

# Media Highlights 2022





The Human Rights Foundation's (HRF) work is covered by the world's top media outlets, reaching millions of people worldwide and ultimately

*inspiring change*

In this media booklet, you'll find some of the most noteworthy articles authored by or written about HRF in the last year.



*nge.*

# BY THE NUMBERS

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 **130** *Billion*

Global Impressions

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**23,000** 

Media Mentions

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55



Languages

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133



Countries

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\$1.85 Billion



Earned Media Value

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# FEATURED SPREAD

## *“Icarus: The Aftermath”*



“Icarus: The Aftermath,” a Bryan Fogel documentary produced in association with the Human Rights Foundation, has garnered wide praise. A sequel to the Oscar-winning “Icarus,” this film follows Russian whistleblower Grigory Rodchenkov, the former head of the Russian anti-doping agency RUSAD, for five years as he flees to the United States to escape assassination. HRF CEO Thor Halvorssen served as an executive producer for the film.



Icarus: The Aftermath COURTESY OF TELLURIDE FILM FESTIVAL

*“It drops mind-boggling revelations about the extent of Russian doping and the lengths to which Vladimir Putin’s administration will go to silence dissidents and whistleblowers, but it’s also a deeply touching portrait of a man whose life was shattered because he got tired of being part of a system that ran on lies.”*

*– The Wrap*

*“A poignant and powerful document about the unpredictable burdens of heroism.”*

*– The Indie Wire*

*“Even more shocking than the 2017 original.”*

*– Variety*

# Why Are People Boycotting The 2022 Winter Olympics?

Media Outlet  
**Glamour**

Author  
**Jenny Singer**

Date  
**Feb 9, 2022**

The U.S. and nine other countries are carrying out a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics. It's a symbolic gesture, but what obligation do regular people have to boycott by not tuning in?



Matthew Stockman/  
Getty Images

At the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, [figure skaters](#) sharpen their blades and machine-made snow covers the giant slalom. On the other side of the country, the Chinese government is carrying out what the U.S. State Department has labeled a genocide against Uyghurs, a minority ethnic group.

Since 2017, over one million Uyghurs—a mostly Muslim group living in Xinjiang, a region in northwestern China—have been forced into internment camps. They are detained on the basis of “everything from wearing a

headscarf or sporting a long beard to having more than two children or traveling overseas for vacation,” [The Washington Post reports](#). Survivors of the camps have reported acts of torture, rape, and forced sterilization. Though China [claimed](#) to have closed the camps, in 2020 a [BuzzFeed News investigation](#) revealed that the government had built “high-security camps—some capable of housing tens of thousands of people” in which to forcibly house Uyghurs. “Uyghurs are basically having their cultural identity destroyed over time,” Peter Irwin, senior program officer at the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP), tells *Glamour*.

If you’re following the Olympics, you know that Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva [already made history](#) with her quad jump, and that Leslie Jones’s commentary [isn’t being respected](#) as the art form it is. Regular viewers don’t have the same visuals of forced labor, family separations, and life under surveillance in Xinjiang. But most people are connected to the region, since it is responsible for the vast majority of [cotton production](#) in China.

“Even though we may never have met someone who is Uyghur, we may never have been to China, each of us owns a T-shirt that likely has cotton that comes from Xinjiang and was likely made by slave labor,” Naomi Kikoler, director of the Center for the Prevention of Genocide at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, [said this week](#). “I don’t think we often talk about the level of proximity that we sometimes have to acts of potential genocide.”

In response to the treatment of Uyghurs, the U.S. and nine other countries are carrying out a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics. It’s a symbolic gesture—American [athletes can compete](#), but diplomats won’t attend the games. What obligation do regular people have to boycott by not tuning in? The Olympics are supposed to be a celebration of athleticism, diplomacy, and the perseverance of dreams. But this year, it may feel as if viewers are forced into an absurd position in which watching speed skating means accidentally normalizing a genocidal regime.

“There’s a genocide taking place in the Uyghur region. There are crimes against humanity taking place in the country where the Olympics are taking place,” says Irwin. “I don’t think any individual should be supporting this by watching the Games. I think if you’re watching, you’re legitimizing what the Chinese government is doing.” This isn’t the first time moral questions over watching the Olympics have been raised in recent months. Ahead of the 2021 Olympic Games—held in Tokyo during a COVID surge—Sasha Mudd, a professor of philosophy, referred to this situation as “tolerance complicity.” That is, not participating directly in a bad act, but also not calling it out. “We tolerate, normalize, or even celebrate wrongdoing through taking pleasure in its results,” she [wrote in The New York Times](#).

But before you come at people for cheering on [Nathan Chen](#) and Sara Hector, Irwin says there are other things to consider: “I think we have to

step back and think—the only reason we’re calling on individuals and looking at athletes as potential sources of free expression to call out China for what it’s doing is because the International Olympic Committee has [done nothing](#),” Irwin argues. “There has been no pressure put on the Chinese government at all when it comes to what they’re doing to Uyghurs.” He’s critical of corporate sponsors too. Despite the U.S.’s labeling the treatment of Uyghurs a genocide, major corporations like Coca-Cola, Airbnb, and Procter & Gamble are Olympic sponsors this year.

### What can we do?

Level one: “It sounds a bit cliché, but [read about the situation](#), inform yourself,” says Irwin. Other easy steps: Talk about it with your friends and family, bring it up on social media, seek out relationships with Uyghur communities in your state.

The next level of action: Contact your elected officials. The Uyghur Human Rights Project recommends asking your member of Congress to support or sponsor the [Uyghur Human Rights Protection Act](#) and the [Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act](#).

The next level: “If there’s something you can do to prevent the atrocities, it’s that China does respond to the economic argument, says Irwin. “If there’s an economic reason to stop doing what they’re doing, then that could be somewhere to press.” Students at the Catholic University of America have [pushed their school](#) to move toward divesting from any

investment related to Xinjiang. Now students at other schools are calling for their own inquiries. “We’ve seen some momentum on this,” says Irwin.

If you’re a consumer, consider this: Captives are often released from the camps but then forced to labor at factories for little or no money, [The New York Times reported](#) in 2018. In December 2021, President Biden [signed](#) the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act to keep products manufactured in the Xinjiang region from entering the U.S. But the [Times reported](#) that before the act was passed, Nike and Coca-Cola both lobbied to weaken it. The UHRP encourages consumers to hold brands accountable on social media and through petitions. In 2021, French prosecutors, according to [The New York Times](#), [began investigating](#) whether Inditex, the owner of Zara, as well as Uniqlo, and Sketchers, use forced Uyghur labor.

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**One easy step is to add a Google Chrome extension called the Uyghur Forced Labor Checker, which will warn you if the company you’re buying from might use Uyghur labor in its manufacturing.**

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*Jenny Singer is a staff writer for Glamour. You can follow her on Twitter.*

# *‘Insightful and courageous’: Gabon activist Hervé Mombo Kinga dies of Covid*

Outlet  
**The Guardian**

Author  
**Saeed Kamali  
Dehghan**

Date  
**Feb 18, 2022**

**Celebrated blogger had suffered ill health after spending 17 months in prison for speaking out against president Ali Bongo**

*Hervé Mombo Kinga began making videos in 2015 criticising the regime and poor living conditions in Gabon. Photograph: Human Rights Foundation*



Hervé Mombo Kinga, the pro-democracy activist and celebrated blogger who spent 17 months in jail for insulting the Gabonese president, Ali Bongo Ondimba, was not impressed when he saw the pictures of the leader limping up the stairs of France’s presidential palace.

Kinga, who died last week at 47 after contracting Covid, was infuriated by the episode – widely shared in the west African country of Gabon, despite the

embarrassment it caused the president, whose family has held power for more than five decades.

[Using a walking stick and supported by an aide](#), Bongo lost his balance at the top of the Élysée stairs. He was caught by the French president, Emmanuel Macron.

In a six-minute video on social media, Kinga fumed at Macron for what he saw as the French leader's endorsement of Bongo, whose [disputed re-election in 2016 by a slim margin was marked by violence](#).

"Emmanuel Macron, we are effectively at war," said Kinga, angry about the mending of relations between his homeland and its former colonial ruler.

Kinga was a vociferous critic of the Bongo regime, posting videos under the pseudonym "Matricule 001" or resistance soldier 001.

Kinga's health had deteriorated after the harsh conditions of his detention, according to his lawyer, Anges Kevin Nzigou. He was hospitalised in January and contracted Covid, which "became more severe, particularly because of his state of health", Nzigou says. Kinga had just become a father for the second time.

