



**2019**  
**ANNUAL**  
**REPORT**



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# Celebrating 15 Years of the Human Rights Foundation

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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).

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 unite the world to stand against tyranny.

1

### 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.

2

### We create

innovative solutions.

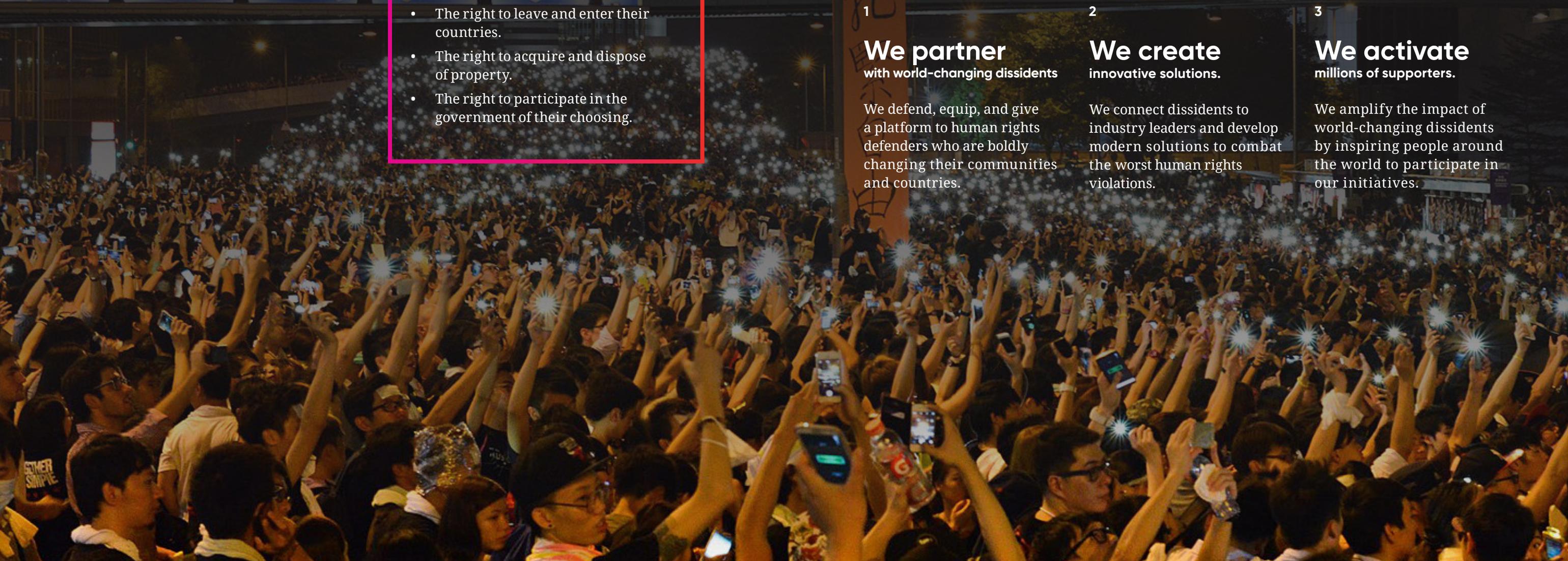
We connect dissidents to industry leaders and develop modern solutions to combat the worst human rights violations.

3

### 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

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

**MARCH 22**  
College Freedom Forum at Universidad Francisco Marroquín in Guatemala

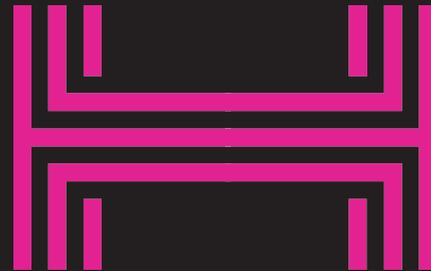
**MARCH 26**  
HRF speaks at the Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy

**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

**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

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

**FEBRUARY 28**  
Oslo Freedom Forum in Mexico City

**FEBRUARY 27**  
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

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

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

**MAY 13**  
Launch of HRF's rebrand and new visual identity

**OCTOBER 22**  
HRF speaks about challenging authoritarianism in Sydney, Australia

**OCTOBER 23**  
Oslo Freedom Forum in New York

**OCTOBER 28**  
College Freedom Forum at Augsburg University, Minneapolis

**OCTOBER 30**  
Report by the Congressional Research Service cites HRF policy memo on human trafficking and authoritarianism

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

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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.

In 2020, our work was featured in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *CNN*, *CBS News*, *People Magazine*, *TIME*, *The Washington Post*, *The Associated Press*, *Bloomberg*, *Fox News*, *Buzzfeed News*, *Billboard*, *NPR*, *Yahoo*, *BBC News*, *Newsweek*, *The New York Post*, *Deutsche Welle*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Reuters*, *USA Today*, *Al Jazeera*, *ABC*, *NBC*, *The Independent*, *Sky News*, *Fortune*, *The Daily Beast*, *The Hill*, *Forbes*, *Entertainment Online*, *Variety*, *Good Morning America*, *Breitbart*, *CBS This Morning*, *the Drudge Report*, and other international 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



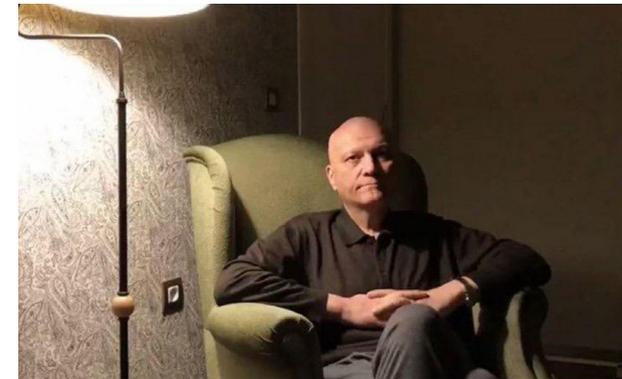
He led a popular uprising against Mugabe. Now he says life is more brutal than ever for Zimbabweans



Bitcoin could change the game for foreign aid



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



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



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



Digital money is here: Will it make us more free—or less?



