsyan took office as PM on April 17, only a week after the end of his second presidential term, but resigned on April 23. During the historic gathering on April 23, 2018, he announced “…in our revolutionary political movement, there is no geopolitical context, no conspiracy; this is a clean Armenian velvet revolution”. This was the result of mass protest rallies, which were exclusively peaceful and involved all layers of society, especially youth. On May 8, following a re-vote, the National Assembly elected Pashinyan, who enjoys a public approval rate of nearly 90% as the new PM.
In essence, behind the nearly 25-day peaceful national display of disobedience are 25 years of corruption and social injustice, resulting in unemployment and inequality in the application of the law under criminal-oligarchic rule. Today, it can be said that this is a very rare, possibly unique, case in which a nation has overturned a dictatorial government through an exclusively peaceful and bloodless process, without external interference.

The ISHR Armenian section welcomes this as a victory of the democratic forces in Armenia, and recognizes the ongoing need for deep participation in the social, political, and human rights protection processes in the country. It is prepared to support the new government in strengthening human rights and democratic values in Armenia.

ISHR Belarus

Book published in honor of Prof. Ivan Kotlyar, lifelong human rights scholar & educator

(2018) - On April 21, 2018, the presentation of the new book “Personality: Kotlyar I.I.”, honoring Professor Ivan Kotlyar, President of ISHR Belarus, was held in the Brest central municipal library named after A.S. Pushkin. Sergey Simanovski, Executive Secretary of the Board, shared the following insight into the book and the contributions of Prof. Kotlyar to the field of human rights:

The authors of the book are Svetlana Ptichkina, senior lecturer at Brest State Technical University, and Arsentii Golovchenko, board member of ISHR Belarus. The presentation was conducted by the Scientific Council of ISHR Belarus and the Directorate of the Brest Central Municipal Library named after A.S. Pushkin.

Prof. Kotlyar (born 1941) can rightly be called a pioneer in the field of human rights in modern Belarus. The problems of the theory, protection, and realization of human rights become the sole focus of his life from 1973 onward. In 1996, he published the very first scientific and methodical publications on the problem of human rights in the country, and in 1998, he introduced the need for human rights courses in the education system at parliamentary hearings. He subsequently developed the “Human Rights” curriculum for higher educational institutions for the Ministry of Education.

Over the years, he conducted manifold international conferences as well as seminars on human rights at Brest State University, at which he has been passing on his knowledge and experience to students for over 30 years. Prof. Kotlyar has received international and domestic recognition for his activities and contributions to academia, teaching, and human rights. This included receiving the Honorary Diploma of the International Biographical Centre in Cambridge (UK) in 2001, among many others. In 1996, he created the Republican Public Association for the Protection of Human Rights (the Belarusian section of the International Society for Human Rights), which he continues to direct today.
Human rights competitions held in honor of the 70th anniversary of the UN-UDHR

(Oct. edition 2018) - On the eve of the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN-UDHR) by the UN in 1948, the Belarussian section of the ISHR has announced a call for submission of written work for two thematic competitions for school and university students of the Republic of Belarus. Pavel Pernikau, board member and Head of the Press Center of ISHR Belarus, reported on the details of the competition: Students are given an opportunity to use their knowledge of the provisions of the Declaration to subjectively reinterpret existing problems in the field of the implementation of certain categories of human rights, suggesting original ways and methods to solve them. Children are invited to write an essay on the topic “The contemporary significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, to demonstrate its importance for the international community and for each person as a whole, expressing their attitude towards the ideas embodied by the UN-UDHR. Winners of the competitions will receive an award at the jubilee events of ISHR Belarus and the Brest Human Rights Group on Dec. 7–8, 2018.

This is not the first time that the organization has held competitions on the eve of International Human Rights Day on December 10, as well as on other anniversary dates. For example, the winners of the last competition, dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Vienna Declaration, visited the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) winter session of 2014 in Strasbourg (see photo).

ISHR Moldova

International Women’s Day: Flowers from mounted police, figures from human rights activists

(March edition 2018) - Ghenadii Caunov, member of ISHR Moldova, reported on the situation of women in his country on March 8, International Women’s Day: How will this day be remembered in Moldova? First of all, with congratulatory videos from law enforcement agencies, in which police hand out flowers to passing women in honor of International Women’s Day, as seen in the screenshot of the news report to the right. At the same time, in the center of Chisinau, there was a march of women’s solidarity under the slogan: ‘We do not need flowers, we want equal rights’. The march for women’s solidarity, organized in the capital on March 8 by non-governmental human rights organizations, with numbers reaching 200 participants.

The march is designed to draw public attention to the problems that women currently face in Moldova and demand that their rights be respected by state institutions. These rights include the provision of well-deserved salaries, respect for the rights of women of different nationalities, professions and religious faiths, respect for the rights of women who are migrants, members of parliament, or women who are otherwise discriminated against on the basis of sex.

The only politician present at the march was the leader of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS), Maya Sandu, who stated: "I am here to remind society that not all rights of women are respected in this country. We know about the problems with the labor market. Salaries of women are lower than those of men. We know about discrimination in public space. Some politicians allow themselves to speak in an ugly manner about women and their rights. But perhaps the biggest problem is violence against women."
Women’s rights should exist not only on paper or in legislation, insists Caunov, but instead be respected by society as a whole. He shared the following figures from Newsmaker, an online news source in Moldova supported by the European Endowment for Democracy, to illustrate the degree of observance of women’s rights in Moldova:

- 45% of Roma women received no education
- Women receive only 76% of the avg. pension of men
- 14% of older women live in poverty
- Nine in ten women with special needs is unemployed
- The level of teenage pregnancy in Moldova is twice as high as in Europe: 35 pregnancies per 1000 girls
- One in ten adult women suffer from all types of violence from their partners (UNDP Moldova)

From the President: Moldova
*Repression against human rights organizations in Eastern Europe*