"Mr Kinga was an unwavering defender of human rights in [Gabon](#) and led his fight without hatred or resentment, despite the obstacles he faced. It is this [that] made him an emblematic figure in the fight for freedoms in Gabon," Nzigou says.

Kinga had been left penniless after the authorities destroyed his business, a cybercafe in the capital Libreville, and could not afford healthcare. A crowdfunding campaign was launched to help, but the intervention came too late.

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**Céline Assaf Boustani, president of the Human Rights Foundation (HRF), says: "Armed with just a camera, Hervé dedicated his life to exposing the harsh reality of life under the Bongo regime in Gabon."**

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"Hervé was insightful and courageous, and his death is a tremendous loss to the Gabonese people struggling against poverty and government repression."

Gabonese opposition leader Jean Ping was among those who paid tribute online. He hailed "the courageous fight he led for Gabon". Others called Kinga a "freedom fighter" whose death was a "big loss" for young people.

"Sick, weakened, continually persecuted, he refused to leave Gabon. A righteous man died today," [said one tweet](#).

"Your death saddens us. But the seed you sowed in us has become a hope that nourishes and inspires us every

day," [read another](#).

Kinga started making [videos](#) in 2015, "criticising repression, injustices, poor public services and deleterious living conditions for ordinary Gabonese citizens under dictator Ali Bongo's regime", says the HRF.

He supported Jean Ping in 2016. Dozens of people [lost their lives](#) in the post-election violence. Omar Bongo, the current president's father, governed from 1967 until his death in 2009, when his son took over after a [contested election](#).

Kinga was among more than a dozen activists arrested in demonstrations in August 2017, a year after the election. He was held for 17 months, partially in solitary confinement, and charged with "insulting the head of state" and "participating in propaganda that disturbs the public order".

"He was kept with very limited light and air coming from a small opening in the ceiling, making it impossible to ascertain whether it was day or night. Through this opening, rather than through the door, Kinga received his minimal food ration. Although detainees are usually allowed three meals per day, Kinga was only given food once per day," according to a 2019 HRF petition submitted to the UN, appealing Kinga's imprisonment.

"This food ration was thrown over the wall to him, as if he were an animal. He was unable to shower and lacked access to any toilet facilities; instead, he was forced to relieve himself in a plastic bag in his cell. Kinga was not provided [with] a mattress and was relegated to sleeping on the floor, although he could not properly lie down in the painfully small cell."

Released in February 2019, Kinga was particularly critical of the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In [his last video posted](#), Kinga said: "If you think about it, we are armed: we have words, resistance, boycotting, and disobedience. I will be the first to encourage this type of fight."

# *Garry Kasparov: How the free world gave Putin the green light*

Outlet  
*Op-Ed*  
**Chicago Tribune**

Author  
**Garry Kasparov,**  
HRF Board Chairman

Date  
**Feb 25, 2022**

*Ukrainian President  
Volodymyr Zelensky  
speaks to the press  
in the town of Bucha,  
northwest of the  
Ukrainian capital  
Kyiv, on April 4, 2022.  
(Ronaldo Schemidt/  
Getty-AFP)*



Early Thursday morning, Germany invaded Ukraine. So did the Netherlands, Italy, France, Great Britain and every other country that has supported Russian dictator Vladimir Putin's war machine for the past decade.

The missiles that slammed into Kharkiv, the helicopters attacking an airport near the capital Kyiv, every bullet in every Russian paratrooper's gun — all were built or bought largely with money from the free world. That same free world now stands in shock that these weapons are being used to do what they were designed to do.

Europe bought Russian gas and oil and welcomed Putin's oligarch cronies' looted billions in IPOs, real estate purchases, and political donations legal and illegal. Even after Putin invaded Ukraine in 2014 and annexed Crimea, Europe tried to keep business as usual separate from Russia's assault on European security and the global world order.

On Thursday, Putin repaid them in full for their years of appeasement. After weeks of posturing and dramatic Thursday morning, Germany invaded Ukraine. So did the Netherlands, Italy, France, Great Britain and every other country that has supported Russian dictator Vladimir Putin's war machine for the past decade.

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On Thursday, Putin repaid them in full for their years of appeasement. After weeks of posturing and dramatic calls for summits and negotiations made headlines around the world, he sent his massed forces into Ukraine on the schedule he set months ago. The preening shuttle diplomacy by France's Emanuel Macron and Germany's Olaf Scholz was revealed to have been a waste of time for everyone but Putin, who used it to ready his forces for the attack.

That time could have been used to arm Ukraine with the weapons it badly needs to fend off Russia's overwhelming military superiority. It could have been used to level sanctions to demonstrate that this time, for once, the West was serious about deterrence.

Instead, Ukraine was treated like a beggar and sanctions were kept in reserve, as a threat Putin had little reason to expect was serious. After all, goes his thinking, if you have the power to stop me and choose not to use it, aren't you giving me the green light?

It's not as if Putin tried to hide what he was doing. Spies and satellites weren't necessary to tease out that Russia was investing record sums in its military capacity and security forces; it was right there in the national budget for years. Russia may be falling apart and falling behind, but there was always plenty of cash for security forces and propaganda, the budget of a dictator.

Putin was so confident of his potential rivals' obliviousness and cowardice that he brought nearly every mobile element of the Russian military to Ukraine's border over the course of two months. There were barely any of the usual pretexts about "exercises," even when Russia took the unusual step of moving a large force into Belarus, where they were poised just a couple of hours from Kyiv.

Of course, this is far from the first time that the world has ignored Putin's warnings, let alone mine. Five years into his rule in Russia, Putin infamously stated that "the demise of the Soviet

Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century." Few took it seriously or understood it to mean that Putin would try to reverse that catastrophe should he have the chance. A clear warning was ignored, much the way Hitler's "Mein Kampf" was considered little more than hateful ranting when it was published in 1925.

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## Now a war of conquest has erupted in Europe, the greatest ever threat to the post-World War II order of borders and laws.

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Tanks are rolling and jets are dogfighting above major cities. Putin has followed through on his promise to try to crush Ukraine, which he first invaded in 2014. [My New York Daily News op-ed](#) on Putin at the time was bluntly titled "Stop This Man." Needless to say, Putin has not been stopped.

Eight years later, Putin and his war machine are much stronger. Instead of being politically isolated and economically cut off, his regime has profited from record gas and oil exports. Most profits are siphoned off into the private accounts that make Putin and his cronies the richest people in the world. Much of the rest has gone into a literal war chest, expanding and improving Russia's military and internal security forces and filling a reserve fund to help them weather sanctions.

Time has made Putin's grip on power in Russia stronger as well, with every significant critic dead, jailed or exiled. The last major protests, in 2020 on behalf of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny, were met by an army of well-equipped riot police. Their shiny new helmets and batons were also paid for by the same European nations whose leaders meekly protested the brutality.

Putin is not invulnerable, nor is his army. Ukraine is fighting hard, and if the initial onslaught is repulsed, and aid arrives in time, Putin could find himself in a difficult position. He will have to either retreat or choose total war against an urban population, which could shock even sleepy NATO into action.

Russians came out to protest this war in the largest numbers since 2020, with more than 1,700 arrests across the country on the first day. Most Russians get their news from state-controlled television, unfortunately, where they are told this is a war of self-defense against the "Nazis" in Ukraine and their masters in America. But the longer the war goes on, the more obvious it will be that Putin's needless war on Ukraine is also part of Putin's war on Russians.

Russia has the world's largest nuclear arsenal and Putin invokes it regularly, but there is much that can be done to constrain him and save lives now. After years of my warnings and proposals being ignored, and now hearing "You were right, Garry!" all day, I'll repeat what I said in 2014: Stop telling me I was right and start listening now. My recommendations:

**Support Ukraine militarily**, immediately. Everything but boots on the ground, meaning every advanced weapon, intelligence and cyber-capability. It has to be now. If Ukraine falls, Putin will bleed it dry to compensate for sanctions and dig in, as he has in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. Victory in Ukraine is also the only way to avoid doing this all again, when Putin needs new targets to distract from the disastrous state of Russia.

**Bankrupt Putin's war machine** by freezing and seizing Russian assets and access to markets. Kick Russia out of SWIFT and other financial networks, and every international institution.

**Expose and seize the assets** of Putin's cronies and their companies and families in the free world. Take away their visas and send them back to live in the dictatorship they helped build.

**Recall all ambassadors** from Russia. There is no point in diplomacy or communications with a rogue dictatorship making war. Send the message that isolation will be total until all aggression ceases and Ukraine is made whole.

**Turn off, shut down and send home** every element of Putin's global propaganda machine. Russia Today and other platforms beam lies and hate into millions of homes in the free world, while Putin maintains total control of the media in Russia.