## The Washington Post

Human rights group asks Nicki Minaj to cancel performance in Saudi Arabia



## theguardian

Nicki Minaj pulls out of Saudi Arabia concert after backlash

The singer has cancelled an appearance at Jeddah World Fest citing her support for women and the LGBT community



Nicki Minaj cancels her concert at a Saudi Arabian music festival



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.

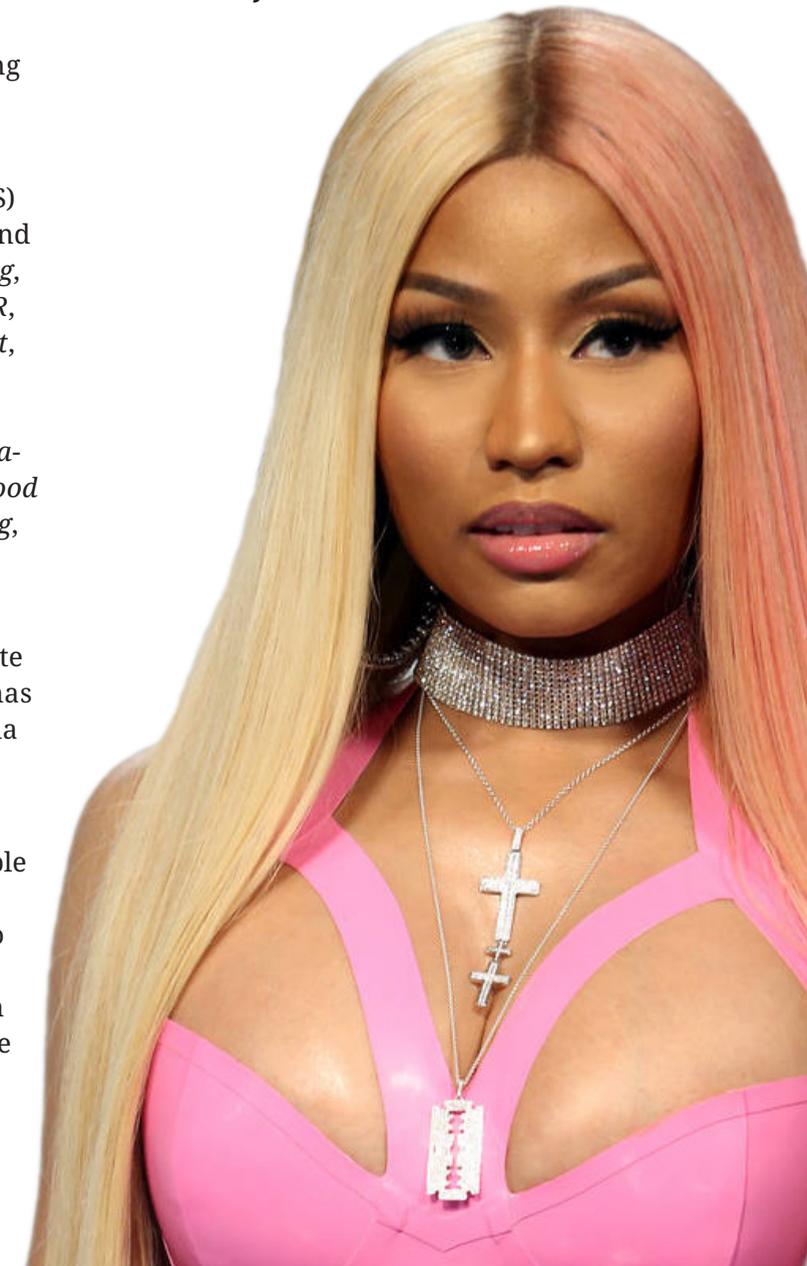
Tens of millions of people learned about how Minaj snubbed Mohammad bin Salman (MBS) in favor of speaking out for free expression and women's rights. Coverage included *Bloomberg*, *CNN*, *Fox News*, *Buzzfeed News*, *Billboard*, *NPR*, *BBC News*, *TMZ*, *Newsweek*, *The New York Post*, *Deutsche Welle*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Reuters*, *Al Jazeera*, *ABC*, *NBC*, *The Independent*, *Fortune*, *The Daily Beast*, *The Hill*, *People Magazine*, *Forbes*, *Entertainment Online*, *Variety*, *Good Morning America*, *Breitbart*, *CBS This Morning*, and other international outlets.

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



# 03

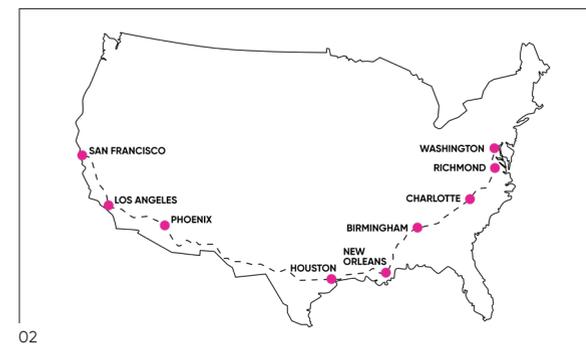
## Impact Litigation & Advocacy



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.

## 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

- 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.
- 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.

- 01 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.

## JUNE

- 06 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.
- 20 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.



03

## JULY

- 08 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.
- 24 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.

## AUGUST

- 02 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.



04

## SEPTEMBER

- 10 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.
- 19 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.”