(March edition 2018) - Prof. Thomas Schirrmacher, President of the ISHR, reported on his visit with the Moldovan section in Chisinau, which followed his visits to ISHR sections in Macedonia (in Skopje), in Azerbaijan (in Baku), and in Ukraine (in Kiev) in January:

Because my flight was delayed by heavy snow, there were only a few hours left before my return flight to Frankfurt. However, four members of the section still came all the way out to the airport, despite the snow storm, to spend a few hours together. They reported to me in detail about the political and legal challenges in the country, including problems with the education system, low pensions, and high poverty rate. They also gave many examples of how dangerous it has become for human rights activists. Similar to the situation in Ukraine, more and more people are arrested in order to intimidate them; their flats are searched, their things are even confiscated, but no court case ever takes place. Therefore, in Moldova, as in several other countries in Eastern Europe, human rights organizations are faced with increasingly tense conditions in which they are tightly controlled, hindered, and unwanted.

**ISHR Ukraine**

*Journalist Vasily Muravitsky released from remand prison, detention reduced to house arrest*

(July edition 2018) - Legal experts of the International Society for Human Rights in Ukraine have been carefully monitoring the proceedings of the case of journalist Vasily Muravitsky, who was first arrested in August of 2017 on accusations of treason and infringement of the territorial integrity of Ukraine through his journalistic activities.

On June 27, 2018, the Korolevsky District Court of Zhitomir held a hearing on his case, in which two petitions were considered regarding the measure of restraint for the accused, including the extension of detention and on changing the measure of restraint to house arrest. The ISHR has repeatedly pointed out violations of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, as well as criminal procedural legislation regarding the measure of restraint for V. Muravitsky, who was held in remand prison until recently.
The court took into account the fact that prosecutors once again failed to substantiate the necessity of applying an exceptional measure of restraint in the form of detention, did not prove the impossibility of avoiding the risks associated with the failure of the accused to fulfill their procedural obligations in the event of applying alternative measures of restraint. Based on this, and also guided by the practice of the European Court of Human Rights (which obliges the court to have a good reason for the extension of the term of detention, to consider alternatives to detention, and also indicates that the presence of suspicion that a person has committed serious crimes in itself cannot justify a long period of pre-trial detention), the court decided to change the measure of restraint to 24-hour house arrest.

This is the most significant achievement of the entire monitoring process by the ISHR in Ukraine of Vasily Muravitsky’s case, who spent 11 months (330 days total) in remand prison. Vasily Muravitsky also issued a statement following his release, in which he thanked the ISHR, among other prominent human rights organizations, for their support of his case. Despite this, it should be noted that the change in the measure of restraint does not in any way stop or change the course of the criminal proceedings; the charges have not been dropped. Therefore, the experts of the ISHR in Ukraine will continue monitoring this litigation.

New report on violations of the rights and safety of attorneys in Ukraine

(Sept. edition 2018) - Over the past two years, ISHR Ukraine has been monitoring court proceedings regarding the right to a fair trial in the country. In September, it released a comprehensive report together with the Initiative Group for Protection of Rights of Attorneys on the violations that have occurred against attorneys over the past three years in Ukraine. Anton Alekseyev, Executive Director of ISHR Ukraine discussed the report:

“Since 2015, there have been 34 cases of attacks on lawyers. Five lawyers were killed as a result of such attacks. These are Yuri Grabovsky, Victor Loiko, Tatyana Popova, Valery Rybalchenko and Irina Nozdrovskaya. According to the report, most of the attacks on lawyers are carried out by representatives of the police, the Secret Service, and other governmental agencies, as well as through members of Parliament, radical groups, and ‘unidentified individuals’.” Human rights defenders express open concern about this situation; it is becoming more dangerous to be a lawyer, and even the most serious cases are not considered by the courts”.

Major tendencies in violation of the rights of lawyers identified in the report include:

- Identification of an attorney with a client (e.g. detention; pressure from politicians and the public);
- Extrajudicial instruments of influence on attorneys (e.g. murder, physical attacks, damage to property);
- Criminal and disciplinary prosecution of attorneys or threats of prosecution (e.g. involvement of an attorney as a witness in a process; searches of offices; criminal prosecution for lawful actions);
- Failure to provide attorneys with access to their clients and removal of an attorney from court proceedings (non-fulfilment of duties related to a client delivery to participate in a court session; abuse of the right to engage a public defender);
- Violation of basic principles of legal proceedings (suppression of evidence; interference in interrogation of witnesses; lack of possibility to confidentially communicate with a client).

All tendencies of infringement of the rights of attorneys have a single motive – preventing an attorney from fulfilling his/her functions as counsel for the defense in a trial. Initiators of these processes try to prevent unbiased judicial proceedings, and aim to obtain a court decision in their favor at any cost. This pattern should be regarded as a serious danger to democratic values, because it violates not only the individual rights of attorneys, but also seriously weakens the ability of lawyers to perform their profession in protecting these values. Therefore, every case of violation of the rights of an attorney requires close attention from public authorities, civil society and international institutions.


**ISHR Albania**

*Visits to the new Albanian section in Tirana in spring and fall*

(April-May edition 2018) - Katrin Bornmüller, Co-Chair of the Board of the German section of the ISHR, attended the celebration of the founding of the new ISHR section in Albania in March of this year. The president of the section, Dr. Margarita Kola (center of photo), performed the re-registration. It marks a promising new beginning with strong plans for the future.

“Albania has so many problems to solve, from abolishing corruption, to eliminating horrendous levels of poverty, especially among the Roma, who are often forced to live off of garbage”, says Bornmüller. According to Ms. Bornmüller and the section, banishing the practice of blood-feuds through education is also a critical issue; there are families who cannot leave their homes because of the danger of being killed as a result of a blood feud with another family. Finally, addressing the crimes committed under the communist government of Enver Hoxha (under which, according to Bornmüller, Albania had the most death sentences in relation to the population in the world and affected nearly every family) is another key issue area that the section plans to tackle through their work.

