Since our launch 15 years ago, the Human Rights Foundation has created a global network of support for hundreds of the bravest and most influential dissidents in the world.

These individuals dedicate their lives, often at great personal risk, to challenging authoritarian governments that violate the most basic rights of 4.18 billion people in 94 countries across the globe.

In order to better serve these individuals and turn the tide toward a freer and more open world, we are challenging ourselves to significantly grow our reach and impact in 2020.

Our mission has never been more clear than it is today: the Human Rights Foundation exists to challenge tyranny and promote freedom in closed and closing societies. So how do we accomplish that?

We engage in political prisoner legal advocacy with a track record of measurable success in bringing about liberation; we educate a global audience through media and events that reach millions of people every month; we conduct research and analyses that change government policy across the world; we produce high-impact reports and publications focusing on human rights and authoritarianism; and we directly support individual activists and civil society organizations on the frontlines of democratic change.

For 2020, we aim to keep improving the work of human rights defenders, achieving international legal victories, sparking meaningful collaborations, employing technology at the service of freedom, and building our global community through events and outreach.

As a charitable organization without an endowment, HRF is entirely dependent on the generosity of donors like you to do our work. With your support, we can continue to expand our efforts, build more programs, and educate more people — in the process, making the world more peaceful, prosperous, and free.

With gratitude,

Thor Halvorssen
President
Human Rights Foundation
Our Mission

We are a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that promotes and protects human rights globally, with a focus on closed societies. HRF unites people in the common cause of defending human rights and promoting liberal democracy. Our mission is to ensure that freedom is both preserved and promoted around the world.

We focus our work on the founding ideals of the human rights movement, those most purely represented in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the 1976 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Our Mission

We believe all human beings are entitled to rights and freedoms including:

- Freedom of speech and expression.
- Freedom from slavery and torture.
- Freedom of association.
- Freedom from arbitrary detainment or exile.
- Freedom from interference and coercion in matters of conscience.
- The right to equal treatment and due process under law.
- The right to leave and enter their countries.
- The right to acquire and dispose of property.
- The right to participate in the government of their choosing.

We are a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that promotes and protects human rights globally, with a focus on closed societies. HRF unites people in the common cause of defending human rights and promoting liberal democracy. Our mission is to ensure that freedom is both preserved and promoted around the world.

We partner with world-changing dissidents. We defend, equip, and give a platform to human rights defenders who are boldly changing their communities and countries.

We create innovative solutions. We connect dissidents to industry leaders and develop modern solutions to combat the worst human rights violations.

We activate millions of supporters. We amplify the impact of world-changing dissidents by inspiring people around the world to participate in our initiatives.
2019 HIGHLIGHTS

JANUARY 23
HRF participates in round table on human rights at World Economic Forum in Davos

FEBRUARY 16
HRF hosts an official SXSW Interactive panel on Chinese human rights and the Uyghur crisis

MARCH 22
College Freedom Forum at Universidad Francisco Marroquin in Guatemala

MARCH 26
HRF speaks at the Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy

APRIL 9-25
HRF organizes the Freedom Drive with Saudi women’s rights advocate Manal al-Sharif to raise awareness on women’s rights in Saudi Arabia

MAY 29
HRF submits its first case file under the Global Magnitsky Act to the U.S. State and Treasury Departments

MAY 13
Launch of HRF’s rebrand and new visual identity

JUNE 6
HRF wins its case before the U.N. on behalf of Gabonese human rights activist Hervé Mombo Kinga

JUNE 11-14
HRF’s legal and policy staff members host a panel and workshop at RightsCon in Tunis, Tunisia

JULY 3
HRF visits Taiwan to speak out in defense of democratic protests in Hong Kong

AUGUST 28
HRF wins its case before the U.N. on behalf of Iranian political prisoner Saeed Malekpour

SEPTEMBER 13
Oslo Freedom Forum in Taiwan

SEPTEMBER 27
HRF organizes the Future of Governance conference at Oslo Innovation Week in Norway

OCTOBER 28
HRF organizes the Future of Governance conference at Oslo Innovation Week in Norway

OCTOBER 22
HRF speaks about challenging authoritarianism in Sydney, Australia

OCTOBER 23
Oslo Freedom Forum in New York

NOVEMBER 15
First-ever Oslo Freedom Forum Working Retreat for the Arab World

DECEMBER 3
HRF launches the global fundraiser for its 2020 Hong Kong Desk

APRIL 26
HRF hosts a panel discussion on the collapse of the rule of law in Turkey at Columbia University

MAY 27-29
11th annual Oslo Freedom Forum in Norway

FEBRUARY 28
Oslo Freedom Forum in Mexico City

MARCH 16
HRF awards the Rómulo Betancourt Prize for Democratic Diplomacy to Diego Arria, Wuilly Cochez, and Luis Almagro

FEBRUARY 20
College Freedom Forum at Harvard University

APRIL 26
HRF hosts a panel discussion on the collapse of the rule of law in Turkey at Columbia University

JUNE 11-14
HRF’s legal and policy staff members host a panel and workshop at RightsCon in Tunis, Tunisia

MAY 27-29
11th annual Oslo Freedom Forum in Norway

OCTOBER 22
HRF speaks about challenging authoritarianism in Sydney, Australia

OCTOBER 23
Oslo Freedom Forum in New York

NOVEMBER 15
First-ever Oslo Freedom Forum Working Retreat for the Arab World

DECEMBER 3
HRF launches the global fundraiser for its 2020 Hong Kong Desk

APRIL 26
HRF hosts a panel discussion on the collapse of the rule of law in Turkey at Columbia University

MAY 27-29
11th annual Oslo Freedom Forum in Norway

OCTOBER 22
HRF speaks about challenging authoritarianism in Sydney, Australia

OCTOBER 23
Oslo Freedom Forum in New York

NOVEMBER 15
First-ever Oslo Freedom Forum Working Retreat for the Arab World

DECEMBER 3
HRF launches the global fundraiser for its 2020 Hong Kong Desk
Table of Contents