05

## OCTOBER

- 07 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.



06

- 11 HRF’s Legal and Policy Fellow, Michelle Gulino, and Policy Officer, Malaak Jamal, published an op-ed in *The Washington Post* (“Ethiopia’s leader won the Nobel Prize. But he’s got a long way to go for peace.”).

### *The Washington Post*

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



07

- 19 HRF submitted a petition to the UNWGAD on behalf of Tajik political opposition activist Maksud Ibragimov, who was abducted in Russia and forcibly returned to Tajikistan, where he was sentenced to 17 years in prison.
- 30 The Congressional Research Service’s Report — *The State Department’s Trafficking in Persons Report: Scope, Aid Restrictions, and Methodology* — cited an HRF policy memo on human trafficking and authoritarianism.

## DECEMBER

- 15 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.”

01 Hervé Mombo Kinga, who was imprisoned for peacefully protesting the results of the 2016 rigged presidential elections.

02 Route of The Freedom Drive campaign supported by HRF.

03 HRF staff member Michelle Gulino on “Deep Dive,” discussing the Sudan uprising.

04 Iranian activist Saeed Malekpour.

05 Police brutality in Hong Kong.

06 Evin Prison, near the Alborz Mountains in Iran, is considered the most brutal in the world for its regular executions and inhumane treatment of prisoners who are said to be tortured, starved, and raped.

07 Op-ed written by HRF’s Malaak Jamal and Michelle Gulino, published in *The Washington Post*.

# 04

## Political Regime Classification

HRF's mission is to promote freedom and democracy with a focus on closed societies.

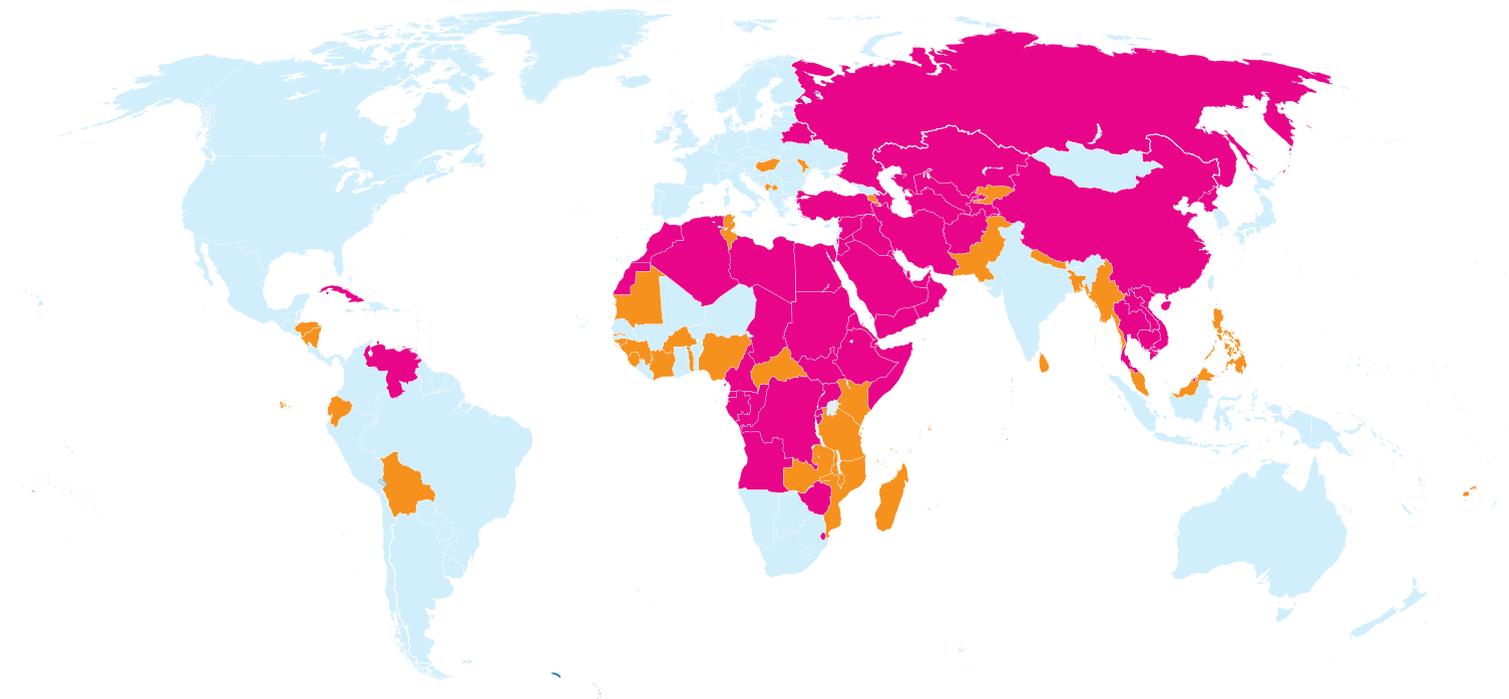
As of January 2020, 54% of the world's population is living under authoritarian regimes.

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.

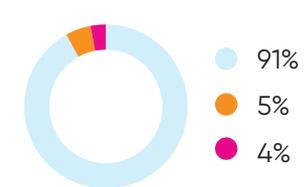
## Authoritarianism Worldwide

● Democratic ● Competitive Authoritarian ● Fully Authoritarian

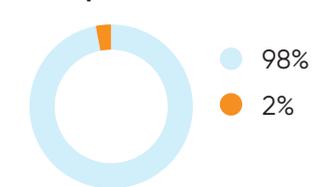


### Population by Regime Type

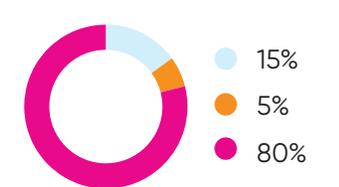
Americas



Europe



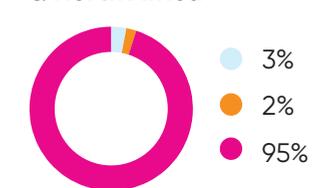
Eastern Europe & Central Asia



Africa



Middle East & North Africa



East Asia & Pacific (Asia-Pacific & South Asia)



# 05

## The Freedom Drive



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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-2Drive 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.