(Oct. edition 2018) - Katrin Bornmüller returned to Albania in September, and she reported the following about her experience there: The poverty of many people is terrifying. On the one hand, you can see expensive cars like Mercedes being driven around Tirana, and on the other hand, there are incredibly people searching through the dumpsters. More staggering still were the visits to Roma families, such as one family of twelve living in a single shed with no income, and a daughter of 13, who was already married with a baby (photo left). They only receive 20€ per month from the state. Meanwhile, Dr. Kola has defended four clients in different courts, even in the face of judges who are frequently bribed to decide in favor of the delinquent party. She handles cases that nobody dares to try, so the phone rings all day and into the night, even on weekends. She recently won a sensational trial that will go down in international law in her name. Dr. Kola was delighted that one of her biggest enemies among the judges was forced to step down due to corruption.

We also visited families affected by the deadly tradition of blood feuding, in which if a man kills someone from another family, the family of the victim is obliged to kill a male over 18 belonging to the perpetrating family. A teacher, Liliana Luani, who has been caring for a mother and her 17 year old son who have been trapped in hiding in pitiful conditions for five years, due to the murder in a blood feud committed by her husband. Despite the fact that he completed his prison sentence, this punishment is not recognized in the context of a blood feud; therefore, he and their two sons over 18 were forced to flee to the mountains.

Liliana wrote a book on her investigation into blood feud victims in the regions of Tirana, Durres, Lezha, Skodra, Kukes, and Dibres, which affected 596 families. Unfortunately, now even women and children are killed in the feuds. Liliana created a campaign to ask companies to offer seminars for the victims, who are then brought there under police protection in skills such as cooking, sewing, and literacy. It is very shameful of the states in Europe that send Albanian refugees back to the country, out of ignorance of the gravity of the situation. In one case in Sweden, the young man was murdered upon being deported to Albania. In another case of deportation from France, the person was forced to immediately go into hiding.
Croatia & Bosnia

Visit to ISHR Croatia & aid delivery to Bosnia-Herzegovina

(Aug. edition 2018) - At the beginning of July, Katrin Bornmüller visited Jadranka Cigelj, section leader of ISHR Croatia, in Zagreb. In a report about her trip, Ms. Bornmüller explained that Ms. Cigelj, who was a victim of the Serbian concentration camps of Omarska and Trnopolje, “is still haunted by the memories of rape, torture, and the unbearable agony experienced by the inmates through floggings, shootings, and all manner of horrors that were perpetrated against those poor human beings”. Bornmüller expressed her outrage that the Croatian state continues to deny the victims adequate compensation. As a result, Ms. Cigelj is filing a lawsuit against the state, which if need be, will be taken before the EU Court of Justice.

Ms. Bornmüller also attended the memorial day commemoration of Srebrenica 1995 – 2018 with Ms. Cigelj. From her perspective, it was merely a meaningless political event in parliament, in which no victim spoke. “The mayor of the city of Zagreb, Milan Bandic, was the only one who mentioned the victims of the war. At least there was one victim from Srebrenica and Jadranka Cigelj herself present in the room”, she said.

The next stage of the journey was accompanying the arrival of the 9th transport of humanitarian goods from ISHR Working-group in Wittlich to Prijedor in the Republic Srpska (part of Bosnia-Herzegovina). After the load made it through customs with the help of Mirsad Duratovic, the goods were delivered to local charity association and ISHR partner, MDD Merhamet. Around 20 helpers from the more than 700 impoverished families served by the association assisted with unloading.

MDD Merhamet cares for people from many ethnic backgrounds, including Bosnians, Croats, Roma, and Serbs. The Roma are especially vulnerable to poverty, and there are many people who have almost nothing to eat. For the coming winter, the most pressing request is for flour.

ISHR Germany

Annual General Meeting of the German Section held in Bonn

(April-May edition 2018) - The 46th annual general meeting of the German Section of the International Society for Human Rights (IGFM) took place on 6-7 April 2018 at the Gustav Stresemann Institute in Bonn, Germany. Participants from over 20 countries attended and discussed current issues in human rights work.

The focal points of the annual IGFM meeting were the humanitarian situation in the Middle East and religious freedom. The German Section provides frequent humanitarian aid to refugees in the region, especially in northern Iraq.

Members of the ISHR and officials from health agencies and refugee/IDP camps in northern Iraq reported on this during the plenary session and during the in-depth working group sessions. The IGFM invited not only experts but also eyewitnesses from the region.

Furthermore, the IGFM was pleased to welcome the emeritus Bishop of Hong Kong, Cardinal Zen Ze-kiun, who was an inspiration to the audience. During the plenary session, he described the difficulties currently facing Christians in the People’s Republic of China. During the working group on religious freedom, further witnesses reported on the persecution of religious minorities in various states such as Pakistan and Egypt.
The annual meeting also provided space to deepen cooperation between the various sections of the ISHR, especially during the International Council meeting, which took place the following day (see ‘ISHR Events’).

The German Section of the International Society for Human Rights (IGFM) would like to sincerely thank all the friends and members who attended and participated in the 46th Annual General Meeting in Bonn, as well as all the speakers, witnesses and experts who made this event possible with their contributions!

Support for refugees/IDPs and victims of IS in northern Iraq (Kurdistan) (June edition 2018) - Over April and May of this year, the German section of the ISHR undertook two separate trips to northern Iraq to provide humanitarian aid and various forms of support for refugees and IDPs, including women and children who were previously victims of enslavement by the so-called Islamic State (IS).

At the beginning of April, Katrin Bornmüller, the President of the ISHR working group in Wittlich and Deputy Chairman of the German section, traveled for the 8th time to northern Iraq in April with Muho Boga, an active member of the working group who is originally from Iraq. Together, they visited and provided support to many families, especially women and children, who have been liberated through ransom payments from enslavement, trafficking, and horrendous sexual and physical abuse at the hands of IS. Ms. Bornmüller has been consistently providing financial assistance to many liberated families and women, many of whose lives had been destroyed by IS; many have family members who are still held captive.