**Call out Putin's lackeys** in the free world. The lobbyists, the law firms, the [former politicians like German ex-chancellor Gerhard Schröder](#),

who chairs two of Putin's strategically important energy companies. This includes the fifth columnists of all political stripes who side with a dictator for ideology or Russian cash. Why do executives and advertisers tolerate the likes of Tucker Carlson braying Putin propaganda in prime time? Donald Trump and his acolytes in Congress still can't find a discouraging word for Putin and repeat Russian propaganda even as Russian bombs fall on Ukraine. I've bashed every U.S. president since Ronald Reagan over Russia policy, but praising a bloodthirsty dictator to score partisan points is disgusting and un-American.

**Replace Russian energy exports** by increasing production and opening new sources, from fracking to nuclear to renewables. Giving authoritarians so much leverage for extortion is unacceptable. There's no point in saving the planet if you don't save the people on it.

Joe Biden's Cold War background has prepared him better than most of his European peers. His grave tone and announcement of serious sanctions were a welcome start. Most EU leaders, even the ones in the East ~~who grasp the danger~~ Putin represents, are a generation removed from confrontation and conflict. But now they must help Ukraine fight against the monster they helped create.

This is war, a hot war, no longer deterrence, and time is of the essence to get weapons to Ukraine so it can fight the war for freedom that the rest

of the world has preferred to pretend isn't real.

We must acknowledge that there will be sacrifices involved. The price of stopping Putin has gone up since 2008, when he invaded Georgia, and since 2014, when he first invaded Ukraine, but it will only get higher if he isn't stopped now. Failing to fight will only postpone the inevitable to another time and place.

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**Defending Ukraine from  
Putin is the defense  
of the free world.  
Defending Ukrainian  
lives is the defense of  
Western values.**

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America used to care about such things, I recall from my life in the Soviet Union that Putin misses so much. It's time to do what is needed and to do what is right. It's time to fight.

*Garry Kasparov is chairman of the Re-  
new Democracy Initiative and the 1985  
world chess champion.*

# *It's Time We Give Corporations a Human Rights Scorecard*

Outlet  
*Op-Ed*  
**The Globe Post**

Authors  
**Alvaro Piaggio**  
Senior Policy Officer  
**Jianli Yang**

Date  
**Mar 1, 2022**



*Protesters hold signs as they gather during a rally for Uyghur Freedom in New York City in 2021. Photo: AFP*

Several democracies took an important symbolic step by staging a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics that came to a close on February 20. Dozens of athletes around the world bravely refused to act as pawns of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the games.

Although far from sufficient, these are encouraging signs that there is a growing movement in the democratic world willing to stand up to [China's egregious human rights violations](#) and its efforts to undermine liberal democratic values around the world. Unfortunately, there is a major and influential player that has proven much harder to convince to join these efforts: the corporate world.

The world today has largely embraced free markets. If there is one way in which history "ended," it was certainly in the way in which totalitarian, centrally planned economies have all but ceased to exist except for less than a handful of stubborn autocracies like North Korea and Cuba.

**Most dictatorships, however, learned long ago that their survival depended on them avoiding economic ruin, and thus have taken advantage of free markets and welcomed foreign investment.**

### CCP Rights Violations

China's regime is the poster child of this sort of capitalist dictatorship, having expanded its economic power and influence in the world since the CCP started adopting free-market reforms in the 1970s.

At the same time, in the last 10 years alone, the CCP has engaged in some of the most egregious [human rights violations in Xinjiang](#), crushed any remnant of autonomy and democracy in Hong Kong, built a monstrous surveillance state, and centralized even more power in the hands of party leader **Xi Jinping**. And they are not stopping there.

The CCP is trying to shape international institutions in its image, as it buys off or bullies other countries into toeing their line to conform to their interests.

As the [CCP is committing genocide against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang](#), large

corporations from free countries are looking the other way as they continue to do business in the region. Major clothing companies have refused to even acknowledge that the cotton in their garments was picked by forced Uyghur labor.

### Foreign Capital Fuels the Regime

Entertainment giant Disney filmed a movie in the region and thanked the very local government that is carrying out this horrific crime for their hospitality. BlackRock, the largest investment firm in the world, received approval from the regime to operate mutual funds in China – the first foreign corporation to be allowed to do so – and it is pushing for American investors to dramatically increase their exposure to the Chinese market.

This shamelessness was at its most infamous display last month, as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), backed by millions of dollars in sponsor money from around the world, allowed the [Chinese regime to host the Winter Olympics in Beijing](#).



*People calling for a boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics due to China's persecution of Muslim Uyghurs in front of the Chinese Consulate in Los Angeles in November 2021. Photo: Frederic J. Brown/AFP via Getty*

None of the CCP abuses or even the recent [disappearance of Chinese tennis player](#) and Olympian **Peng Shuai** seem to have deterred the IOC from taking the sponsorship money and allowing the greatest sports washing event in history to take place.

There is a lot more the democratic world must do about China's human rights abuses. But none of this will matter much if foreign capital continues to empower the regime.

### **Corporations Must Be Held Accountable**

In order for this to stop, we must start by creating a reliable and systematic way in which we can grade corporations in their commitment to respecting basic human rights and democratic values.

Not partnering with a government carrying out genocide, or not helping a dictatorship build a massive surveillance system are among the lowest bars we should expect companies operating from the comforts of countries where rule of law and free speech are respected to clear.

Today, the only efforts made to rate corporations in how they perform beyond their bottom lines take the form of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) ratings. ESGs, however, rely on flawed methodology and dilute such important issues into one scorecard to the point that they make some of them meaningless, especially human rights.

In other words, not only are there issues with how data is reported and the independence of the rating agencies, but companies can get away with glowing reviews by improving their environmental impact, even while they do business with some of the worst human rights abusers in the world.

How is it possible that Tesla can receive such high ESG ratings while it opens a showroom in Xinjiang? How can Dell claim to be "making strides" in its social impact in the world, while it is helping the CCP build its massive surveillance state? How can BlackRock offer ESG rated funds that have massive exposure to the Chinese state?

### **Evaluate Company Ratings**

This is not to say that companies' efforts to curb global warming, the reason many of these companies get favorable ESG ratings, are not welcome. They are. But this should not be used as cover for companies as they collaborate with human rights abusers. The S in ESG needs to be dropped if human rights are not going to be at the top of the agenda.

Providing consumers and investors an independent, systematic rating of companies and their commitment to human rights will empower people to effect meaningful change around the world.

Autocrats from Saudi Arabia to China have abandoned most ideological burdens to embrace an evil and Machiavellian pragmatism: they

have put markets, and free people's capital, to work into solidifying their autocratic rule and crushing civil society in their countries.

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**If we are serious about promoting democracy and showing solidarity with oppressed peoples around the world, we need to go after the oppressors' bottom line.**

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One of the most important steps to do this is to identify the companies that enable dictators and ensure that respect for human rights becomes the first and most important hurdle to clear when deciding on an investment.

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# *For Freedom, Against Dictatorship*

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Outlet  
**National Review**

Author  
**Jay Nordlinger**

Date  
**Jun 1, 2022**

*Editor's Note: The Oslo Freedom Forum took place in the Norwegian capital from May 23 to May 25. Today we publish the first part of Jay Nordlinger's journal.*

## **Notes on the Oslo Freedom Forum: Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Uyghurs, Cubans, Syrians, et al.**

The Oslo Freedom Forum is an unusual thing: It gathers human-rights activists from all over the world. Dissidents, oppositionists, former political prisoners – future political prisoners. OFF does not care whether the dictatorship is left or right. Whether the boot is red or black. It is anti-dictatorship. OFF does not favor human rights for some; it favors them for all.

This is a quite unusual thing.

Many people have good dictatorships and bad dictatorships. For example: Saudi Arabia, good; Iran, bad. Russia, good; China, bad. Cuba, good; Burma, bad. In my experience, those who oppose dictatorship across the board – and support liberty for all – are pretty rare.

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**One of the greatest benefits of the Oslo Freedom Forum, say its participants, is that it makes people feel less alone. If you are a dissident up against a dictatorship, you can feel very, very alone. But the people at OFF are in the same boat, so to speak. They can trade stories, compare notes — be understood. And they feel less alone.**

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*The Oslo  
Freedom  
Forum is  
sometimes  
known as  
“Davos for  
Dissidents.”*

*- National Review*

*Omar Alshogre, a Syrian former political prisoner,  
speaking at the Oslo Freedom Forum on May 23,  
2022 (Oslo Freedom Forum / Jan Khür)*

Which is a valuable gift.