Stops included New York, NY; San Francisco, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Phoenix, AZ; Houston, TX; Austin, TX; New Orleans, LA; Birmingham, AL; Charlotte, NC; Richmond, VA, and Washington, DC.

At the time, mainstream media outlets, politicians, and world leaders praised "progressive" measures by Mohammed bin Salman, particularly his decision to lift the ban on women driving.

Yet behind this façade of reform, a brutal crackdown on dissidents and human rights advocates continues.

Many women's rights activists who advocated against the driving ban — including Loujain al-Hathloul, Eman al-Nafjan, and Samar Bada-

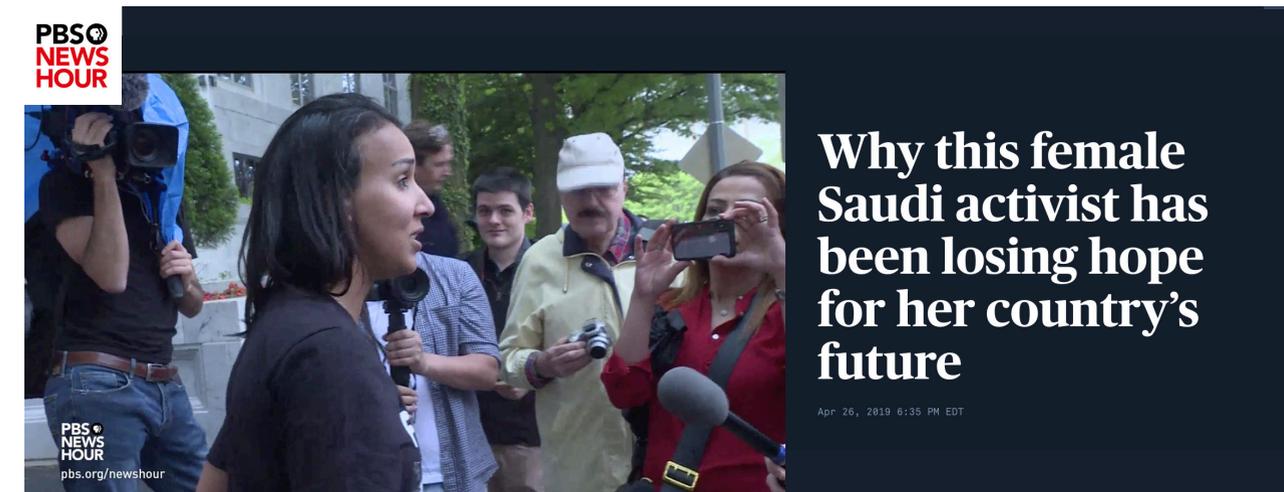
wi — are now jailed and subjected to torture, including electric shocks, flogging, and sexual harassment. Several might still face execution.

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.

## 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*.



01 Manal al-Sharif during *The Freedom Drive*.

# 06

## 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 Uni-

versity 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.

01 Reporters Melissa Chan and Megha Rajagopalan talk about the dark side of technology on HRF's SXSW 2019 panel.

02 SXSW attendee plugging a USB into HRF's Flash Drives for Freedom wall.



01



02

# 07

## 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."

01 In April 2019, HRF brought experts together at Columbia University to offer perspectives on the collapse of the rule of law in Turkey and its implications for the country and beyond.



01

# 08

## Anti-Corruption Initiative

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, signifi-

01 At the 2019 Oslo Freedom Forum, Bill Browder, Kyle Parker, Sjoerd Wiemer Sjoerdsma, Rebecca Vincent, and Hagar Hajjar Chemali discuss instituting a global sanctions regime to target human rights violators.

02 Vladimir Kara-Murza explains the importance of the Magnitsky Act at the 2019 Oslo Freedom Forum.



01

02

cantly, 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.

# 09

## The Human Rights Cost of the War on Drugs

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 photogra-

01 HRF's first-ever drug policy report, which examines the negative consequences of current international drug policy.



01

pher 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.

# 10

## The Oslo Freedom Forum

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.

OSLO  
FREEDOM  
FORUM

01 One of six Twitter workshops tailored for activists from different regions of the world.

02 Hong Kong pop star turned activist Denise Ho speaking at the 2019 Oslo Freedom Forum.

03 Launch of *Defending the Defenders* at Oslo City Hall.

04 Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ine Eriksen giving opening remarks at the 2019 Oslo Freedom Forum.

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.

## 2019 Oslo Freedom Forum



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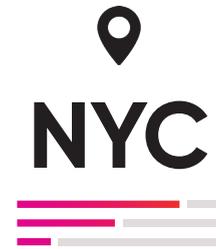
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For the first time, HRF featured speakers from Tajikistan (Sharofiddin Gadoev), Hong Kong (Denise Ho), and Kenya (Audrey Mbugua).

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.

# The Global Expansion



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 Wully Cochez, Diego Arria, and Luis Almagro.

01 Maziar Bahari being interviewed during the Oslo Freedom Forum in Mexico.

02 Cartoonist Xavier "Bonil" Bonilla on stage talking about freedom of expression during the Oslo Freedom Forum in Mexico.

03 Rómulo Betancourt Prize laureates Wully Cochez, Diego Arria, and Luis Almagro with Virginia Betancourt and Thor Halvorssen.