01 Making Headlines 02-03
02 Celebrities & Dictators 04-05
03 Impact Litigation & Legal Advocacy 06-09
04 Political Regime Classification 10-11
05 The Freedom Drive 12-13
06 Global Partnerships & Conferences 14
07 Research & Advocacy 15
08 Anti-Corruption Initiative 16
09 The Human Cost of the War on Drugs 17
10 The Oslo Freedom Forum 18-25
  2019 Oslo Freedom Forum 19
  The Global Expansion 20
  Oslo Freedom Forum in Mexico 21
  The Rómulo Betancourt Prize for Democratic Diplomacy 21
  Oslo Freedom Forum Working Retreat for the Arab World 22
  Oslo Freedom Forum in New York 23
  Oslo Freedom Forum in Taiwan 23
  11 Years of Oslo Freedom Forum Speakers 24-25
11 Tech & Liberty 26-28
  Collaboration with Leading Tech Companies 27
  Finance and Freedom 27
  Flash Drives for Freedom 28
12 Supporting NGOs at Risk 29
13 Educational Programming 30-31
  The College Freedom Forum 30
  Oslo Scholars 31
14 The Freedom Fellows 32-33
15 Art in Protest 34-35
16 Wear Your Values 36
17 International Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent 37
18 Financials 38-39
19 Our Staff 40-41
20 Join Us 43
01

Making Headlines

HRF gives activists from around the world a platform to tell their stories about the atrocities they face living under dictatorships. Over time, we have developed a demonstrable ability to get these stories into the world’s top media outlets.


This Saudi activist is driving across America to raise awareness of the women still in prison in her country, detained for wanting to drive.

He led a popular uprising against Mugabe. Now he says life is more brutal than ever for Zimbabweans.

Bitcoin could change the game for foreign aid.

Turkey crackdown leaves terminally ill patients banned from seeking health care abroad.

Ethiopia’s leader won the Nobel Prize. But he’s got a long way to go for peace.

The prince, the billionaire and the Amazon project that got frozen in the desert.

Family of Loujain al-Hathloul fight to free imprisoned Saudi activist.

Digital money is here: Will it make us more free or less?
In July, HRF learned that world-famous hip hop artist Nicki Minaj was scheduled to perform in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at a government-backed concert. Given the Saudi regime’s litany of human rights violations—including the brutal torture of female political prisoners and massacre and starvation of civilians in Yemen—HRF sent Minaj a public letter, outlining why she should cancel her appearance and instead issue a statement of support for human rights in Saudi Arabia.

We sent the letter to Minaj personally and opened up a line of dialogue with her team, while working with the media to place stories about the concert in dozens of media outlets. A few days later, Minaj announced that, after considering our arguments, she was canceling her Saudi performance.


The impact through social media was also enormous. Consider that Minaj stoked a debate on women’s rights on Instagram, where she has three times as many followers as Saudi Arabia has citizens.

This was a singular embarrassment for MBS and a reminder that, while he may be able to strong-arm most individuals and institutions, he can’t have it all. HRF is committed to bringing about wider international condemnation of the ongoing human rights crimes in Saudi Arabia, and we continue to press for the release of political prisoners and for genuine political reform.

“While I want nothing more than to bring my show to fans in Saudi Arabia, after better educating myself on the issues, I believe it is important for me to make clear my support for the rights of women, the LGBTQ community and freedom of expression.”

Nicki Minaj
One of the major ways HRF supports human rights activists is by offering pro-bono international legal representation for political prisoners. To date, HRF has a 100% success rate in petitioning the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD). In January, HRF submitted a petition to the UNWGAD regarding an individual in the dictatorship of Gabon, Hervé Mombo Kinga, who was imprisoned for peacefully protesting the results of the 2016 rigged presidential elections, and for publicly exposing the regime’s corruption and poor governance. After his health deteriorated, HRF also submitted an Urgent Appeal to the attention of the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Within a few weeks of HRF’s submission, a U.N. communication was sent to the government of Gabon, and Kinga was released from prison, after nearly 18 months in detention. In June, HRF won its case before the UNWGAD against the dictatorship of Gabon. The UNWGAD declared that Kinga had been arbitrarily detained and was entitled to compensation. Kinga has publicly thanked HRF for our role in the success of his case.

**Impact Litigation & Advocacy**

**JANUARY**

14 HRF launches the Freedom Drive with women’s rights advocate and Oslo Freedom Forum speaker Manal al-Sharif who drove from San Francisco to Washington, D.C. The “Freedom Drive” raised awareness about the ongoing crackdown in Saudi Arabia against the country’s human rights activists — especially women who had advocated for the right to drive.

**FEBRUARY**

04 Gabonese activist Hervé Mombo Kinga released from prison, after nearly 18 months in detention. HRF’s Legal team submitted a petition on behalf of Kinga before the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and received a favorable decision.

13 HRF filed submissions on behalf of Saudi human rights activist Omar Abdulaziz Alzahrani, to the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy and the U.N. Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, after Alzahrani was subjected to a cyber attack ordered by the Saudi government.

27 HRF sent an open letter to the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK about the censorship of North Korean defectors living in South Korea.

**MARCH**

05 Egyptian photojournalist Shawkan was released after five years in arbitrary detention. HRF’s Legal team submitted a petition on behalf of Shawkan before the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and received a favorable decision.

26 HRF Chief Program Officer, Céline Assaf Boustani, represented HRF at the Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy.

28 HRF’s legal team prepared a submission for the U.N. Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review of The Gambia. This mechanism was established to examine the human rights performance of all U.N. member states.

28 HRF signed on to support a series of letters formally requesting $1 million each in appropriations for the Departments of Treasury, State, and Justice, to be used for the implementation of targeted sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Act.