- In the first session of the forum, Thor Halvorssen, the founder of OFF and its parent organization, the Human Rights Foundation, based in New York, speaks from the stage of the Oslo Concert Hall. (This is the home of another organization: the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra.) Halvorssen says that some people have asked him, "How come OFF doesn't address abuses in democratic countries?" His answer is as follows:

People in democracies have remedies: legitimate courts; multiple political parties; a free press. People under dictatorship lack such remedies. There is a time and a place for everything. At this forum, we address abuses in authoritarian or totalitarian countries.

Which sounds (and is) reasonable.

- The opening session of the forum, you can see on YouTube: [here](#).
- In his remarks – his welcome, if you will – Halvorssen says that more than half of humanity lives under authoritarian regimes: about 4 billion people. And you can see the contrast between unfree, closed societies and free, open ones. China is "buckling" under the coronavirus, says Halvorssen.

Which reminds me of Garry Kasparov, the chairman of the Human Rights Foundation. He has a pithy formulation: "China gave the world the virus; America gave the world the vaccine" (or most of the vaccines, I gather).

Kasparov, I admire no end, for this reason, among others: He doesn't have to be doing any of this. He doesn't have to campaign for freedom, democracy, and human rights around the world, exposing himself to risk, from the Kremlin, in particular. He could have spent his years as the great retired chess champion, the chess legend, receiving accolades from one and all.

When I mentioned this once, he responded, "I never wanted to be a statue. For one thing, just think what pigeons do to it."

- Various people mention the stakes in Ukraine – which are huge, for Ukrainians, of course, and for the world at large. You know who recognizes this? The Russian state, for sure. I will quote the foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov: "This is not about Ukraine at all, but the world order. The current crisis is a fateful, epoch-making moment in modern history. It reflects the battle over what the world order will look like."

A rare moment of agreement, between me and Lavrov, today's Gromyko (and Molotov).

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**The Oslo Freedom Forum is sometimes known as "Davos for Dissidents."**

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Bill Browder is a regular attendee. He spearheads the global campaign for Magnitsky acts. He has been in the crosshairs of Putin and his goons for years. (I wrote about Browder, and his extraordinary family, in 2018: [here](#).) This year, Browder is not in Oslo but in Davos. Why? He explains in a video, presented to the forum. He wants to convince the big corporate executives to disassociate themselves, at long last, from Russia – from Putin’s authoritarian kleptocracy. There may be a window.

- Another regular attendee at the Freedom Forum is Vladimir Kara-Murza, the Russian democracy leader. Like Browder, he is not attending this year. But he is not in Davos. He is in a Russian prison cell. Long an advocate of political prisoners, he is now one himself – and he needs other people to serve as advocates for him.

Chief among them is his gallant wife, Evgenia – who is loath to be in the public eye, but who enters the fray whenever her husband cannot: when he has been subject to a poison attack, for example, as he has been twice, or, like now, when he is thrown into prison.

In the Oslo Concert Hall, Evgenia reads a message from Vladimir. He says he has no regrets whatsoever about speaking out against Putin’s assault on Ukraine, and the Kremlin’s other abuses and crimes. He quotes his mentor, Boris Nemtsov: “The cost of freedom is high.” (Nemtsov was murdered within sight of the Kremlin in February 2015.) Vladimir goes on to say, “The cost of silence and complicity is unacceptable.”

A great man.

- Oleksandra Matviichuk is a Ukrainian human-rights lawyer. She gives a talk in which she details atrocities committed by Russian troops in her country. There are some pictures, too – hard to look at, of course, but necessary to face. How do you gun down people riding their bicycles on their streets? Streets on which they have ridden their bicycles routinely, in the normal course of life? How do you break into a house, kill the father, and rape the mother in front of her young child? These are the kinds of things that Russians are doing over and over in Ukraine.

I realize that it’s a war: one army, or military, competing against another. But, mainly, it seems to me a simple assault by one country on the people of another. Not a hair on a Russian civilian’s head is threatened. But every person – every man, woman, and child – in Ukraine is a target. That’s a “war,” I suppose. But it seems to me something else, and has since the beginning.

Like others, I am usually very careful to distinguish between a government and a people – especially a dictatorship and the people under its rule. I take care to say “Putin” or “the Kremlin,” not “Russia” or “Russians.” But, you know? Putin is not killing women as they wait in a bread line. He is not firing at mothers and children as they try to evacuate. He is not raping anyone. Other people are doing this. There is a broader responsibility, is there not?

This is a big, contentious, and painful subject . . .

• Alexander Lukashenko, the dictator of Belarus, is a junior Putin. Those opposing his government are incredibly brave. I have been writing about them, in detail, since 2010. Here in Oslo, three women give a talk, jointly. They are heroines of democracy in Belarus: Veronika Tsepkaló, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, and Tatsiana Khomich. Tatsiana is the sister of Maria Kalesnikava, a political prisoner. Maria ripped up her passport rather than accept exile. Tatsiana is representing Maria while Maria is behind bars.

They have faced – they have braved – great dangers, these people. One of them says this: When you go out in the day, you don't know whether you will return in the evening. Whether you will hug your children goodnight.

Once, at an opposition rally, the women were told that there were snipers on a nearby rooftop. All the women could think to do was wave to them.

It's amazing what people will risk for the basic freedoms and rights that so many of the rest of us are lucky enough to take for granted.

• Last year, the Oslo Freedom Forum was held in Miami, not Oslo. This had to do with the complications of travel in a time of Covid. In a [report](#) from Miami, I wrote,

There is a panel on myths of the Cuban dictatorship. I am to moderate it. One of our guests was to be Carolina Barrero, a Cuban art historian and activist. But she has not come to Miami. Why? Luis Manuel

Otero Alcántara, the artist and political prisoner, has gone on hunger strike. Carolina and others have joined him in solidarity.

The things people do. The sacrifices they make. Extraordinary.

Since then, Ms. Barrero has been kept under house arrest in Cuba, then expelled from the country. She is here in Norway, speaking. And it is a pleasure to see her, and hear her. Many young people in Cuba are sick and tired of the dictatorship – even more sick and tired, possibly, than the old people are. They see that millions upon millions of people, including in Latin America, are leading normal lives, in free societies, or relatively free ones. Why should they be deprived of the same? Why should they have to live under one of the few remaining Communist dictatorships in all the world? Fidel and Che and the rest set up shop such a long time ago. The shop must be closed, or destroyed, at long last.

• I meet a friend of mine, a Uyghur American. She is so fed up. For six years, she says, Uyghurs abroad have been explaining the Uyghur situation to the world at large. What's a Uyghur? How do you pronounce "Uyghur"? How do they differ from the ethnic majority in China? Etc. The U.S. State Department, among other institutions and bodies, has described Beijing's persecution of the Uyghurs as a "genocide." Yet no real action is taken. My friend is so sick of talking. Enough talking, she says. She is ready for her people to be a cause – a worldwide cause – as the Ukrainians are. The

Uyghurs are facing an emergency, just as the Ukrainians are.

The frustration of my friend, I understand. Easily. I also think of the Syrians . . .

- Omar Alshogre is an amazing young man. He is a student at Georgetown University – vibrant; winsome. He was a political prisoner in his native Syria, subjected to any number of horrors. To have kept his sanity is an achievement. Before he was released, he underwent a mock execution. Understand: He thought it was a real execution. He thought he was going to die. Instead...

Anyway, an amazing, heart-in-throat story. I could not help thinking of Tosca, the Puccini opera. The prisoner, Cavaradossi, is told that there will be a mock execution. He has to play along. Then he will escape, with his beloved, Floria Tosca. And yet – the execution squad kills him for real.

It is wonderful to see Omar, alive and ready to tackle the world, for years to come.

- A concert hall ought to have a musical performance, and there is one – more than one, actually – on the stage here at the Freedom Forum. The one I have in mind is by Lynn Adib, a singer-songwriter born and raised in Damascus. A beautiful performer.

- There is also a comedian – Sakdiyah Ma'ruf, a woman from Indonesia. She is a "hijabi" (one who wears a hijab). She grew up in a conservative religious community, she tells us. So, the pandemic was not such a big deal. Stay at home? And if you have to go outside, cover up? Why, millions of women are experts at that . . .

A little laughter is a life necessity.