## 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*



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## 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.



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## 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.



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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

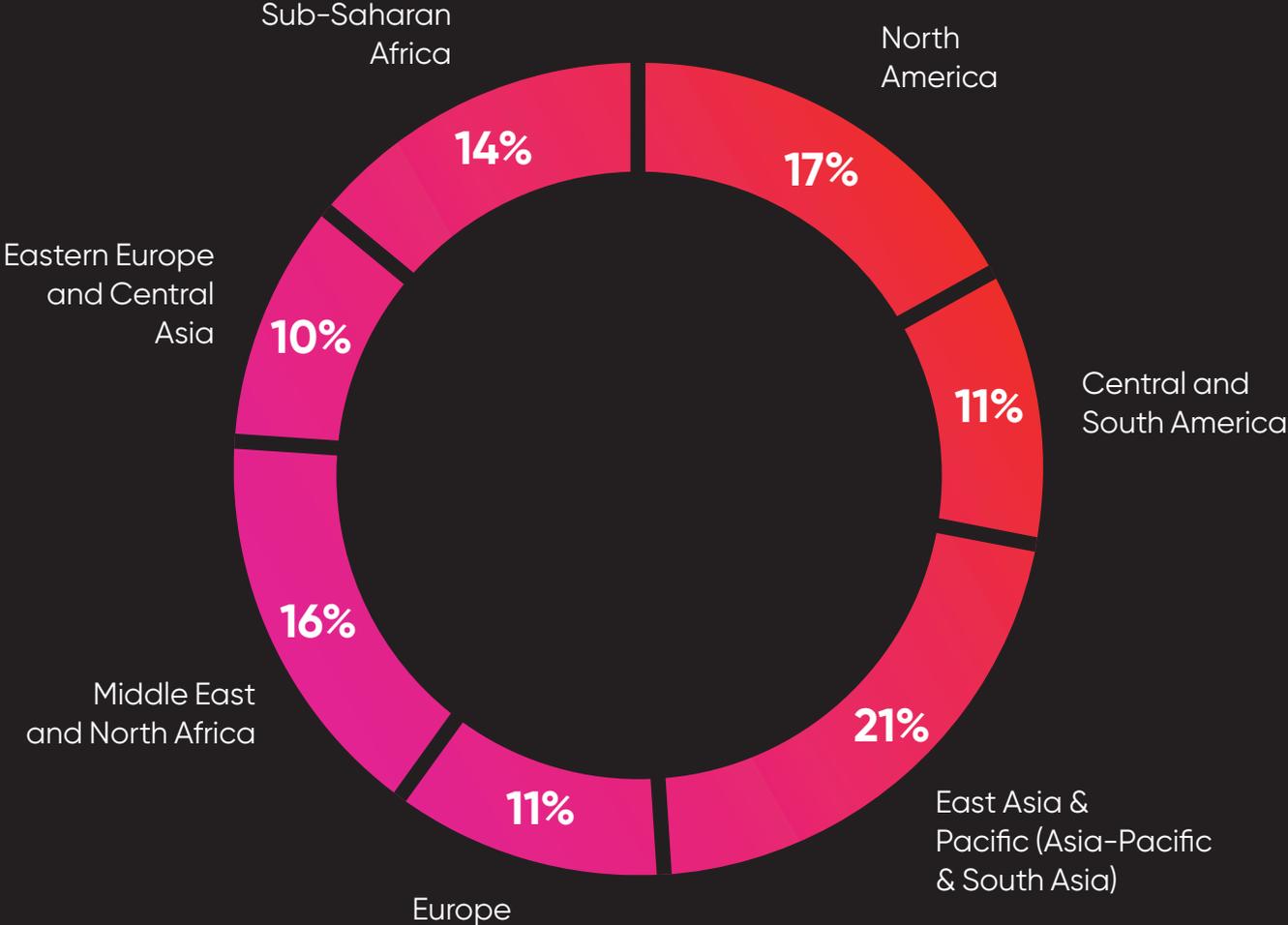
**9**  
Speakers awarded the Nobel Prize

**507**  
Books published by speakers

**15**  
Age of youngest speaker

**93**  
Age of oldest speaker

**66**  
Films about speakers



# 11

## Tech & Liberty

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 Uni-



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versity 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.

01 Activist Tech Bar at the 2019 Oslo Freedom Forum.

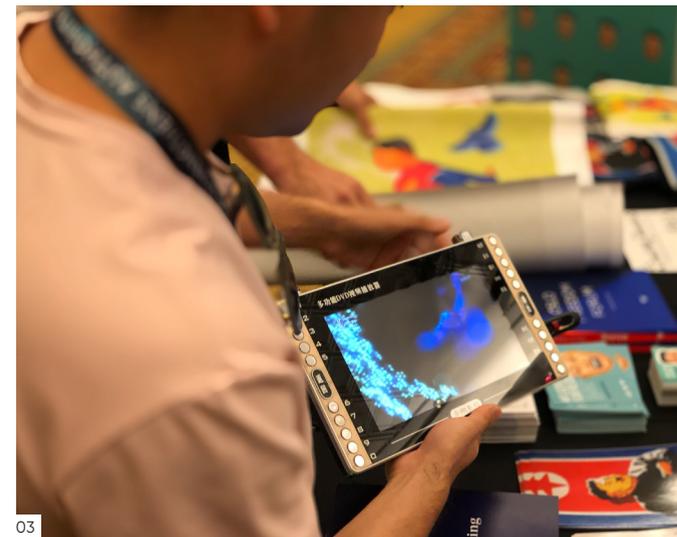
02 HRF at the 2019 SXSW Trade Show.

03 HRF at DEF CON.

04 "Finance and Freedom" panel with Laura Shin, Alena Vránová, Jimmy Song, and Jerry Brito at the 2019 Oslo Freedom Forum.