From the end of April through the end of May, Khalil Al-Rasho, the Director of Humanitarian Aid to Iraq of ISHR Germany, was also working on the ground in northern Iraq to support and supervise the transportation and distribution of two tons of medical supplies and equipment from Germany for refugees, which were distributed to several health centers which serve refugees and the local population in Kurdistan.

Mr. Al-Rasho also met with the local UNHCR office together with Ms. Frauke Havenkost, who is a board member of the Heinrich Böll Foundation Brandenburg and a consultant of Ms. Marie Luise von Halem (Member of State Parliament in Brandenburg for the Green Party), to generate suggestions for the role of the state of Brandenburg in providing support for refugees.

Shortly thereafter, Mr. Al-Rasho assisted Mr. and Mrs. Dr. Klopf in visiting patients and distributing medication to health centers, including a children’s clinic, in the refugee/IDP camps of Essian, Shekhan, and Shariya. Following the visit of these two doctors, Mr. Al-Rasho initiated several new projects, including setting up a computer lab in camp Essian with 10 computers donated by the German section, to be used for an upcoming program to teach computer skills for refugees beginning in June. He and his daughter Shaha also visited so-called ‘wild-camps’ and distributed aid items, such as clothing and blankets, to needy families.
Furthermore, they traveled to the liberated areas of Bahzani and Bahshika, and delivered an organ to a Syrian Orthodox church to replace one destroyed by IS. Though liberated, these areas are still dangerous at night for the inhabitants, who are at risk of kidnapping or violence from IS fighters, who still live in hiding in the area. Near the end of the trip, the participants in the three month long sewing course project in camp Essian initiated by ISHR Germany received their certificates on May 19.

**ISHR Lithuania**

*Humanitarian aid of medical supplies to hospitals in need in January & July*

(Jan. edition 2018) - ISHR Lithuania has coordinated transports of medical aid items donated by the ISHR Working Group in Wittlich, Germany, to Kupiskis Hospital and Rokiskis Hospitals in Lithuania in January and July of this year. The head of Kupiskis Hospital, Roma Ramanauskiené, had the following to say about the transport in January “On behalf of the doctors, directors, and patients of Kupiskis hospital, we thank you and your staff for the wonderful support we have received. The facilities here consist of a hospital, a clinic, and a nursing home, so the hospital beds we received are very important to us, and the medical supplies will be allocated where they are needed most”.

(Aug. edition 2018) - In July, a delivery of donations was brought to Kupiskis and Rokiskis hospitals, including 21 hospital beds, furniture and much more, which are critically needed. Jurgita Samoskiene, Chairwoman of ISHR Lithuania reported that “all medical supplies in the small cities of Lithuania are very outdated or no longer functional, since the state does not have the funds to replace them. It is only thanks to donors from abroad that the necessary help can reach people in need. Therefore, we thank the donors from Trier and the ISHR working group in Wittlich under the leadership of Katrin Bornmüller for this opportunity to support these Lithuanian hospitals”.

**ISHR Spain**

*Discussing human rights in the Mediterranean*

(July edition 2018) - ISHR Spain was inducted as a new member organization at this year’s International Council meeting in Bonn in April. In June, Ms. Enerida Isuf, President of ISHR Spain, was represented at a debate on human rights and social issues relating to migration and the Mediterranean in Tarragona, Spain. In her speech, she discussed migration as a social phenomenon, the European legal framework on migration, discrimination against immigrants and the lack of social justice in migration law.

“Between the many violent conflicts, "springs", migrations, refugee camps, and massive displacements of people, the Mediterranean has become a renewed scene of the battle for the future and for one’s own life. However, the dream of paradise turned into a nightmare, with lives submerged in the waters or stranded in their destinies - uprooted, disintegrated. In this scenario, political, social and humanitarian issues of responsibility unavoidably emerge”, says Isuf.
Ms. Isuf explained that the debates and discussions were initiated as a part of a collaborative cultural program preceding the 2018 Mediterranean Games, organized by the Ministry of Culture, the government of Catalonia and the Municipality of Tarragona to “deepen knowledge and understanding of the cultural diversity of the countries participating in the 2018 games, which stimulates reflection on the contemporary reality of this vast geographical and cultural space, while emphasizing the value of cultural diversity as an essential element for dialogue, mutual learning and coexistence”.

**Protesting against anti-gypsyism in Italy**

Later in the month, ISHR Spain joined the protests held in Barcelona in front of the European Parliament Representative Office and Embassy of Italy on June 27, against the explicitly racist pronouncements and policy suggestions of issued by the new Italian government coalition of far-right Northern League and the euro-sceptic Five Star Movement against Italy’s Roma minority. Enerida Isuf, President of ISHR Spain reported:

As European Roma and pro-Roma civil society, we strongly condemn the unconstitutional proposal of Interior Minister Matteo Salvini to establish a census for Roma in Italy and ask the Italian government to uphold the rule of law and democratic values. Though the proposal for a census of Roma and for expulsion all non-Italian Roma is clearly against the law and has already been retracted by his government, Salvini has successfully used anti-gypsyism to increase his voter base. Hate speech by Italian politicians is on the rise and is not a new phenomenon, especially among members of the Northern League. Just this summer, Italian League MEP Danilo Oscar Lancini argued against future Roma-related EU policies and funding in the European Parliament because “Roma do not want to be integrated”.

Ms. Isuf ended her report with a plea not to allow history to repeat itself, and called for action on the part of European citizenry, the EU, and its institutions. “There is no justification for Salvini’s anti-gypsyist acts and statements, and everyone should condemn his racist actions. 80 years ago Europe experienced a similar narrative, and we all know the consequences. We ask European institutions and the general public to act responsibly and not only stand by and watch. Europe must start defending its core values and stand up for the right to live in a racism-free society”.