**APRIL**


29 HRF hosted a panel discussion at Columbia University, entitled “Turkey: The Collapse of the Rule of Law.” As a founding member of the Coalition to Free the Kremlin’s Political Prisoners, HRF co-launched the first comprehensive report on political prisoners, “The Kremlin’s Political Prisoners: Advancing a Political Agenda by Crushing Dissent.”

**MAY**

01 HRF submitted an urgent appeal to the U.N. Special Procedures on behalf of Saudi activist Raif Badawi in advance of Ramadan, an occasion for Royal Pardons in the Kingdom.
HRF’s Legal and Policy Fellow Michelle Gulino briefed civil society groups and Congressional staff on Capitol Hill on the Kremlin political prisoners report and its value as a tool to assist in the imposition of sanctions on culpable perpetrators within Russia.

HRF received a favorable decision from the UNWGAD against the dictatorship of Gabon, noting that Hervé Mombo Kinga’s detention and deprivation of liberty were, in fact, arbitrary under numerous categories, and that he was entitled to compensation.

HRF staff member Michelle Gulino appeared as a panelist on “Deep Dive” with Wall Street Journal editor Mary O’Grady to discuss the Sudan uprising.

HRF and the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights submitted an individual complaint to the UNWGAD requesting that it initiate a formal investigation into the arrest of Russian activist Anastasia Shevchenko.

HRF staff member Roberto González represented HRF in Washington, D.C. to present HRF’s case file submission under the Global Magnitsky Act to representatives from the State and Treasury Departments, along with the Canadian and U.K. governments.

During a brief furlough granted due to international pressure, Iranian web designer Saeed Malekpour escaped Iran’s Evin Prison to attain his freedom in Canada. HRF had previously submitted a petition on his behalf to the UNWGAD.

HRF submitted an Urgent Appeal to the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the rights to peaceful assembly regarding police violence in the Hong Kong anti-extradition law protests.

HRF’s Chief Program Officer, Céline Assaf Boustani, and Legal and Policy Fellow, Michelle Gulino, wrote a piece in Eazel Magazine for Fashion Week around the world: “Wear Your Values: Fashion’s Role in the Fight for Freedom.”

HRF submitted an Urgent Appeal to the UNWGAD on behalf of Iranian activist Masih Alinejad’s brother, Alireza Alinejad, who was forcibly taken from his home and is being held in Iran’s notorious Evin Prison.

HRF filed an Urgent Appeal to the UNWGAD on behalf of Iranian activist Masih Alinejad’s brother, Alireza Alinejad, who was forcibly taken from his home and is being held in Iran’s notorious Evin Prison.

HRF submitted a petition to the UNWGAD on behalf of Tajik political opposition activist Mak-sud Ibragimov, who was abducted in Russia and forcibly returned to Tajikistan, where he was sentenced to 17 years in prison.

HRF submitted a petition to the UNWGAD on behalf of Tajik political opposition activist Mak-sud Ibragimov, who was abducted in Russia and forcibly returned to Tajikistan, where he was sentenced to 17 years in prison.


The Global Magnitsky Coalition — of which HRF is a member — achieves victories in the form of funding increases for Global Magnitsky enforcement in all relevant appropriations bills in the FY20 “Minibuses”, one of which states that “not less than $3,000,000 shall be available for addressing human rights violations and corruption.”

The Washington Post
Ethiopia’s leader won the Nobel Prize. But he’s got a long way to go for peace.
In order to fulfill our mission, HRF has classified all of the countries in the world, with the purpose of distinguishing democratic regimes from authoritarian regimes. According to HRF’s regime analysis, 94 countries in the world are non-democratic. In other words, 54% of the world’s population — 4,179,518,155 people — are living under an authoritarian regime. HRF’s research further shows that the world currently has a little over 100 democracies that govern over 46% of the world’s population; 40 competitive authoritarian regimes that rule 1.2 billion people or 16% of the world’s population; and 54 full-fledged dictatorships ruled by tyrants, strongmen, kings, or military juntas that oppress over 2.9 billion people or 38% of the world’s population.

HRF is one of the few international organizations that focuses exclusively on promoting human rights in authoritarian regimes. Through our regime classification research, we are able to focus our limited resources on countries ruled by authoritarian regimes — countries where independent media, activists, think tanks, opposition parties, and NGOs are under permanent threat and are systematically prevented from having an alternative voice about domestic policy.

As of January 2020, 54% of the world’s population is living under authoritarian regimes.
In 2011, Manal al-Sharif filmed a video of herself driving in Saudi Arabia and posted it on YouTube, landing her in jail and sparking the country’s Women-2-Drive movement. Ultimately, she and her colleagues were successful, and the ban on women driving was lifted, but it came as a fig leaf over a broader crackdown on human rights. In 2012, Manal spoke at HRF’s Oslo Freedom Forum and received the Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent. She later went on to become a global icon and the best-selling author of *Daring to Drive*.

In the spring of 2019, HRF partnered with Manal to raise awareness about female political prisoners in Saudi Arabia. HRF staff and Manal drove more than 3,000 miles, making symbolic stops along the way and meeting with thousands of people.

In 2011, Manal al-Sharif filmed a video of herself driving in Saudi Arabia and posted it on YouTube, landing her in jail and sparking the country’s Women-2-Drive movement. Ultimately, she and her colleagues were successful, and the ban on women driving was lifted, but it came as a fig leaf over a broader crackdown on human rights. In 2012, Manal spoke at HRF’s Oslo Freedom Forum and received the Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent. She later went on to become a global icon and the best-selling author of *Daring to Drive*.

In the spring of 2019, HRF partnered with Manal to raise awareness about female political prisoners in Saudi Arabia. HRF staff and Manal drove more than 3,000 miles, making symbolic stops along the way and meeting with thousands of people.