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## 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.



<b>90K</b> Drives donated and pledged	<b>900K</b> North Koreans reached	<b>50M</b> Hours of reading material disseminated
<b>2.1M</b> Hours of footage smuggled	<b>\$14M</b> Earned media value	<b>1.23B</b> Global media impressions

# 12

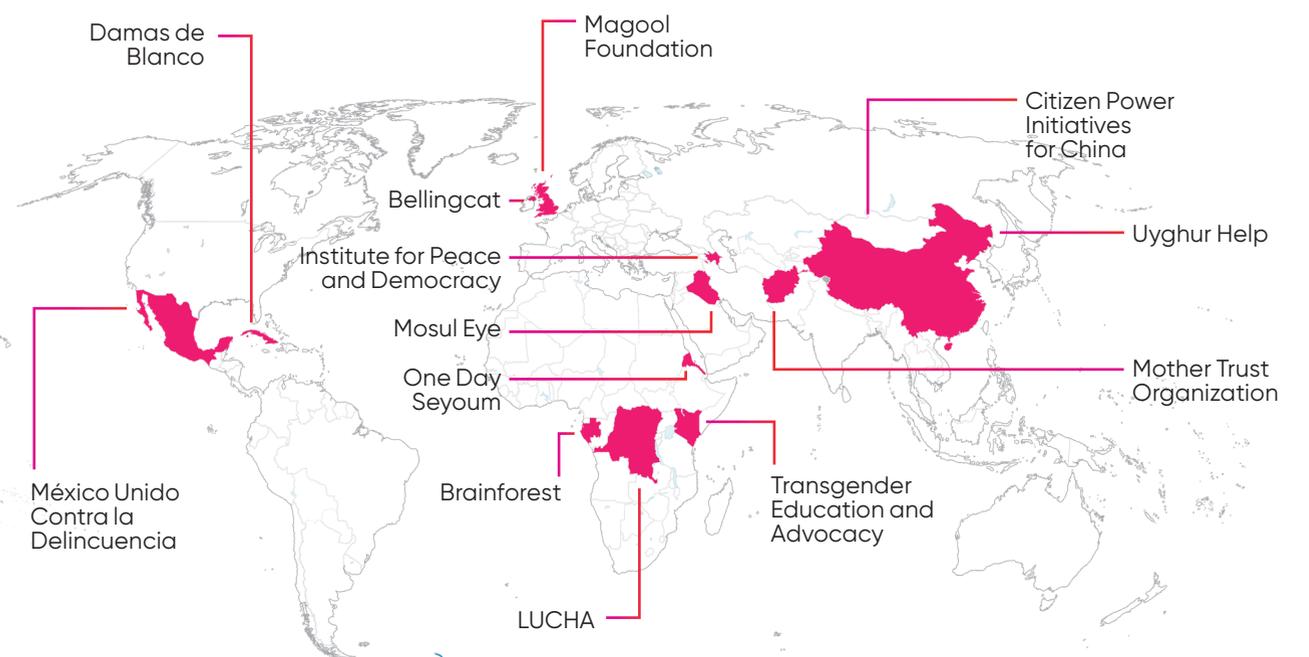
## Supporting NGOs at Risk

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



# 13

## Educational Programming

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.

## The College Freedom Forum

HRF hosts College Freedom Forum events on college campuses to connect students directly with activists promoting democracy and fundamental rights around the world. The College Freedom Forum is a series of one-day events on university campuses, designed to educate students about the state of freedom around the world and the global impact of limiting individual liberties. The CFF program brings dissidents and human rights advocates from countries with authoritarian governments to inspire civic engagement among students and encourage them to advance freedom abroad.

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.

Speakers at February's Harvard event included Syrian citizen journalist Abdalaziz Alhamza, Venezuelan violinist and pro-democracy activist Wuilly Arteaga, Chinese human rights activist Ti-Anna Wang, NBA star Enes Kanter, Somali gender rights activist Leyla Hussein, nonviolent resistance expert Jamila Raqib, and psychology expert Steven Pinker.

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,



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Blockstack co-founder Ryan Shea, and HRF's own Bolivian citizen activist and founder of Ríos de Pie Jhanisse Vaca Daza.

Finally, 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.

## Oslo Scholars

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 press freedom advocates in Angola.

01 Students with Russian environmental activist Evgeniya Chirikova at the College Freedom Forum at Augsburg University.

02 Anti-FGM human rights activist Leyla Hussein at Augsburg University.

03 Speakers Fred Bauma, Jhanisse Vaca Daza, Daniel Pérez, Ryan Shea, and Grace Jo at the College Freedom Forum at the Universidad Francisco Marroquín in Guatemala.

# 14

## The Freedom Fellows

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.

01 Freedom Fellow Vanessa Tsehaye after the launch of the Freedom Fellowship at the 2019 Oslo Freedom Forum.



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## 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 crack-down on democratic ideals in Eritrea.

### Edipcia 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.

### 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.

### 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.

## 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.



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01 Works by Art in Protest artists Gao Brothers, Song Byeok, Rodrigo Figueredo, and Shamsia Hassani at the 2019 Oslo Freedom Forum in Taiwan.

02 Afghani artist Shamsia Hassani in front of an unfinished mural.

## 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,



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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.



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03 "Utopia of the Embrace" performance by the Gao Brothers during the 2019 Oslo Freedom Forum.

05 Art in Protest director Holly Baxter and Chinese artists Zhen and Qiang Gao – the Gao Brothers – during the 2019 Oslo Freedom Forum.

04 North Korean defector and artist Song Byeok.

# 16

## 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.



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01 Helmet painted by a Ukrainian artist, used for protection during the 2014 protests against the pro-Russia autocratic regime of Viktor Yanukovich.