**Participation in the commemoration of the Roma victims of the Holocaust at Auschwitz-Birkenau**

(Oct. edition 2018) - On August 2, 1944, the ‘Gypsy Camp’ of Auschwitz-Birkenau was closed, resulting in an estimated 4000 Roma and Sinti being killed in the gas chambers by the morning of August 3. Today, there are international efforts to recognize August 2 as Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, in remembrance of the estimated 500,000 to 1.5 million Roma victims of this most dark and painful part of human history.

This year on this day, representatives of ISHR Spain were invited to participate in commemoration activities for Roma Holocaust victims that took place in Auschwitz-Birkenau itself and in Krakow, Poland. Enerida Isuf reported on behalf of the section: We were invited by the Documentation and Cultural Centre of the German Sinti and Roma foundation in Heidelberg through Ternype, the International Roma Youth Network, which organizes annual events as a part of the Roma Genocide Remembrance Initiative”.

At this year’s event, called “Dikh he na bister” (Look and don’t forget), we joined 250 Roma and non-Roma youth from across Europe for a week of talks and training by experts on the Holocaust, from the fields of anthropology, history and human rights.
We also had the opportunity to meet with survivors, including Raymond Gureme, a 93 year old Roma survivor of the Holocaust (see photo). It was a great, but also a very painful experience, to listen to people share their life experiences in surviving those times. We felt very lucky to meet and interview these wonderful people. After this experience, Ricardo Valenti Gutierrez of ISHR Spain will take action by joining with other people who are interested in this topic to organize a series of awareness-building session in different primary and secondary schools in Barcelona.

**ISHR Switzerland**

*Dignified award ceremony honoring Karl and Wenche Hafen in pre-Christmas Bern*

(Dec. 2018) - On December 1, Members of the Executive Committee of the IGFM Germany, as well as the ISHR Switzerland and other invited guests were invited to attend the ceremonial ceremony for the awarding of the Swiss Human Rights Award to Karl and Wenche Hafen in Bern. The honorary president of the ISHR Switzerland, Ms. Monique Schlegel, said after nearly 30 years of the Swiss Human Rights Award: "This was one of the most beautiful awards that I have ever experienced."

With the following reasoning, the ISHR Switzerland's Executive Board honored the Hafen couple with this year's Human Rights Award: "The ISHR is the life's work of the couple Karl and Wenche Hafen. Over the last 40 years of tireless effort, they have been instrumental in making the ISHR a global organization and a voice in the global human rights movement."

The Swiss Human Rights Award is not endowed with a sum of money, but it is a tradition that the award will be presented in the form of an image painted exclusively for the award winners. The well-known artist Elsbeth Boss said the following during the presentation of her artwork:

"To work for peace, justice and reconciliation needs courage. Courage to be courageous, perseverance and certainty that one is doing the right thing. People like Karl and Wenche Hafen, who are unreservedly committed to a peaceful coexistence, mindfulness, and a "better" world, deserve high regard and respect!"

The honorary President and former Executive Director of ISHR Switzerland, Monique Schlegel, has been able to follow the work of Karl Hafen for over 30 years, and was also able to report interesting and previously unknown experiences from the early years of the ISHR movement in her speech, and even from the youth of Karl Hafen: "One of the political events that had a lasting effect on many people was the Berlin Wall in 1961; Karl was still a student here and was allowed to sit in front of the television until late in the evening to follow the developments. At that time, he was ten years old and already able to understand the situation of the people who jumped out of the windows in Bernauer Strasse or tried to reach freedom via the walls, which were only a few decimeters high. And since then the topic of human rights is no longer foreign to him!"

In his acceptance speech, Karl Hafen revealed even more interesting experiences, such as his account of his interview at the ISHR (IGFM) in 1978; it is a wonderful piece of contemporary history, which cries out to be published. " For me, it was a stroke of luck when I was invited to the Society for Human Rights in May 1978 for a job interview. It was only a few days before the official visit of the Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko to Bonn, and at the time the only three employees - the IGFM founder Ivan Agrusov, a secretary, and the manager for affairs in the Soviet Union - were busy preparing a big demonstration.
Nobody actually took any notice of me, so I made myself useful by packing pamphlets. By the afternoon, I began to become concerned and politely asked if an interview was still going to take place. Mr. Agrusov apologized, saying that unfortunately he had no time left, because he had to take the packages to the post office, but if I wanted to I could accompany him there. Yes, that was my job interview, on the fly.

And then the question came, when could I start? Hesitantly I voiced my expectation: ‘I have a girlfriend in Norway, whom I would like to visit after completing my studies, so September would be my suggestion’. It had been over six months since I had last seen her.

The unexpected answer: ‘That’s too late for me. When are you available at the earliest?’ After all, it was about getting the job. I answered ‘I have the last exam on July 19’. His response: ‘Okay, then start on July 20.’ That was not just a single occurrence, but rather the hard reality of the ISHR (IGFM): the organization first, then the family. And sometimes it was a tough test for us. As you can see, we stood together and got through it together, as we continue to do today.’

**LATIN AMERICA**

**ISHR Colombia**

‘Without Borders’: On the Venezuelan refugee crisis, the largest in the history of Latin America

(Sept. edition 2018) - Diego Alejandro Marin-Cifuentes of ISHR Colombia described the current massive refugee exodus out of Venezuela, due to the ongoing economic catastrophe under its authoritarian president, Nicolas Maduro: “Despite the recent pronouncements of several South American governments to regulate the entry or passage of Venezuelans to their territories, the government of Colombia has decided not to impose any kind of restriction on those who arrive from neighboring Venezuela; Venezuelans will not have to produce a visa or passport, and they will not have to guarantee a minimum income to enter Colombia”, says Marin-Cifuentes.