In the News

Coverage included a PBS NewsHour television segment, a profile in The Guardian, an op-ed in TIME, a CNN web feature, a short CNN video, a Reuters report, a Young Turks live appearance, local coverage in cities like Houston and Birmingham, personal recognition onstage by Hillary Clinton, talks at the Asia Society and Council on Foreign Relations, and a feature interview on NPR.

In order to bring attention to the plight of these brave women, HRF supported Manal in her drive across the U.S. Perhaps most striking throughout this campaign was Manal’s public acknowledgement by the Saudi dictatorship, which invited her to visit its embassy in Washington, D.C. to “clarify” the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia. Needless to say, given what had happened to Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul just a year before, she declined their invitation. With HRF’s help, Manal staged a protest outside the D.C. embassy.

Many women’s rights activists who advocated against the driving ban — including Loujain al-Hathloul, Eman al-Nafjan, and Samar Badawi — are now jailed and subjected to torture, including electric shocks, flogging, and sexual harassment. Several might still face execution.
Global Partnerships & Conferences

HRF collaborates directly with tech companies and entrepreneurs to create solutions to the world’s most challenging issues. To launch and develop these partnerships, HRF invests the time and resources to be able to participate meaningfully at a handful of global conferences.

As HRF’s international profile has grown, it has led to partnerships with and appearances at other events around the world, including DEF CON in Las Vegas; Oslo Innovation Week in Norway; Forum 2000 in Chile; the Conscious Capitalism Summit in Dallas; the GenNext community in cities across the United States; Singularity University global events; and, most notably, South by Southwest (SXSW), the world’s largest interactive festival.

At SXSW, we’ve introduced thousands of people to Flash Drives for Freedom with Yeonmi Park; we’ve focused on tech for human rights with speakers from Cuba, Syria, Eritrea, and Afghanistan; we’ve covered surveillance and the Uyghur crisis with Tahir Imin, Melissa Chan, and Megha Rajagopalan. In 2020, our programming will focus on surveillance in the age of protest with an eye toward the Hong Kong democracy movement.

Research & Advocacy

On April 26, HRF released a report, “The Collapse of the Rule of Law and Human Rights in Turkey: The Ineffectiveness of Domestic Remedies and the Failure of the ECtHR’s Response,” in conjunction with a Turkish legal expert. The report discusses the lack of rule of law in Turkey and details its corruption investigations under the umbrella of the erosion of judicial independence, noting how the Turkish government intervened in the corruption investigations and adopted measures to control judicial processes and mechanisms.

To accompany the launch of its report and bring discussion to the links between authoritarianism and corruption, HRF co-hosted a panel with the Columbia Institute for the Study of Human Rights and the Human Rights Institute at Columbia Law School entitled, “Turkey: The Collapse of the Rule of Law.”
HRF launched its Anti-Corruption Initiative to document the links between corruption, authoritarianism, and human rights abuses, and to publicize instances where kleptocratic regimes are aided and abetted by oligarchs and their cronies inside democratic nations abroad. Since the launch of this initiative, HRF has joined other NGOs in the Global Magnitsky Coalition and received requests for partnering on submissions related to the U.S. Global Magnitsky Act, which allows the President to block or revoke U.S. visas and to block U.S.-based property of foreign individuals and entities that have engaged in acts of corruption and serious human rights abuses. Under the Act, organizations such as HRF are invited to submit case files regarding perpetrators for eventual inclusion on the Specially Designated Nationals List for sanctions.

In January, HRF began evidentiary work for a case file which covered decades’ worth of financial corruption within an authoritarian regime, intertwined with numerous human rights abuses, and was formally submitted to the U.S. Departments of State and Treasury in May. This past cycle, efforts of the Global Magnitsky Coalition—of which HRF is a member—collectively resulted in 19 distinct cases, detailing the crimes of 69 perpetrators. The Coalition is comprised of approximately 90 organizations, though, significantly, HRF was one of only 15 organizations to present a submission. Following its submission, HRF strengthened advocacy efforts with State and Treasury experts and has continued to work within its network for the next round of submissions under the Global Magnitsky Act.

HRF’s War on Drugs Research Program investigates the human rights consequences of the global war on drugs. Launched in 2018 at the Oslo Freedom Forum, the program has conducted in-depth research and awareness-raising efforts to educate the public and policymakers on the negative impact of global drug prohibition. In 2019, we published a detailed report that assesses the costs of the war on drugs, both in terms of money and human rights, and examines three case studies: Colombia, Mexico, and the United States. What we found is that prohibition policies do not justify the billions of dollars spent in this war. Then, we investigated the links between the illicit market and human rights violations, and found that prohibitionist drug policies ultimately constitute a threat to democracy.

HRF is pleased to be among the first international human rights groups to take a stance on drug policy, and we hope our efforts can reframe the topic in human rights terms and prompt greater engagement from experts. In 2019, we expanded our advocacy and outreach, bringing drug war activists and experts to speak around the world through the Oslo Freedom Forum Global Expansion. At the Oslo Freedom Forum in Mexico City, we curated a photography exhibit that paired the moving photographs of Mexican photographer Mónica González with shocking statistics on the violence and terror of the drug war. At our flagship event in Norway, we staged a panel with some of the foremost thinkers and activists on drug policy and illicit markets, and were able to draw a link between the drug war and its impacts on democracy.
The Oslo Freedom Forum (OFF) is a transformative annual conference where the world’s most engaging human rights advocates, artists, tech entrepreneurs, and world leaders meet to share their stories and brainstorm ways to expand freedom and unleash human potential across the globe.

Approximately 1,000 participants and more than 75 members of the international media joined some of the world’s top entrepreneurs, technologists, philanthropists, and investors, as well as high-level policymakers from Norway, the European Union, the United States, and other democratic nations to hear two days of inspiring talks and participate in panels and roundtable discussions. Highlights included a new partnership between Wikipedia and Netblocks to keep the Internet free and open, new support for educational materials for Afghanistan’s all-female robotics team, and much more.