02 Participant of one of HRF's panels on the intersection of fashion and human rights during New York Fashion Week.

# 17

## 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.



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01 2019 International Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent laureates at the Oslo Freedom Forum.

### 2019 Václav Havel Prize Laureates

**Rap Against Dictatorship**  
Anti-authoritarian Thai musical group

**Ramy Essam**  
Egyptian musician in exile

**Rayma Suprani**  
Venezuelan political cartoonist

# 18

## Financials

HRF is fully dedicated to using donor dollars effectively; 92 cents of every dollar go directly toward programs.

01 Networking at the 2019 Oslo Freedom Forum.

*"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."*

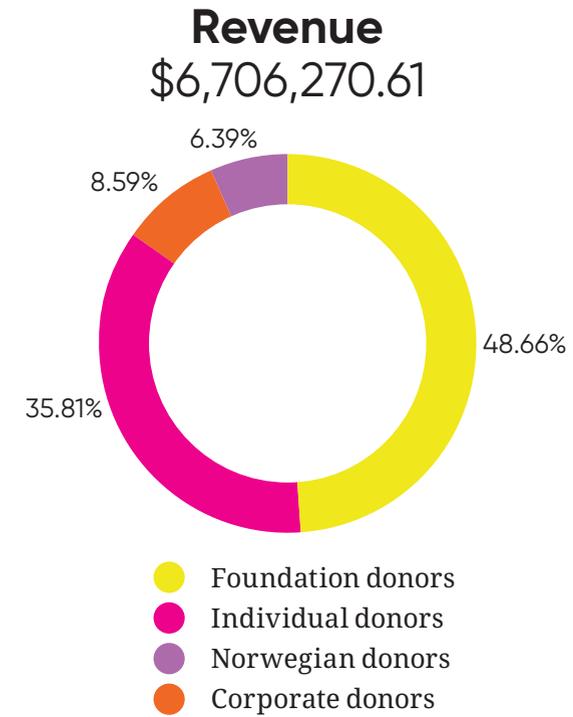
Justine Hardy

British conflict trauma therapist and journalist

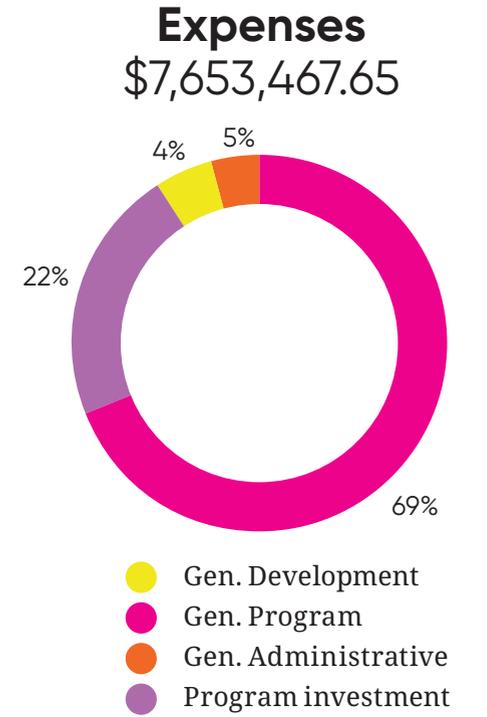


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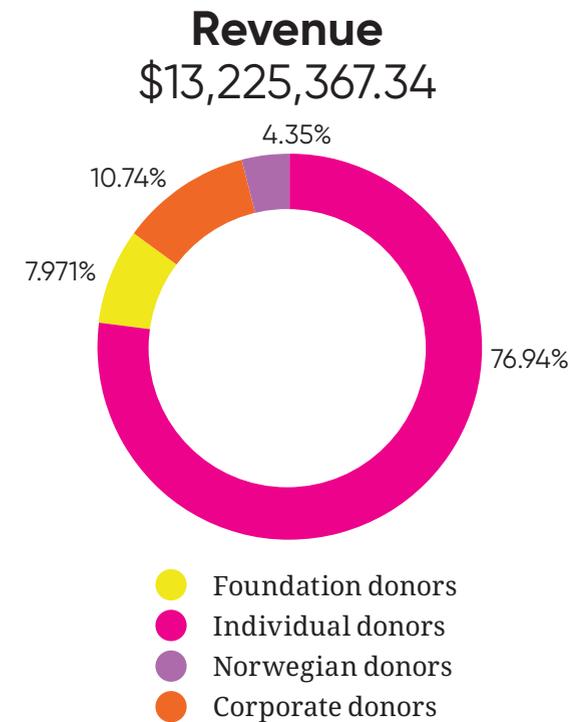
# 2018



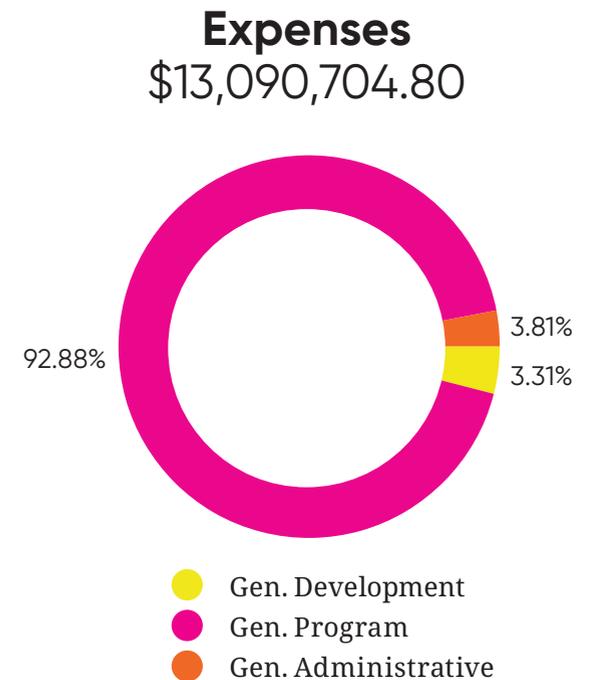
# 2018



# 2019



# 2019



## Our Staff

**Céline Assaf-Boustani**  
Chief Program Officer

**Holly Baxter**  
Director,  
Art in Protest

**Mariana Bernardez**  
Creative  
Director

**Natalia Ciolko**  
Director of  
Communications

**Alessandro DeNino**  
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**Gustav Deutsch**  
Director of Production

**Chloe Dyer**  
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Associate

**Javier El-Hage**  
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Forum in Norway

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**Alex Li**  
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Strategy Intern