He writes that today’s Colombia reflects a more humane view of the situation faced by those fleeing from the tyranny of Nicolas Maduro’s regime. According to the UN, approximately 2.3 million Venezuelans have left Venezuela as of June 2018, primarily to Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, and Chile. “Colombia undoubtedly has experienced people fleeing based on our own history, including in regards to what this uprooting process entails for those who leave and for those who are left behind. Perhaps our history has strengthened us as a country and better prepared us to receive them, than those who have never experienced forced migration”, explains Marin-Cifuentes.

“Today in Colombia, you can see many people in transit whose bodies are weary and who carry pain in their souls. In their faces, you can see the tragedy and the burden they carry on their shoulders, as the the last hope for their families. The misery that Nicolás Maduro has managed to bring to his country is worthy of the greatest tyrants; he not only has imposed it on his homeland, but dragged it throughout the continent, by driving his people into self-exile. But happy faces can also be seen, as they receive help from individuals or the Colombian state, which fans the flame of hope of all of Latin America”.

Marin-Cifuentes concluded by applauding the Colombian government’s position of “receiving Venezuelan migrants as what they are - human beings with rights”. Despite his country being a developing country itself, with many internal problems, “it has not forgotten the most important thing - respect for humanity”.

A Venezuelan family entering Colombia after emigrating from their home country. June 2018.

Source: Voice of America


Venezuelans in crisis need help on both sides of the border

(Nov. edition 2018) - Silvia Osorio, President of ISHR Colombia, Cristian Rare, from New Generation Colombia, and Haydee Marin, Vice President of the ISHR and Coordinator of the Latin America Committee, visited Cucuta, Colombia on the border with Táchira, Venezuela on October 12, 2018. Ms. Marin reported on their visit to the border, in which they spoke with representatives of Venezuelan churches and civil society, and to evaluate the pressing needs of Venezuelan citizens who are fleeing Venezuela, as well as those who remain in their home country.

According to Ms. Marin’s report, one of the major problems on the border is that people fleeing Venezuela only have the pressing need to flee from misery and oppression on their minds, without a clear strategy to follow afterwards: “You see men and women with children carrying bags with their only belongings, who come walking through the Colombian customs without knowing where to go or what to do next”. She explains that Colombian Catholic Churches and Protestants have been offering aid on the border, but they can’t keep up with demand, as there are simply too many people in need”.

“Venezuelans who possess passports can go to other countries, but those who do not have documents seek to cross borders by going through the mountains, looking to go to Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil by walking for days; many die from the cold in the mountains of Colombia”, says Marin. According to the calculations of Colombian authorities, approximately 30,000 Venezuelans cross the border daily via the Simon Bolivar Bridge, which connects San Antonio de Tachira, Venezuela with the city of Cúcuta, Colombia.

Marin paints a bleak picture of the scene at the border: “The streets of Cúcuta are full of Venezuelans who travel around looking for work; in the evenings, you see thousands of people sleeping in the streets. In the parks and public spaces, it is very painful to see Venezuelan girls between twelve and fourteen years-old working as prostitutes. The news shown on TV and in the newspapers is nothing compared to reality”.

Not only is the situation grim for those on the Colombian side of the border, but for those who remain in Venezuela as well. Marin described the humanitarian crisis inside Venezuela as follows: “There is no medicine available, children go hungry and without clothes or shoes; school teachers are not able to get pencils and notebooks so the children can write. We managed to speak with several teachers who told us about the daily problems they experience, in order to help the students. Children do not have anything to eat at home and come to school hungry”.

According to Ms. Marin, international organizations are not allowed to donate to Venezuelan civil society, “because the government of Nicolas Maduro does not admit wrongdoing, and to accept help would prove otherwise”. “However, through friends, we managed to send 5000 books on alphabetization and mathematics, which were donated to ISHR Colombia. We are currently collecting children’s clothing and school supplies to send to Venezuela”, stated Marin.

ISHR Guatemala

Peacebuilding in prisons, improving education for indigenous children

(Sept. edition 2018) - Hayde Marin recently reported on the activities of ISHR Guatemala, who are currently carrying out two major projects: ‘Constructores de Paz’ (Peace Makers) and education for Mayan indigenous children. The ‘Constructores de Paz’ program has been developed in prisons in Guatemala with the help of Confraternidad Carcelaria de Guatemala (Prison Fellowship of Guatemala) to carry out trainings in peacebuilding for prison leadership and in schools.
The penitentiary system in Guatemala has 22 prisons that house approximately 20,000 inmates. One of the most challenging problems that Guatemala faces is the fight against youth gangs, called "Maras". These gangs control organized crime in Guatemala and are very violent. So far, 400 young imprisoned Maras participated in the ‘Constructores de Paz’ course. The program has been implemented in prisons including La Granja Canadá, which is located outside the capital of Escuitla, which houses 3,000 inmates despite a capacity of 600. In 2015, there was a riot among the prisoners that was due to these extremely overcrowded living conditions combined with rivalry between gangs, leaving 17 dead. Confraternidad Carcelaria de Guatemala and ISHR Guatemala have sought ways to help support peace between the prisoners, including through the ‘Constructores de Paz’ program, which has been very successful in helping to resolve conflicts without violence.

For its second major project, ‘Educational support for Mayan indigenous children’, ISHR Guatemala received a donation of 60,000 educational books for the rural, largely Mayan area of Guatemala. The books are titled ‘Alphabet and Phonetic Primer’ and ‘Numbers, Concepts and Geometric figures’. These books were donated to rural schools in the poorest areas of the country, where the majority of children are indigenous Mayans, who are disadvantaged and often face discrimination. Both projects were led by representatives of ISHR Guatemala, Maria Renee Bobadilla and Alexandra Marin.