HRF’s Oslo Freedom Forum seeks to:

- Raise human rights to the top of the world agenda.
- Highlight the work of activists and innovators.
- Expose authoritarian regimes.
- Inspire action through the exchange of ideas.
- Build, grow, and equip a vibrant international community.
- Establish a human rights network of journalists.
- Connect participants with allies and supporters.

For the first time, HRF featured speakers from Tajikistan (Sharofiddin Gadoev), Hong Kong (Denise Ho), and Kenya (Audrey Mbugua).

Speaker Laila Haidari covered drug reform in Afghanistan, which is a topic we have typically covered in the past in the Americas and the Philippines.

We also launched “Defending the Defenders: The Right to Protect the Environment.” It united our global community of activists and the Norwegian public in a celebration of bravery and a commitment to protecting environmental defenders everywhere, particularly those operating in countries ruled by authoritarian regimes without access to local NGOs, independent media, or legal protections for their work.
In 2018, HRF expanded its flagship annual conference to include regional events around the world. These events link HRF’s existing network of rights advocates and supporters of freedom with new partners to strengthen civil liberties in Asia, Latin America, and beyond.

The global OFF expansion events feature riveting talks, world-class networking, interactive exhibits, music and art, and new collaborations between courageous dissidents and leaders from business, philanthropy, technology, policy, and media. The initial impact from these events has taken the form of auxiliary events, new partnerships, and press activity, and continues to grow.

In 2019, “Unite” was the designated theme of the Oslo Freedom Forum events around the world.

In the spirit of that theme, we invited attendees to engage with at least one participant during the events and commit to working with them over the next year on a project in the service of human rights. It is not an exaggeration to say that this community of courageous pro-democracy activists has the power to contribute significantly to changing the destiny of nations, and quite possibly, the world.

Oslo Freedom Forum in Mexico

A world-class community of influencers gathered at the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City, Mexico for HRF’s first Oslo Freedom Forum in Latin America. The interactive exhibition space featured organizations and companies working at the intersection of human rights and a variety of other industries. The focus for this event was primarily on the intersections of technology and the arts, with such participants as Twitter, Students for Liberty, SocialTIC, MakerDao, AirTM, Wikimedia Mexico, Open Money Initiative, Amnesty International Mexico, and Article 19 Mexico. The Expo featured HRF’s War on Drugs and Anti-Corruption Initiative work, as well as overviews of our other programs and the Oslo Freedom Forum series.

The Rómulo Betancourt Prize for Democratic Diplomacy

At the 2019 Oslo Freedom Forum in Mexico, HRF awarded the Rómulo Betancourt Prize for Democratic Diplomacy to Wuilly Cochez, Diego Arria, and Luis Almagro.
Oslo Freedom Forum Working Retreat

In November, HRF brought together approximately 60 human rights advocates from 13 countries across the Arab World and 12 global experts, for a three-day “working retreat” to discuss the pressing issues faced by civil society in the region and lessons learned from the Arab Spring protests. This was the first Oslo Freedom Forum satellite event centered around interactive workshops and training sessions, designed by and for a group of activists. Themes centered on discussions of civil society and building and uniting social movements; press freedom and censorship; privacy and digital security; rights of underrepresented groups; and healing, trauma, and wellbeing.

“I am humbled and inspired by your determination and strength. Keep resilient until we meet again. Thank you HRF team for forming this community and for your sincere efforts and dedication to support the route to democracy.”

“You did something very unique. Please continue doing this. We need it.”

Attendees of the Oslo Freedom Forum Working Retreat

Oslo Freedom Forum in New York

The third annual Oslo Freedom Forum in New York brought together more than 500 dissidents, artists, musicians, technologists, students, journalists, and innovators. The speaker lineup included the highest-ranking diplomat to ever escape North Korea; an investigative journalist who has boldly exposed the system of slavery behind Qatar’s 2022 World Cup; an academic whose meticulous research is exposing Huawei’s ethical transgressions; an Academy Award-winning filmmaker who exposed Mr. Putin’s Olympic scandal; Hong Kong’s most famous pop star-turned-protestor, and a young woman from Eritrea who leads an organization that raises awareness about the crackdown on free press in her country.

Oslo Freedom Forum in Taiwan

The second Oslo Freedom Forum in Taiwan gathered the regional East Asia community for a one-day conference of powerful talks, roundtable discussions, music, and most importantly, conversations that inspired action. The speaker lineup featured prominent Cantopop star-turned activists from Hong Kong, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist from Burma who reported on the Rohingya crisis; the highest-ranking diplomat to ever escape North Korea; information warfare expert with a specialization in foreign disinformation campaigns; Venezuelan political satirist and comedian; renowned North Korean human rights activist and author; leading Thai student activist; and esteemed China-experts.

01 Bobby Ghosh leads a workshop on “Developing Relationships with Journalists” at the Oslo Freedom Forum Working Retreat.
02 Conversation with Dr. Agnès Callamard, UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions.
03 Women’s rights activist Masih Alinejad asks the audience to raise white scarves in support of the White Wednesdays movement in Iran at the Oslo Freedom Forum in New York.
04 Speakers unite at the end of the New York Oslo Freedom Forum.
05 Attendee adds a message of support to the Hong Kong protesters at the Oslo Freedom Forum in Taiwan’s Lennon Wall.
11 Years of Oslo Freedom Forum Speakers
By the Numbers

317
Speakers

8.8M
Video views

104
Countries

248
Years speakers have been imprisoned

21
Languages spoken during talks

12
Speakers who were heads of state

69
Speakers currently in exile

10
Speakers banned from attending OFF by their government

9
Speakers awarded the Nobel Prize

507
Books published by speakers

15
Age of youngest speaker

93
Age of oldest speaker

66
Films about speakers

14%
Eastern Europe and Central Asia

10%
Sub-Saharan Africa

16%
Middle East and North Africa

17%
North America

11%
Europe

11%
Central and South America

21%
East Asia & Pacific (Asia-Pacific & South Asia)
HRF’s Tech & Liberty program connects world-class technologists with activists who live under dictatorships to provide them with the resources they need to meaningfully advance their work and protect their communications. As authoritarian regimes develop systems of oppression that increasingly rely on technology, HRF is partnering with tech experts to help secure dissident voices. The goal of the program is to keep activists private online, fight state surveillance, and support technologies that advance free expression and press freedom. In the past year, HRF has actively participated in, and sponsored, numerous conferences that explore how to harness new technologies to promote individual rights and challenge tyranny.