# *Iranian Artists-in-Exile Find a Vehicle for Protest*

Outlet  
**The Washington  
Post**

Author  
**Bobby Ghosh**

Date  
**Jun 4, 2022**

MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA  
- OCTOBER 04: The  
PaykanArtCar, a new  
vehicle dedicated to  
highlighting human  
rights abuses in Iran, is  
unveiled at the Human  
Rights Foundation's  
Oslo Freedom Forum  
on September 5, 2021  
in Miami, Florida.  
(Photo by John  
Parra/Getty Images  
for PaykanArtCar)  
(Photographer: John  
Parra/Getty Images  
North America)



**At the Oslo Freedom Forum,  
an annual gathering of political  
activists and dissidents, attendees  
are confronted with the challenge of  
making the world care about long-  
running tyrannies.**

The passage of decades makes it that much harder to draw international attention to the plight of Cubans, say, or Zimbabweans – and harder still because newer causes, such as the tragedy of the Uyghurs, clamor for our collective concern.

The forum awards the Vaclav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent to those who bring invention and imagination to their activism to alert the world to their causes. Previous winners have included Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, Indonesian comedian Sakdiyah Ma'ruf and Emmanuel Jal, a hip-hop artist from South Sudan.

If art, comedy and music have long been deployed in political causes, one of this year's award-winning projects breaks new ground: It is a car.

The PaykanArtCar project has turned an Iranian-made sedan that was once gifted by Shah Mehammed Reza Pahlavi to the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu into a vehicle for activism against Iran's rulers. The idea is to use the car as a canvas on which Iranian artists can protest the depredations of the regime in Tehran.

The first artist to have at it is Alireza Shojaian, an Iran-born, Paris-based artist who has chosen to draw attention to the plight of Iran's LGBTQ+ community. Against a yellow background, Shojaian has painted images depicting Ali Fazeli Monfared, a 20-year-old man from Ahvaz, in southwestern Iran, who was allegedly beheaded last year by his own relatives for being gay. The style is redolent of the 10th century Persian epic known as Shahnameh, and the artist says he was especially inspired by one of its stories, the tragedy of Rostam and Sohrab, in which a father kills his son.

International and Iranian rights groups say the LGBTQ+ community in

Iran faces discrimination in society and criminalization in law. Same-gender sexual activity carries the maximum sentence of death. The mores and laws are defended by the liberal and conservative factions of the theocracy. Former President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad famously declared there were no homosexuals in Iran, and former foreign minister Javad Zarif justified the execution of gays by invoking Iranian society's "moral principles."

Hiva Feizi, executive director of PaykanArtCar, told me the project is now seeking a second artist to use the car as a mural for another cause. "They can decide the specific issue — it could be about women's rights, environmental concerns or anything else — as long as it is related to Iran," she said.

A Florida-based nonprofit, PaykanArtCar is run by Mark Wallace, a United Nations diplomat under President George W. Bush. Wallace also heads United Against Nuclear Iran, which pursues more conventional means of advocacy — pressing policy makers in Washington not to make concessions to Tehran and pressuring companies to stop doing business with the country.

The PaykanArtCar project is in effect an acknowledgment that conventional efforts aren't sufficient to keep the cause of freedom in Iran fresh in the public mind. It certainly speaks to the Iranian diaspora, for whom the Paykan, which means "arrow" in Persian, is a national icon.

Based on the Hillman Hunter, a British car, it was the first car manufactured in Iran, starting in 1967.

Although production of the sedan ceased in 2005 (a pickup version was made until 2015), the Paykan can still be seen on Iranian roads. Hardly the most comfortable or reliable of rides, the car nonetheless invokes pride, symbolizing the can-do spirit of Iranian drivers and mechanics. It also inspires thousands of jokes, and I heard most of them from Paykan taxi drivers during a trip to Tehran in 2015, just months before authorities tried to ban them to address the city's notorious air pollution. My favorite: "How do you make a Paykan accelerate 0-60 mph in less than 15 seconds? Push it off a cliff."

The Shah's gift to his fellow tyrant was made in 1974, when developing countries took special pride in making cars. (My native India was then producing the Ambassador,

based on another British car, the Morris Oxford.) It was still roadworthy when Ceausescu was toppled in 1989, and was twice put up for auction before it was acquired by the PaykanArtCar project.

Since being repurposed as a moving mural, it has been displayed in the US, Canada and in Europe. Feizi says that although Iranian diaspora groups were initially skeptical of its use to promote LGBTQ+ rights, "they've been coming to see it, and most of them agree that using it as a vehicle of protest is a novel idea, a good way to get attention for people in Iran."

At the OFF, it did a much better job of that than the motley gathering of Oslo-based Iranian dissidents who assemble regularly in front of the Norwegian parliament to chant slogans calling for the downfall of the regime in Tehran. They hadn't got the memo about creative dissent.

# *‘You have to step over your fear’: how to take on a dictator*

Outlet  
**The Guardian**

Author  
**Tracy McVeigh**

Date  
**Jun 7, 2022**

Sviatlana  
Tsikhanouskaya, left,  
and Tawakkol Karman.  
Composite: Reuters/  
Getty



Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and Tawakkol Karman led uprisings in Belarus and Yemen respectively. They explain what it means to be at the forefront of a revolution.

Revolutions are rarely successful. But although they are often thwarted by those they seek to overthrow, the energy created even by unsuccessful revolutionary protest can spark a process that builds momentum over weeks, months – and even years, as two women who led very different uprisings explain.

## **Belarus: the unexpected president**

At last month’s Oslo Freedom Forum, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya took confidently to the stage.

Officially recognised by the US and many European nations as the winner of the Belarusian presidential election in 2020, she has lived in exile since Alexander

Lukashenko, who has held the country in an iron grip for 28 years, claimed victory in the ballot.

Every inch the stateswoman in her suit and high heels, Tsikhanouskaya won a standing ovation from Oslo's audience of human rights activists and journalists. Days later, she passed a painful milestone: two years since she last saw her husband, Sergei Tikhanovsky, a dissident blogger who was arrested after announcing plans to run in the 2020 election and sentenced to 18 years in prison. He left behind a stay-at-home mother looking after two children with hearing difficulties; she has no idea if he knows how much has changed in his absence.

"My husband was jailed and I haven't had any communication with him since. We never discussed my participation in the election, in politics.

"It was unimaginable, because I was a housewife and we never discussed politics at home. I became interested only because my husband started his blog and began to oppose the dictator, so when he was jailed, my first thought was to support him, a step to show my love for him. It was not for freedom or democracy.

"But then, of course, so many people started to demonstrate and show their intention for change that I joined. In our country, everybody had thought you can't change anything, you are in the minority.

"Then, in 2020, we saw there were millions of us who felt the same. "

The sense of hope as huge numbers of people swelled pro-democracy rallies in Belarus was strengthened by Tsikhanouskaya and two other opposition leaders, Maria Kolesnikova and Veronika Tsepkalo standing for change – all women, all united.



*Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya at a rally before the 2020 election. Photograph: Sergei Grits/AP*

"I think it was a unique moment because we are a post-Soviet country. In the Soviet Union, a woman knew where her place was – and her place was behind a man, always. Of course, times were changing and in Belarus we had a lot of women in business and some politicians, but not a lot. There were still rules that women were in the secondary roles, but in 2020 the regime underestimated the role of women.

"I was accepted as candidate. Lukashenko wanted to make a laughing stock of me – 'Look who would vote for a woman? She's a housewife' – but he didn't catch the mood. Belarusian people are so tired of politicians who care only about themselves, who don't care about the people, and the fact that women were leading this uprising was attractive for people because they see women

as normally kinder, more caring about children; they want people to be happy, to be in comfort. Lukashenko said, 'Our constitution is not for a woman,' that there would never be a woman president in our country, and it showed he'd lost connection.

"Now, of course, our win has shown that women have the same power as men and in future in Belarus there will be no debate about where the place of women is. She will be equal to men. I think we now will avoid this part of our history where women will have to fight for their rights, because we already proved everything."

Lukashenko, keen to strengthen ties with Vladimir Putin, has supported Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"In Belarus, when the dictator became a collaborator and co-aggressor it was shocking for Belarusian people because we know that we are on the side of Ukrainians," she says.

"The regime of Lukashenko and the Belarusian people are two different things. Put Belarusian people and Ukrainians together when you are talking about the struggle for freedom.

"In the international arena we are managing to explain to people what is going on. Please punish the Belarusian regime, but please support the Belarusian people. When you mention punishment or sanctions, be precise.

"We are with Ukrainians. When Lukashenko dragged our country into the war, despite repressions, despite people realising they faced torture or being detained, hundreds of thousands took to the streets to protest. It's extremely difficult to fight in a dictatorship when you are detained for a yellow ribbon in your hair or for an Instagram like, but this war wasn't approved by Belarusian people.