Nicaragua

Grave human rights violations committed by Ortega regime continue to worsen

(Oct. edition 2018) - Haydee Marin issued the following report on the events taking place on the ground in Nicaragua, which is currently in an ongoing state of open protest against the authoritarian regime of Daniel Ortega, which has been met with deadly violence and repression:

It started on April 18 of this year, when retirees entered the streets of the city of León to protest proposed changes to social security, who were ruthlessly attacked by sympathizers of the Sandinista government. This led to protests of university students in Masaya and Managua, to which the Ortega regime responded with intense violence. Nicaraguan civil society supported the students, spreading the protests nationwide. In response, violent paramilitary groups and national police were used to assassinate defenseless citizens. According to our sources, more than 400 have been killed and 500 remain missing as a result of government attacks; furthermore, over 2000 people have been detained under degrading conditions, many of whom are tortured. Mutilated dead bodies of students have appeared; relatives reported that these young people had been arrested by police.

Recently, a law was passed that facilitates the punishment of those who participated in the protests, or who spoke out against the government in the media, by accusing them of terrorism. This has allowed the government to persecute not only protest leaders, but all also anyone involved in the ‘Civic Alliance for Justice and Democracy’, which consists of student leaders, peasants, and civil society actors, among others. This alliance represented the Nicaraguan people at the negotiation table with the Ortega government, mediated by the Catholic Church. Negotiations have since been suspended by the government.

Harsh repression continues, in particular towards the following:
Healthcare professionals - More than 300 health professionals have been dismissed (doctors, nurses, auxiliaries) in health centers across the country in retaliation by Daniel Ortega’s government for treating protesters who were injured by police and paramilitaries.

The Catholic Church - Aggression towards Catholic priests and attacks on parishioners, as well as vandalism of structures continues. Paramilitary groups are ordered by the Ortega regime to enter and destroy the inside of the churches.

The media - Independent media that is not controlled by the government is being threatened; journalists cannot carry out their job of reporting reliably because they are physically attacked, their equipment is stolen, and they face death threats. The TV channels 100 % Noticias, Channel 12, and Channel 10, were set on fire, while others have been looted, and journalists were attacked.

Private companies - Private enterprises are also being threatened, as merchandise is held by customs and excessive taxes and fines are being charged as a form of punishment for supporting the protests. Some businessmen received death threats, while the farms and businesses of others have been invaded by pro-government forces. The national police do not intervene in defense of the legitimate owners.

Students and civil society - Brutal repression is taking place on an ongoing basis against students, poor farmers, civil society actors, and private enterprises. Multiple international organizations, including the Organization of American States (OAS), the UN, and the European Economic Community, are aware of these human rights violations and have taken action. The recent report from OAS directly accuses the government of being the cause of the acts of violence in the country, which was also reported by the UN-OHCHR; this resulted in the dismissal of the UN mission from the country by the Ortega-Murillo regime.

Peru & Ecuador

From the President: The human rights of threatened peoples

(Oct. edition 2018) - As President of the ISHR, Prof. Schirrmacher has been invited to testify on November 28, 2018 in the Human Rights Council of the German Federal Parliament on “Threatened Peoples” on November 28, 2018. “Having studied ethnology/cultural anthropology among other subjects, it is a topic that has accompanied me all my life”, said Schirrmacher.

He connected this topic with his recent trips to Peru and Ecuador, in which he was able to spend time with several indigenous groups at high altitudes as well as meet with ISHR partners: “Some human rights violations do not only target individuals, but entire groups of people, whether ethnic, linguistic, religious, or those with lower economic status, or often, a combination of those elements”. In Ecuador, he also met with partner organizations who are involved in fighting for the freedom of press there. “In Ecuador, the indigenous tribes who fought the Inca centuries ago face many modern threats today. In Peru, it is typically the descendants of the Incas themselves who live in the picturesque Andes Mountains that face marginalization and various challenges to their survival”, clarifies Schirrmacher.

He concluded by highlighting the ISHR’s history of fighting for the human rights of threatened people, such as the Yezidis in Iraq, the Kurds and Armenians in Turkey, the Rohingya in Myanmar, the Syriac-Orthodox Christians in Syria, the Tibetans and Uighurs in China, and the Ahmadis in Pakistan, among others.
**MIDDLE EAST**

**ISHR Iraq**

*Addressing crimes of ISIS, seeking justice for Yezidis, and supporting refugee and IDP populations*

(Sept. edition 2018) - ISHR Iraq was the second new organization to be accepted into the ISHR global network at the International Council Meeting in Bonn this year. Under the direction of Krmanj Othman, who is also a senior legal advisor to the Independent Commission for Human Rights in Kurdistan, Iraq and a member of the Kurdistan Regional Government’s High Committee for the Recognition of Genocide against Yezidi Kurds and other religious and ethnic minorities, the new organization focuses largely on seeking justice and accountability for the crimes committed by ISIS in Iraq, including genocide, as well as advocating for the rights and wellbeing of refugee and IDP populations in the country.

ISHR Iraq has since engaged in a wide range of activities, including taking part in multiple conferences, televised interviews, meetings with European organizations and diplomats, commemoration events, and much more. For example, in July, they took part in a training of 25 Syrian refugee leaders in Erbil on the topics of negotiation, conflict resolution, and peace efforts in a culture of non-violence, and Mr. Othman was interviewed regarding humanitarian law and the protection of civilian and refugee rights on an Arabic news channel (‘Zagros’) and met with the Deputy Consul of Germany, regarding the situation of IDPs.

In August, Mr. Othman was interviewed by Kurdistan TV regarding the genocide of Yazidis, as well as on supporting IDPs with reconstruction efforts at the locations destroyed by ISIS. ISHR Iraq also participated in the commemoration events of the 4th anniversary of the ISIS attack on Shingal (the holiest site of the Yezidi faith) in Duhok on August 3. Mr. Othman also attended a meeting organized by International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) regarding accountability for ISIS and investigation into mass graves in Duhok.