Much as scientists played a key role in the collapse of the Soviet Union, technologists can play a key role in eroding the control of authoritarian regimes today. We know that once tyrants lose their control over information, they begin to lose their grip on power.

In the past year, HRF staff have spoken at more than two dozen events around the world on these topics. Our Chief Strategy Officer Alex Gladstein also serves as faculty at Singularity University, a powerful community of technologists who aim to solve humankind’s biggest problems. Alex regularly gives keynote speeches at Singularity University events around the world and helps run workshops in Silicon Valley to talk to CEOs about the intersection of human rights and technology.

Meanwhile, HRF has built upon relationships with tech companies like Jigsaw and Twitter, as well as NGOs like the Electronic Frontier Foundation to link them at Oslo Freedom Forum events with at-risk journalists and activists.

Through these interactions and collaborations, HRF is focusing the tech world’s attention on the struggle for freedom and ensuring that its key players are paying attention to civil liberties as they design our future society.

Collaboration with Leading Tech Companies

In 2014, HRF organized the world’s first-ever hackathon for North Korea, with the goal of sending information into closed societies. Since then, human rights groups in HRF’s network have formed dozens of new partnerships with Silicon Valley companies. HRF also organized the world’s first tech lab for dissidents at the Oslo Freedom Forum, and it continues to be a key feature of the annual event.

One area where HRF has made the greatest impact is through technical training. HRF attends conferences such as DEF CON, Mozilla Festival, SXSW, and WIRED to grow its network of cyber security and information technology experts who provide pro bono services for dissidents around the world.

HRF has worked with companies and organizations like AnchorFree, Silent Circle, Wickr, Wikimedia, YouTube, and Yubico in order to identify ways to support dissidents at risk. HRF has presented this work at Europe’s largest technology conference, DLD, and at the European Parliament, the U.S. Congress, MIT, Stanford, the United Nations, and other venues.

Finance and Freedom

Over the past four years, HRF has worked to bring experts from the Bitcoin and cryptocurrency communities together with journalists and activists to explore the possibilities of using parallel economies, censorship-resistant donations, and private payments in the human rights space.

Our Chief Strategy Officer Alex Gladstein speaks and writes frequently on this topic, including keynote talks at events organized by The Economist and Singularity University, as well as op-eds and interviews in Bloomberg, CNN, Forbes, TIME, and more.
Flash Drives for Freedom

Distributing information from the outside world into North Korea on donated USB drives.

It is HRF’s belief that information and education (rather than diplomacy or military action) are the keys to change inside North Korea. When enough of the North Korean people learn the truth about life outside their country, the Kim regime will no longer be able to survive.

That’s why HRF created the Flash Drives for Freedom campaign. HRF is collecting flash drives to donate to local partners in South Korea that are helping guide the flow of information into, and out of, the “Hermit Kingdom.”

We work with local partner non-profits who are able to use special routes to get goods into towns and cities in the northern part of North Korea. From there, associates distribute the drives outward and southward toward Pyongyang.

From our research, we know that each flash drive or SD card filled with content reaches, on average, 10 different people. In 2018 and 2019, HRF sent approximately 52,000 SD cards and flash drives into North Korea, for a total of approximately 90,000 units successfully distributed.

Based on defector testimony and feedback from our local partners, this remains the most effective way to promote freedom and human rights inside North Korea and the most critical program with regard to breaking the Kim regime’s propaganda bubble.

Supporting NGOs at Risk

HRF is empowering dissidents and activists around the world through microgrants.

HRF works with foundations and individuals from around the world to support effective civil society organizations laboring under authoritarian governments. These groups — sometimes media outlets, sometimes anti-corruption units, sometimes environmental or labor rights or democracy or women’s rights organizations — have little support from the international community. HRF partners with them, and supports their areas of need, while collaborating together on new projects to help advance freedom locally.

Partial list of NGOs supported by HRF
Increasing student engagement to inspire the human rights leaders of the future.

HRF is educating the next generation of global human rights leaders. HRF’s Educational Programs encourage students to learn about, and become involved with, the global struggle for freedom. The College Freedom Forum (CFF) series brings speakers from our Oslo Freedom Forum community to university campuses, engaging with students on human rights issues, while the Oslo Scholars Program allows students to work directly with human rights activists.

In 2019, HRF hosted three CFF events: CFF at Harvard University in Boston, Universidad Francisco Marroquín in Guatemala, and the Human Rights Forum at Augsburg University in Minneapolis. More than 800 students and community members were engaged in conversation with global democracy leaders through talks, colloquia, and individual workshops.


In March, HRF presented the fourth annual College Freedom Forum in Guatemala. This event brought six activists to speak with students, staff, faculty, and community members from Guatemala and El Salvador about the global state of human rights. Speakers included Fred Bauma, known as “Congo’s Gandhi,” North Korean defector Grace Jo, Venezuelan comedian Daniel Enrique Pérez, former Charlie Hebdo columnist Zineb El Rhazoui, and psychology expert Steven Pinker.