"Many Belarusians are fighting with Ukrainians. The partisans in Belarus are working to stop equipment, to stop arms and food supplies getting through our territories to reach Russian troops. Belarusian people can claim two victories: that Russian troops didn't feel safe in Belarus because of the disruptions, and that people are taking pictures of troops and missiles launching and troop movements and sending this information immediately to the Ukrainians," she says.

"So, yes, for me, in two years I have changed. It's not modest to say so, but I became a symbol of change. I addressed the UN and met Joe Biden and so on, but it will be a huge pleasure when my husband is released to give him back this role, to exchange roles, because I am so tired and exhausted. It is hard to hear all the time about people who are suffering, who are tortured. When he is released, I will give him this flag.



Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya March 2022.  
Photograph: David Parry/PA



*Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya holds a picture of her husband, Syarhei Tsikhanouski, during a protest in Vilnius, Lithuania, May 2021. Photograph: Janis Laizans/Reuters*

"On 29 May, it was two years of detention. I have heard his voice only on video. I'm a woman, I'm strong enough – I'm an adult, but its very hard to see children wait for their daddy. I have to make him stay in their memory, so I have pictures of my husband everywhere in our apartment. Every night, I hear, 'When is my daddy coming back?'"

"I live with this hope that my children will see him soon, and it pushes you, it pushes you every day. There are so many political prisoners."

"In 2020 we thought one more week, one more week, but two years have passed. It's a big period of life, but people are not ready to say, 'OK we didn't achieve, we will give up,' so that energy is underground. It's in the people.

"We don't know how long the regime's arms are, so I have to make sure my children have people who can take care of them.

"You think how you will be tortured, how you will be humiliated. You cannot be not scared, but you have to step over your fear. My husband was afraid; others were afraid. It is the price you pay. More and more people are involved in the pro-democracy movement and people understand that our country can be completely different after 27 wasted years when a dictator thought of nothing but himself."

### **Yemen: after the revolution**

[Tawakkol Karman](#) became known as "the lady of the [Arab spring](#)" in recognition of her role in the 2011 pro-democracy youth uprising in Yemen for which she won a Nobel peace prize. Now living in exile with her husband and baby son, she is an activist against corruption and authoritarianism and still works for the revolution that rolled across the Arab region but left Yemen behind – [a country now gripped by war and hunger](#).

"The revolution is a continuous act. It doesn't stop, especially when it faces challenges and obstacles. The age of the revolution is still here; it's just 11 years, and in that time we have overthrown about seven dictators in the Arab spring, so that's a big, big achievement. We will not lose our hope. We are so proud of what we did and the problem is now with the counter-revolution leaders and those who support authoritarian regimes.

"We will not give up and we will continue and we will achieve our goals of freedom and democracy."

"The [current ceasefire](#) is very important and the food security situation is very important, but Yemen is bigger than that," she says. "[Stopping the war means stopping the Saudis and the influence of Iran](#) ... If the Saudis stop their missiles, that will stop the current situation. They have total hegemony; they forced the legitimate president to resign and gave the authority to a presidential council. Stopping the war means [Yemen](#) has to decide its own path, to sever from the Emirates; from Iran as well.

"The reason that Saudi waged the war was that they want to stop the wheel of change in Yemen. They want to stop a peaceful-transition revolution.



*Tawakkol Karman speaks to the press in front of the Saudi consulate in Istanbul during a demonstration over the disappearance of journalist [Jamal Khashoggi](#). Photograph: Ozan Köse/AFP/Getty Images*

"Dictators think they will be allowed to control whatever they want to. The more a dictator is appeased and the more western governments make alliances with dictators, the stronger they are and the more their people suffer.

"Yemen and all the countries who chose to face the dictators, they will not stop their dream. Every great revolution is followed by the counter-revolution, but the future belongs to us and we are optimistic because we started this battle and knew we would face such obstacles.

"The thing that we didn't expect during our struggle? It is that we didn't expect western governments to let us down as they did. They make alliances with dictators and they encourage dictators to wage all kinds of wars against us – Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi in Egypt. They support these people by not putting pressure on them to stop. They are selling weapons to them.

"So that has really frustrated us," she says. "And one of the results of that is we see now how Putin was encouraged in going into Ukraine. In Syria, his actions going without censure encouraged him."

Russia has supported the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, in the ongoing conflict in Syria since the start of the uprising in 2011 and directly intervened militarily in 2015. Its bombing of civilian targets, hospitals and schools is widely recognised as causing hundreds of deaths and it holds a naval base in Syrian territory. The lack of censure of Russia's actions, Karman believes, gave a green light to Putin's warmongering ambitions.



Tawakkol Karman. Photograph: Philippe Desmazes/AFP/Getty Images

"The situation in Syria encouraged Putin to invade Crimea and then Ukraine, so now all of our freedom is under threat.

"Our enemies should be one. It is one battle all around the world. It is so clear. Don't trust these dictators; don't think your alliance will help you – they are ruthless and united together. Authoritarian regimes are not friends to democratic regimes. Putin and those like him are the enemies of humanity.

"I feel deep sympathy for Ukraine, but I really expected this war."

However, Karman insists she is an optimist. She believes the place of women at the forefront of politics in her region is too strong to ever be reversed.

"We change a lot. **Women** led the Arab spring; we led the revolution. The deep root of leading the political process and decision-making has changed things for women in society.

"Chaos and wars cause woman and children double the issues, but women are sacrificing, leading the struggle against coups in Libya, in Syria, in Sudan, in Yemen, and inside Saudi Arabia too. Women are paying the price for just daring to be an activist.

"Some people will say that women's rights have gone backwards; some people lose hope, but this is the battle for freedom and democracy and we should remember that the people are there, underground, still sacrificing. The majority continue the struggle, dreaming to make change. They don't give up but are willing and happy to sacrifice anything for their kids to have a future.

"When we raised the revolution, we knew the dictators and the kingdoms around us would do all they could do to stop this wheel of change. OK, we did not expect the western governments who claim to support democracy to let us down, but we believe in ourselves and we know that sooner or later we will win this battle. We are both so sad and so mad.

"I am optimistic. I know the west will wake up and correct their policies, because now they are under fire. Make alliances with freedom fighters and activists around the world.

"For Yemen, there needs to be a real will to stop the war. The Yemeni authorities need to have their political independence and make real alliances – not through the gate of Saudi Arabia.

"People are so scared of Saudi Arabia. The world takes no kind of action because of this dark, dark oil money.

"For politicians who still follow this strategy of believing dictators somehow guarantee stability, this will not work. Dictators pose the greatest risk to global peace. They are the ones who directly and indirectly support terrorism, poverty, corruption. We need peace, democracy and rule of law."



*Women carry a poster of Tawakkol Karman during a demonstration to demand the resignation of Yemen's president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, October 2011. Photograph: Mohammed Huwais/ AFP/ Getty Images*

# *Biden's visit to Saudi Arabia disappoints human rights activists*

Outlet  
*Op-Ed*  
**Seattle Times**

Author  
**Bethany Al-Haidari**  
Senior Fellow on  
Human Trafficking

Date  
**Jun 26, 2022**



*Abdullah Al-Aoudh, left, son of detained Saudi scholar Salman al-Odeh; author Bethany Alhaidari; Areej Al-Sadhan, sister of detained humanitarian aid worker Abdulrahman Al-Sadhan; and attorney Jim Walden on a recent visit to the White House. (Courtesy of Bethany Alhaidari)*

For nearly two years, I was [trapped with my daughter](#) in Saudi Arabia under repressive laws that give preference to men over women, and discriminate on the basis of identity and belief.

As a human rights researcher in Saudi Arabia, I watched my Saudi colleagues and heroes be detained, disappeared, tortured and even killed for expressing their views and supporting human rights.

I will never forget the [sense of relief](#) I felt on Dec. 15, 2019, after years of living in fear, when I was seated on a flight back home to Washington state. When the clouds cleared as we were landing to reveal the Space Needle, I finally felt safe, free and equal under the law.

Recently, this sense of safety was shaken, when [President Joe Biden confirmed his intention to visit Saudi Arabia](#) from July 13-16. He is expected to meet with the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the man culpable for the murder of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

As so many impacted by Saudi Arabian repression languish, including U.S. citizens and residents of Washington state, I cannot help but feel disappointed and frightened by how this trip may further embolden an already dangerous dictatorship. It sends a tragic message to individuals impacted by Saudi repression here at home.

Since I returned I've had the honor to work with families of brave human rights activists and dissidents who are detained or trapped for supporting human rights work, and others who are entrapped in Saudi with their children as I once was. I didn't realize how prevalent this problem was on our own soil until I returned to the U.S.