(Nov. edition 2018) - The work of ISHR Iraq continued in the fall with conferences with EU-MEPs on Iraqi minorities, discussing ISIS crimes with ICC Prosecutor in Nuremberg, and more. On October 3, Krmanj Othman, Director of ISHR Iraq, was invited by the German General Consulate in Kurdistan in Erbil on the occasion of German Unity Day. The following day, he performed a 55-minute interview on-air with well-known local radio station in northern Iraq (Kurdistan), Rudaw Radio, regarding Baha’i rights as a minority in the MENA region in general and in Yemen in particular. A second interview with the same station took place on October 16, this time on the topic of mass graves that were created by IS after massacring minorities on the Nineveh Plains.

In mid-October, the American University of Kurdistan (AUK) in collaboration with the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group of the European Parliament hosted a conference on “Minorities and Religious Diversity in Kurdistan and Iraq” from the 12-13. Professor Josef Weidenholzer, Vice President of the S&D group of the European Parliament, and Dr. Jaafar Eminki, Deputy Secretary of Kurdistan’s Parliament were present at the conference, as well as AUK President, Ambassador John Menzies, who opened the event. He described Duhok as the most stable city in the Middle East and praised the willingness of the small native population of the Dohuk (aka Duhok) region to take in refugees.
The event was also attended by members of parliament and representatives of minority groups, including Christians, Yezidis (aka Ezidis or Yazidis), Mandeans and others. Deputy Secretary of Kurdistan’s Parliament, Dr. Jaafar Eminki stated: “The subject of minorities is always an essential topic in Kurdistan Parliament and Government. In this region, the people decided on co-existence!”.

On October 13, five panels took place throughout the day and over 150 guests were present. The panels discussed the religious diversity of Iraq and the future of religious minorities in the region under the shade of history. During the Christian minorities in Iraq panel, the political pressure and persecution of Iraqi Christians living in cities who were forced to abandon their native language for Arabic was addressed.

One of the panels, titled “Ezidi after the Ferman” (note of the editor: ‘Ferman’ is a term used by Yezidis that means ‘extermination’), included Former Yezidi-Iraqi Member of Parliament Vian Dakhil, who highlighted the last genocidal massacre against Yezidi people by the Islamic State in 2014. The final primary topic revolved around if and how Europe can support religious freedom and reconstruction in Iraq.

From October 19-20, Mr. Othman (Director, ISHR Iraq) and Mr. Al-Rasho (Director of Humanitarian Aid to Iraq, ISHR Germany) represented the ISHR at ‘Nuremberg Forum 2018’, an international conference organized by the Nuremberg Principles Academy in honor of the 20th anniversary of the Rome statute, which was the treaty which created the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague during on July 17, 1998. The conference included panels with experts in international law that took place within the historical court room 600 in Nuremberg, Germany. The conference provided the opportunity to discuss IS crimes in Iraq and the genocide case against Yezidis and Christians with ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda (see photo above) and to discuss meeting with her in The Hague.

On the day after the Forum, Mr. Othman and Mr. Al-Rasho conducted a meeting with the ‘Yezidische Gemeinde Offenbach am Main’ (Yezidi Community Offenbach) regarding the legal steps of genocide documentation and recognition (see photo).

**ISHR EVENTS**

**International Council meeting 2018**

(April-May edition 2018) - The 33rd meeting of the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) took place at the Gustav Stresemann Institut on April 8, in Bonn, Germany. Over 35 representatives from 17 national sections and groups were in attendance this year. The meeting was led by representatives of the board of the International Council, Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher (President), and Mr. Karl Hafen, (Treasurer).

This year, the Council was very pleased to welcome two new member organizations, ISHR Spain, represented by Ms. Enerida Isuf and Mr. Ricardo Gutierrez, and ISHR Iraq, represented by Mr. Krmanj Othman. The International Council voted unanimously to approve their status as member organizations, which means they are officially part of the ISHR community. We look forward to a future of successful cooperation!
From the President

Discussion at Global Media Forum 2018 with UN Rapporteur on Religious Freedom or Belief in Bonn

(Aug. edition 2018) - On June 12, the Center for International Security and Governance (CISG) and the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) hosted a panel discussion at the Global Media Forum of Deutsche Welle in Bonn, Germany.

The two experts on religion and human rights on the panel were Dr. Ahmed Shaheed (UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief) and Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher (Director of the IIRF, President of the ISHR), who discussed the whether religion is a cause or a cure for social inequality.

Human Rights Online: Continuation of cooperation between 8 ISHR Sections

Bloggers from the Eastern Partnership & Russia meet in Kiev in July

(Aug. edition 2018) - Human rights bloggers, one from each section in the countries of the Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) and ISHR Russia, as well as two project members from ISHR Germany attended the workshop in Kiev, Ukraine from July 27-28.

The workshop was the launch event for this year’s project ‘Into the future with Human Rights Online’, which is funded by the German Foreign Office as a part of a larger program to support civil society and pluralism in the region. Human Rights Online was initiated by Dr. Carmen Krusch-Grün of ISHR Germany in 2016 as a blog platform for our sections to share news and information about human rights issues and violations across the post-Soviet countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and Russia.

Bloggers from each section were trained to use the tri-lingual (EN, DE, RU) WordPress site to upload their own posts onto the platform from on the ground. One of the goals of the workshop was to deepen their skills in working with the site and prepare them to lead workshops in regions facing especially intense human rights challenges (not in capital cities).

Two target regions per country were strategically selected by each section, in order to introduce Human Rights Online to areas that are outside of the capital cities, and therefore generally more marginalized and lacking in access to tools to raise awareness of the human rights issues affecting them.

ISHR Georgia, Germany & Moldova represented at ‘We Change’ Conference in Berlin

(Nov. edition 2018) - At the end of October, ‘WeChange’, the Berlin-based online platform for civil society organizations held a conference for the people and organizations working together from Germany, the six Eastern Partnership countries, and Russia. Representatives from ISHR Georgia, Maya ISHR Germany, and ISHR Moldova represented the ISHR and the joint blog platform ‘Human Rights Online’ at the regional networking event.

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