In October, HRF partnered with Augsburg University for the first day of its Human Rights Forum. Participating activists and experts were: Russian environmental champion Evgeniya Chirikova, Bangladeshi writer and publisher Ahmedur Chowdhury (AKA Tutul), anti-FGM activist Leyla Hussein, Libyan peace activist Asma Khalifa, Ugandan author and filmmaker Jerry Sesanga, and Andrew Zolli of Planet Labs.

HRF believes in the importance of cultivating the next generation of leaders, and the Oslo Scholars program is a cornerstone of our approach. This program offers students with a demonstrated interest in human rights and international political issues the opportunity to spend their summer working with some of the world’s leading human rights defenders and activists.

Selected undergraduates attend the Oslo Freedom Forum in Norway and spend their summer interning with an activist working in their area of interest and expertise. The activist serves as a mentor and reference as the student becomes involved with the global struggle for freedom and democracy. Past Oslo Scholars have worked with nonviolence experts in Serbia, North Korean activists in South Korea, and anti-FGM advocates in Angola.
In 2019, HRF launched the Freedom Fellowship, a one-year program that awards human rights advocates, social entrepreneurs, and non-profit leaders working under authoritarian governments around the world with the unique opportunity to dramatically increase the impact of their work.

The fellowship began in May 2019, when the fellows first gathered at the Oslo Freedom Forum. They are currently receiving mentorship by experts in personal leadership, movement building, marketing, fundraising, and digital security.

**The 2019 Freedom Fellows**

**Johnson Yeung**  
Hong Kong human rights advocate, who works on freedom of assembly, protection of rights defenders, and capacity-building for civil society groups. He is the chair of the board of the Hong Kong Civil Hub, which produces regular briefings on Hong Kong’s shrinking civic space, and is a strategic leader of the protest movement.

**Vanessa Tsehaye**  
Eritrean free-speech and democracy activist. She is the founder of One Day Seyoum, a human rights organization that campaigns for Seyoum Tsehaye’s release and raises awareness about the crackdown on democratic ideals in Eritrea.

**Netiwit Chotiphatphaisal**  
Thai student activist, publisher, and author who advocates for education reform. He founded Education for Liberation of Siam, a student group that challenges the Thai military junta’s unjust actions in the country’s education system.

**Rania Aziz**  
Sudanese human rights activist. She acquired leadership organizing professional and youth groups in Sudan to protest against Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir’s dictatorship. She was part of the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), the outlawed umbrella group of unions leading protests. She now works supporting women in leadership roles within Sudan’s current transitional government.

**Asma Khalifa**  
Libyan activist and researcher who has worked on human rights, women’s rights, and youth empowerment since 2011. She is the co-founder of Tamazight Women’s Movement, an organization working on gender equality and research with the indigenous women of Libya and North Africa.

**Fred Bauma**  
Congolese human rights activist, also known as “Congo’s Gandhi.” He is the leader of the pro-democracy youth group LUCHA, which advocates for nonviolent, community-level change and governmental reform in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**Ediccia Dubón**  
Nicaraguan pro-democracy and women’s rights advocate. She is the coordinator of Dialogue of Women for Democracy, a think tank that promotes open discussions about the challenges faced by women in Nicaragua.

**Rodrigo Diamanti**  
Venezuelan human rights activist and nonviolence expert. He founded the international NGO “Un Mundo Sin Mordaza (A World Without Censorship),” which has coordinated creative protests against the Maduro dictatorship in 52 countries.

**Andrei Bystrov**  
Russian lawyer, historian, and democratic activist from Moscow. He is a co-founder of the December 5 Party, a pro-democracy political party that was born out of the 2011-2012 anti-Putin protests.
Art in Protest
Partnerships with human rights artists who inspire action.

Art in Protest supports dissident artists whose art is connected to their countries’ struggle for democracy and basic human rights. This program includes an ongoing series of international art exhibitions and events, featuring artists living under, or exiled by, authoritarian regimes. Dictatorships frequently harass, jail, and even kill artists for work that threatens their hold on power. These artists need support to continue their work, and HRF provides the resources and creates opportunities for their work to be seen by a larger audience.

Gao Brothers
The Gao Brothers are two artist brothers based in Beijing and New York. Gao Zhen (born in 1956) and Gao Qiang (born in 1962) have been at the vanguard of contemporary art in China, collaborating on painting, installation, performance, sculpture, photography, and writing since 1985, but it was not until 2003 that they were allowed to leave the PRC, after years on an official blacklist that barred them from receiving external passports. Since 2003, their work has circulated through exhibitions around the world and won artistic accolades. Private institutions and museums have added these pieces to their collections, including Steven Cohen, Charles Saatchi, Ramin Salsali, Centre Georges Pompidou, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and Princeton University’s Art Museum.

At the 2019 Oslo Freedom Forum, the Gao Brothers performed a rendition of their iconic “Utopia of the Embrace,” a transformative public performance art project rooted in the belief that love can reclaim humanity. The performance gathered 100 strangers in embrace, creating a profound moment of connection and love for the community.
Wear Your Values

The role of fashion in the fight for freedom.

HRF created this program to engage the fashion world in the human rights movement through panel discussions, exhibitions, and events. Wear Your Values is a platform to promote free expression, and uses fashion as a tool with which to draw attention to human rights violations in authoritarian countries.

In 2019, Wear Your Values expanded its ongoing research project and exhibition highlighting fashion as a form of free expression. The exhibition entitled BANNED is a collection of garments that have been used in political protests around the world or banned by authoritarian governments to silence dissent. The collection was featured in an art gallery in San Francisco before being featured at the Oslo Freedom Forum in May and at the Oslo Freedom Forum in Taiwan. It continues to grow as the history of banned clothing is explored in this unique and unprecedented study of the role fashion plays in creating and galvanizing movements and making statements without speaking out loud.

International Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent

The Václav Havel International Prize for Creative Dissent is an annual prize given at the Oslo Freedom Forum in Norway that honors the legacy of former HRF chairman Václav Havel and celebrates those who, with bravery and ingenuity, unmask the lie of dictatorship by living in truth.

2019 Václav Havel Prize Laureates

- Rap Against Dictatorship
- Anti-authoritarian Thai musical group
- Ramy Essam
  Egyptian musician in exile
- Rayma Suprani
  Venezuelan political cartoonist
HRF is fully dedicated to using donor dollars effectively; 92 cents of every dollar go directly toward programs.

“When you’re stuck out in the field, the power of one feels pretty feeble, until you get this recognition that the power of one is everywhere, scattered all over the world, and HRF is this extraordinary universal knitting machine that knits us all together.”

Justine Hardy
British conflict trauma therapist and journalist
Our Staff

Céline Assaf-Boustani
Chief Program Officer

Holly Baxter
Director, Art in Protest

Mariana Bernardez
Creative Director

Natalia Cialko
Director of Communications

Alessandro DeNino
Finance

Gustav Deutsch
Director of Production

Chloe Dyer
Research Associate

Javier El-Hage
Chief Legal Officer

Per Elvestuen
Director, Oslo Freedom Forum in Norway

Raven Germaine
Finance Associate

Sandrine Germaine
Chief Talent Officer

Alex Gladstein
Chief Strategy Officer

Roberto González
Senior Legal Associate

Michelle Gulino
International Legal Associate

Thor Halvorssen
President and CEO

Malaak Jamal
Policy Officer

Sherry Jeng
Development Associate

David July
Strategic Advisor

Mohammed Keita
Policy Advisor

Alex Li
Development and Strategy Intern

Scot Olsen-Morales
IT and Cybersecurity Specialist

Elle Ota
Development Associate

Alvaro Piaggio
Policy Advisor

Isik Sarikamis
Program Associate

Natalia Saucedo
Communications Intern

Jiye Seong
Strategic Advisor

Alexander Sikorski
Program Fellow

Aarthi Sridharan
Impact Litigation Fellow

Sherman Teichman
Senior Strategic Advisor

Bård Ludvig
Thorheim
Special Advisor

Margherita Tommasini
Legal and Policy Specialist

Jhaniss Vaca-Daza
Freedom Fellowship Manager

Jenny Wang
Strategic Advisor, Oslo Freedom Forum

Jim Warnock
Director of Outreach

Nasser Weddady
Strategic Advisor

HRF Board & International Council

Garry Kasparov
Chairman

Diego Arria

George Ayittey

Abdel Ould Ethmane

Park Sang-Hak

Thor Halvorssen

Ron Jacobs

Mart Laar

Alexander Lloyd

Jacqueline Moudeina

Amir Ahmad Nasr

Marina Nemat

Yeonmi Park

W. Brad Stephens

Mutabar Tadjibaeva

Cameron Colby

Thomson

Álvaro Vargas Llosa

Konstantina Yaneva

In Memoriam

Václav Havel
Chairman Emeritus
[1936 – 2011]

Diego Arria

George Ayittey

Abdel Ould Ethmane

Park Sang-Hak

Thor Halvorssen

Ron Jacobs

Mart Laar

Alexander Lloyd

Jacqueline Moudeina

Amir Ahmad Nasr

Marina Nemat

Yeonmi Park

W. Brad Stephens

Mutabar Tadjibaeva

Cameron Colby

Thomson

Álvaro Vargas Llosa

Konstantina Yaneva

Ramón José Velásquez
[1916 – 2014]

Vladimir Bukovsky
[1942 – 2019]

Elie Wiesel
[1928 – 2016]

James Q. Wilson
[1931 – 2012]

Harry Wu
[1937 – 2016]
Not the kind of sculpture of Mao Zedong you typically see in China, “Mao’s Guilt” is a provocative life-size bronze statue depicting Chairman Mao on his knees, with an expression of deep remorse, in contrition for the atrocities committed by his regime. The artists, Beijing-based brothers Gao Zhen and Gao Qiang, attended the 2019 Oslo Freedom Forum and helmed a performance art piece in Oslo’s main square.

Given the politically-challenging nature of this work, and previous raids on their studio, the brothers kept the head of Mao in a separate location, reuniting it with the body on occasions where they wished to show colleagues, friends, and at invitation-only private exhibits. Usually, the body remains unidentifiable, headless, and “politically correct,” in order to escape punishment from censors.

The Gao brothers are part of a coterie of disruptive Chinese artists engaged in dissent through their art — such as questioning Mao’s sacrosanct image in China where the crimes of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution are sublimated by state propaganda and a personality cult. The Gao brothers are intimately familiar with the crimes of the Chinese regime: when they were children their father was labeled a “class enemy” and taken away during the Cultural Revolution. They never saw him again and weeks later were told he had committed suicide.

Donate
HRF is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. We rely on donations to make our work possible. We accept checks by mail, online donations, Bitcoin, gifts of stock, charitable gift annuities, memorial gifts, and legacy gifts. Donations are tax-deductible according to the fullest extent permissible by law. Learn more and make a gift today at donate.hrf.org.

Volunteer
If you believe you have a unique set of skills or abilities that HRF could use in the global fight for freedom, please send us an email with “Volunteer Opportunities” in the subject line to info@hrf.org.

Get Social
Find us online at:
hrf.org
@HRF and @OsloFF
@HRF and @OsloFF
@HRF and @OsloFF
@HumanRightsFoundation and
@OsloFreedomForum

Careers
HRF is a great place to begin or advance your career in human rights. Apply today at hrf.org.

Internships
HRF offers paid internships with flexible schedules to a number of students each year. These positions afford qualified students the opportunity to engage in human rights work and gain hands-on experience in the non-profit world.