I've worked on cases of more than [100 American families who have been torn apart by repression in Saudi Arabia](#). We work with family members who have not heard from their loved ones in years as they have been disappeared, family members who had to learn that their brother, son, father, mother or sisters were tortured and now live with permanent physical deformations or post-traumatic stress disorder due to torture.

We work with families whose loved ones' prison sentences and travel bans are so long that they live with the possibility of never seeing them again unless something changes. We have [American women and children who remain entrapped or kidnapped](#) in the country in situations of abuse, unable to exit due to hyper-patriarchal and archaic male guardianship and kafala laws, which prohibit them from exiting

the country without a husband or father's permission.

We have women who have had their children taken from them to Saudi Arabia, and even one here in Washington state who is under an active travel ban in Saudi Arabia, so she is unable to see her son. [Mothers of children in Oregon](#) never got justice for their child's murder due to Saudi Arabia helping citizens flee ahead of trial.

The repressive tactics of the Saudi government have not been limited to within its own borders, and the impact of Saudi transnational repression within U.S. borders should not be ignored. This was most apparent with the brutal murder of journalist Khashoggi, an American resident. Such egregious crimes by this regime appear to go without punishment.

I hope that a U.S. president's meeting with Saudi Arabia will result in freedom for the family members of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents who are wrongfully detained – [like the well-known cases of Abdulrahman Al-Sadhan](#), Salman al-Odeh, Mohammed al-Qahtani, Mohammed al-Rabiah, Sarah and Omar AlJabri, and others who cannot be publicly named.

I also hope that it would result in the [lifting of travel bans barring individuals from exiting Saudi Arabia's](#) borders and returning home to their families – such as Aziza al-Yousef, Salah al-Haidar, Loujain al-Hathloul, Bader al-Ibrahim and Walid Fitaihi. I also hope that American children

who are entrapped there will be able to reunite with their mothers – like [Teresa Malof](#), [Madonna Saad](#) and so many others.

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**I urge the Biden administration to prioritize human rights ahead of this meeting, and to secure the safety and well-being of his own citizens and residents.**

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A good start would be securing freedom for the wrongfully detained and bringing these American families back home.

*Bethany AlHaidari holds a PHD in International Human Rights Law focused on Saudi Arabia, she works as the Saudi Case Manager for the Freedom Initiative and as a Senior Fellow on Saudi Arabia for the Human Rights Foundation. She is a proud alumna of the University of Washington School of Law.*

# *Iran Tried to Kill Me on American Soil*

Outlet  
*Op-Ed*  
**Wall Street  
Journal**

Author  
**Masih Alinejad**  
HRF International  
Council Member

Date  
**Aug 7, 2022**

*Masih Alinejad said this security-camera photo shows defendant Khalid Mehdiyev outside her Brooklyn home.*



*Brooklyn, N.Y.*

"This time their objective was to kill you," a special agent from the Federal Bureau of Investigation told me. "We detained him with a loaded AK-47." When I saw the photos of the weapon, I was filled with shock, fear and disbelief.

In 2014 I launched a campaign challenging compulsory hijab in my native Iran. For defending a woman's right to dress how she wants and my endless criticism of the regime, I have been targeted multiple times by the Iranian government on American soil.

Video security footage at my home showed a man on my porch last week trying to break in. While he was outside my door, I was on a video call with Human Rights Foundation chairman Garry Kasparov and Venezuelan activist Leopoldo López. We were discussing how last month both [Vladimir Putin](#) and Nicolás Maduro were in Iran, and that just as the dictators are united, so should be the efforts against their regimes.

According to an affidavit from the FBI, the Iranian agent who attempted to enter my home is Khalid Mehdiyev, an Azerbaijan-born immigrant to the U.S. New York police arrested him on Thursday and, after searching his car, they found the loaded AK-47, 66 rounds of ammunition, more than \$1,000 in cash, and multiple fraudulent license plates from various U.S. states. President Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, has confirmed that the Iranian regime sent Mr. Mehdiyev to assassinate me.

Tehran is deathly afraid of my message and its strength inside Iran. For months last year, I had to move between multiple safe houses after the FBI foiled a plot by Iranian agents to kidnap me from my home in New York and forcibly return me to Iran by way of Venezuela. I am routinely harassed online and accounts try to impersonate me to discredit my message. Earlier this month my social-media accounts were fraudulently suspended. The regime has gone after my family in Iran, trying to use my mother to lure me back to the country.

Though my family and I are again being uprooted from our home to go into hiding, the Iranian regime's attempts to silence me will never work. I am not fearful of dying, because I know what I am living for. I have dedicated my life to fighting for those in my country who bravely risk everything to challenge the dictatorship.

Iran continues to deny all of this, but it's the truth. The regime is my only enemy, the only entity interested in kidnapping or killing me. It has already harassed my family in Iran, put my sister on national TV to denounce me, and jailed my brother for two years. It is no surprise that a ruthless tyranny would want to repress innocent activists, but it is shocking it would twice attempt to commit crimes against someone in America. For daring to enjoy my freedom and give a voice to the countless Iranians who can't speak freely, I am unable to live in peace or security even in the U.S.

Tehran is unlikely to stop. Regime officials are humiliated that this latest foiled plot makes the regime look like a bumbling failure. Perhaps they will be emboldened to finish what they started. I am grateful for the protection of law-enforcement agencies, and I hope the U.S. government takes this seriously and makes clear to the mullahs that an American citizen like me should feel safe exercising her constitutional freedoms inside U.S. borders.

*Ms. Alinejad is a member of the Human Rights Foundation's international council and author of "The Wind in My Hair: My Fight for Freedom in Modern Iran."*

# *The Ailing Human Rights Industry*

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OSLO FREEDOM  
FORUM/JAN KHUR

**At this year's Oslo Freedom Forum, even the most sanguine activists struggled to overcome a sense of drift and impotence**



The message emanates from the untroubled green hills, the unremarkable fjord, the pristine and car-free downtown, the silent trams, the colorless streets where there is no trash, no crime, no visible suffering of any kind: All is well here, for you are in a boring place. Dullness is Oslo's great asset—only somewhere with total confidence in its solutions to all of modern society's problems could fail to see the obvious absurdity of the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony, which takes place at City Hall every year. Maybe the Oslo Freedom Forum, the Human Rights Foundation's (HRF) annual convention of political dissidents, could only happen in a place characterized by a sense of post-historical languor.

In two prior trips to the forum I have met an activist from the famously rebellious Syrian city of Kafr Nabl who was murdered by an al-Qaida affiliate a little over a year later, overheard the embittered mutterings of the exiled former president of the Maldives while we killed time in a hotel lobby, and looked into the eyes of a secularist Bangladeshi blogger who was then near the top of a jihadi death list, glimpsing a mad imbalance of resignation and mortal fear. These and a hundred other interactions too inspiring and unsettling to convey in any single piece of writing all happened without my having to leave the Norwegian capital, where the convenience stores all close before 12, as if to punish you for even having an appetite.

The forum, which I attended this year for the first time since 2017, is based on a simple premise that no one would have disputed five years ago—namely that knowledge, publicity, technical know-how, and networking could free the oppressed from their shackles. The main programming is a series of TED-style 10-to-15-minute presentations from people who have fought autocratic regimes or nonstate groups, alongside similar talks from journalists, scholars, or technologists aiding the activists in their fight against tyranny. In between these sessions are hours' worth of subtly curated workshops, dinners, and other quasi-structured schmoozing opportunities. These are all of astoundingly high quality because of the range of backgrounds and outlooks on hand. The forum is an experiment in discovering what

anti-drug war activists, cypherpunks, Islamists, North Korean defectors, National Review staffers, Syrian torture survivors, and the CEO of Tumblr can learn from one another. In Oslo, relationships would be built and awareness would be raised, seeding some kind of future positive change for the billions who toil under dictatorship.

HRF was founded in 2006 by Thor Halvorssen, the libertarian-minded scion of a prominent family in his native Venezuela who had previously headed the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (since renamed the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression), the leading group advocating for free speech on U.S. college campuses. HRF has a very different approach than Human Rights Watch (HRW) or Amnesty International. The latter groups seek to leverage their activist and donor networks, along with the waning illusion of moral authority, in order to accrue power within governments and multilateral organizations like the United Nations or the International Criminal Court, globe-spanning entities that the ideologists of the Western human rights industry believe to be legitimate, effective, and extremely important.