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**Elle Ota**  
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**Aarthi Sridharan**  
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Fellow

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Advisor

**Bård Ludvig Thorheim**  
Special Advisor

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**Jhanisse Vaca-Daza**  
Freedom Fellowship  
Manager

**Jenny Wang**  
Strategic Advisor,  
Oslo Freedom Forum

**Jim Warnock**  
Director of Outreach

**Nasser Weddady**  
Strategic Advisor

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**W. Brad Stephens**

**Mutabar Tadjibaeva**

**Cameron Colby  
Thomson**

**Álvaro Vargas Llosa**

**Konstantina Yaneva**

## In Memoriam

**Václav Havel**  
Chairman Emeritus  
[1936 - 2011]

**Vladimir Bukovsky**  
[1942 - 2019]

**Palden Gyatso**  
[1933 - 2018]

**Eduardo Mendoza**  
[1917 - 2009]

**Ramón José Velásquez**  
[1916 - 2014]

**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.



# 20

## Join Us!

### 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](https://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](mailto:info@hrf.org).

### Get Social

Find us online at:

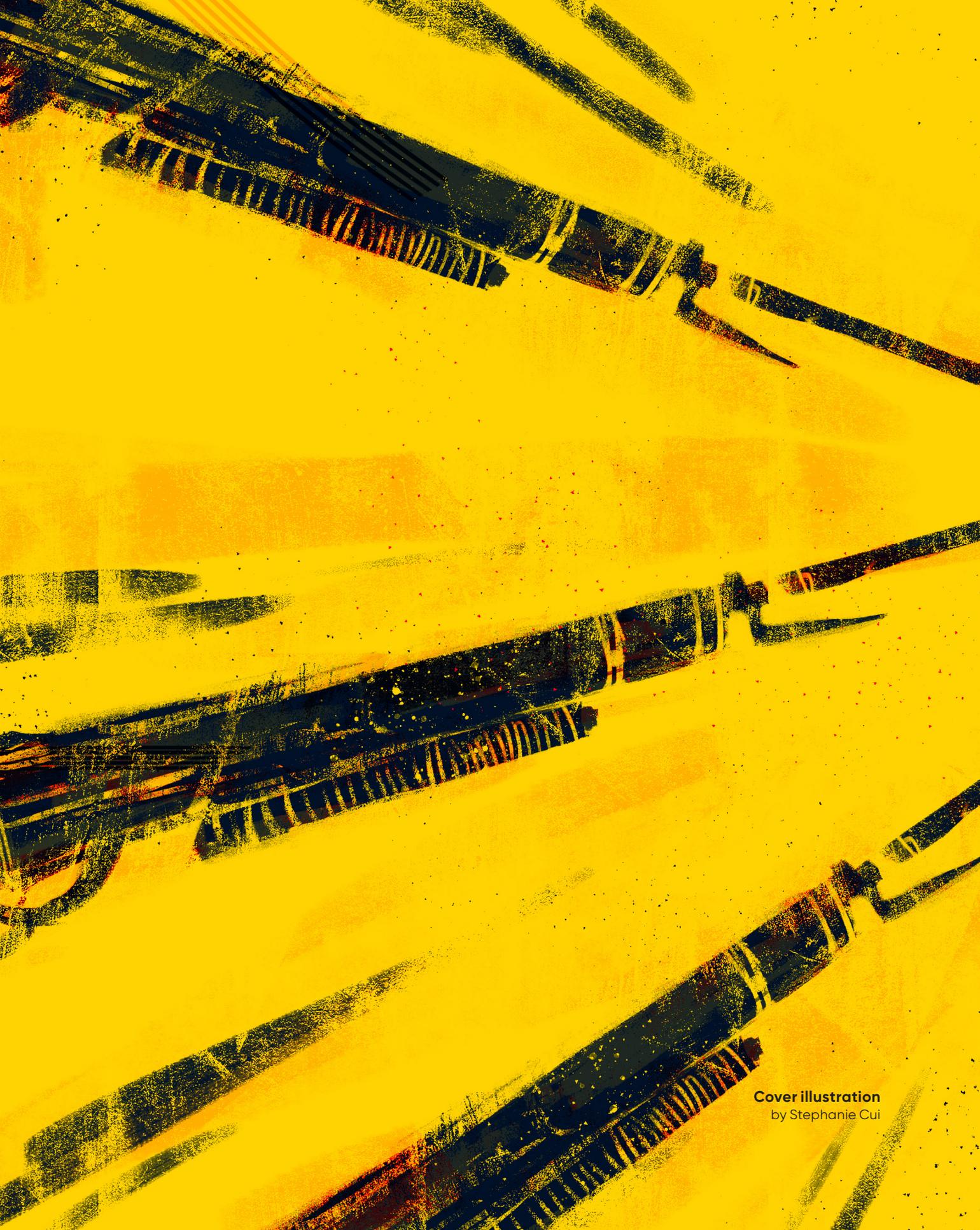
-  [hrf.org](https://hrf.org)
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