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**In contrast, HRF avoids the incumbent human rights community's lust for high politics, instead foregrounding the activists themselves,**

**getting the advocates in front of people from a range of professional and ideological backgrounds who are capable of promoting their stories and advancing their work.**

Just as crucially, HRF exclusively focuses its attention on the denial of civil and political rights. The legacy human rights community gets much of its profile and fundraising from attacks on democracies like the United States, whose openness ensures that there is never any shortage of good- and bad-faith internal criticism. HRF cares only about dictatorships, predatory governments, and authoritarian militant groups, none of which handle dissent all that well.

Has either approach—the elite self-seriousness and sanctimony of Big Human Rights, contrasted with the freewheeling and heterodox HRF—really accomplished much? The world of 2022 is a nightmare compared to that of five years ago, the last time I was in Oslo for the forum. The list of things that have gotten worse is long and sobering. Any remaining hope that the Twitter and Facebook-driven revolutions of the Arab Spring would usher in an era of freedom and democracy in the Middle East has evaporated. Bashar Assad and his Iranian allies slaughtered their

way to control over nearly all of Syria, Yemen became the site of an ever more violent and intractable proxy war, and even Tunisia devolved into a soft autocracy. The Taliban are back in power in Afghanistan; Nicholas Maduro held on in Venezuela, sending over 5 million of his subjects fleeing for their lives. Russia invaded Ukraine and became a full-on police state. Social media and the internet became an easy conduit for nearly any government in the world, democratic as well as autocratic, to track and manipulate just about anyone under their rule. China sent its Uyghur minority to concentration camps and dismantled democratic self-rule in Hong Kong, in defiance of international legal obligations, which of course counted for nothing in the end. The Chinese Communist Party might have created and accidentally leaked a pathogen that's killed some 20 million people, a disease that proved to be a once-in-a-century boon for unfreedom the world over, in Sydney as well as Shanghai. The autocrats have grown more confident and more dangerous as democracies' sense of weakness and drift settles into an indefinite and comfortable malaise.

"Speaking personally," said the exiled pro-democracy Hong Kong activist Glacier Kwong during her presentation on the final day of this year's forum, "the last year has been an incredibly dark period for me, beset by shadows and the torments of my own thoughts." She had seen an authoritarian regime destroy her society and jail her friends without suffering any consequences. "I'm sorry to say the international

community has not honored our sacrifices," said Kwong. She closed with a statement that, by virtue of its vagueness, might be the most realistic call to action possible in the face of the Chinese communist leviathan: "Honor the sacrifice Hong Kong has made for you."

None of the world's recent tragedies can be laid at the feet of HRF, and even HRW and Amnesty are relatively blameless. But in Oslo it was clear that the post-World War II human rights paradigm was crumbling under realities that are both current and also somehow premodern. Powerful bad people are defeating powerless good people, just as they have for millennia. Laws, values, and idealism are less immediately tangible than bullets and poison gas. Citizens of the major democracies have demanded their governments turn inward, such that from an American vantage point the atrocities of Aleppo or Xinjiang look like they're happening farther and farther away from us. The modern world's various channels of idealism—multilateral organizations, NGOs, democratic governments, technological innovators—are some combination of impotent, cravenly self-interested, or complicit in the broader decline.

When the rebels of the human rights world survey the wreckage, the most honest of them now see a landscape where victory isn't inevitable, old dreams have been replaced, former certainties no longer hold, and idealism's very survival requires a retreat into cold reality.

The forum opened on May 23rd at the Oslo Konserthus, a hulking concrete shed of Nordic modularity, with at least twice the capacity of the Oslo Nye Teater, where the event had been held in 2017. "The world has changed so much since we were last here three years ago," opened HRF President Celine Assaf Boustani, alluding to the COVID cancellations of the past two forums. The pandemic, war, and democratic decline all plagued humankind. "Each of these," she alleged to the roughly 1,000 people on hand, "is the result of authoritarians."

Halvorsen then spoke briefly. He wore red sneakers and an olive jacket without a tie. Halvorsen's youthful round face competes with the unblinking focus suggested in his sharp hairline. The 46-year-old has the intense self-possession of someone waging a lonely, longshot war against nothing less than evil itself. When I spoke with him later that day, he rattled off his family's history with the regime in Venezuela, the country of his birth: His father had been a political prisoner, his family's property was expropriated, his mother was shot by regime agents; his cousin Leopoldo Lopez, a leading opposition politician, spent seven years either in prison or under house arrest or holed up in the Spanish Embassy in Caracas. Halvorsen is the producer of *The Dissident*, a 2020 documentary about the murder of Jamal Khashoggi.

"More than half of humanity lives under the boot of authoritarianism,"

Halvorsen announced onstage. “We have to keep repeating that number.” Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine and various regimes’ desperate attempts to influence election outcomes and change minds proved that the mere existence of unfreedom was a danger to democratic societies. “If we don’t end dictatorships,” cautioned Halvorsen, “dictatorships will end us.”

HRF, and Halvorsen in particular, want their production to look good, marking another difference with more traditional human rights groups. The aesthetics in Oslo are not an afterthought; HRF aims for particular moments, images, and people to reach virality. The first striking image of the conference was of Evgenia Kara-Murza, wife of the imprisoned Russian democracy activist and former forum speaker Vladimir Kara-Murza, sitting on a spotlit high stool in a dour black jacket, facing the crowd in profile, reading a letter her husband had written to her from Moscow’s Fifth Pre-Trial Detention Facility. “The price of freedom is high,” Kara-Murza wrote, quoting his mentor, Boris Nemtsov, an anti-Putin figure murdered just outside the Kremlin walls in 2015. A fate more permanent than prison might be coming, Kara-Murza seemed to warn, lightly hinting at his own survival of two previous attempts to poison him. But, the jailed man continued, “I have no doubts and no regrets.”

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**Kara-Murza, we learned, had once said that the worst thing for a political prisoner is to be forgotten. At its best the forum was a three-day revolt against forgetting, even if it often had the unintended effect of reinforcing just how impotent memory can be.**

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During his talk, Omar Alshogre, director of detainee affairs for the Syrian Emergency Task Force, dramatically acted out his cousin’s death in his arms in an Assadist dungeon in Syria. In the midst of trying and failing to imagine what Alshogre’s ordeal must have actually been like, it dawned on me that most Syrians like him—genuine liberals with English fluency and a bravery that democratic citizens can scarcely comprehend, a courage that to us looks almost like suicide—had been killed or exiled over the past 11 years of war.

The exhortations continued throughout the week. "I ask you to keep Belarus on the agenda," pleaded one of the exiled leaders of that country's pro-democracy movement, whose husband languished in prison for the crime of heading an opposition political party. "Help us internally in Eritrea so that we don't have to choose between dictatorship and human trafficking," urged Filmon Debru, who endured unspeakable torture, and the mutilation of his hands, when Bedouins kidnapped him in the Sinai during his escape from the hyperstrict Eritrean dictatorship. "My father is not doing well," warned Carine Kanimba, adopted daughter of Paul Rusesabagina, the Hotel Rwanda hero now serving a 25-year prison sentence after being kidnapped to the country of his birth.

"Kazakhstan's disappeared from the headlines already," fretted one questioner during a panel discussion. Was it ever in the headlines? I thought. For someone who lives in Kazakhstan there might be few things more important than the state of political rights in that vast yet remote-seeming Central Asian country—remote to me, that is. Alas, the front pages, and the attention of the average democratic citizen, can only hold so much faraway suffering at once. One's reserves of attention and emotion are preciously limited. Time grows shorter with every passing second.

In the shadow of these hard and ever hardening realities, the forum could feel like a series of attempts to either salvage or bury leftover

and potentially discredited visions of human progress. The U.N.-led international system, said Ukrainian activist Oleksandra Matviichuk, was "in ruins like Mariupol," a cutting reference to the Black Sea city that the Russian invaders had recently destroyed. On the more optimistic end of the spectrum, Tawakkol Karman, the "mother of the revolution" in Yemen and a winner of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize, insisted that the chaos in her nearly destroyed country was not the fault of the protest movement that unseated the country's long-ruling dictator. There had been, Tawakkol insisted, "a successful national dialogue that brought all of Yemenis together ... We wrote a great constitution." Awesome as that document undoubtedly was, it proved no match for "the forces of the counterrevolution," namely the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, which had all sabotaged Yemen's future. She took no responsibility for the post-Arab Spring chaos, and said nothing about what her movement could have done differently or what democratic activists could learn from her revolution's failure. Karman's speech, and Yemen's plunge into chaos since the 2011 uprising, suggested a paradox that was uncomfortable to reflect upon at any gathering of political dissidents: A botched democratic revolution can ultimately turn out worse for human freedom than the regime it replaced.

Karman was, as she noted, a member of the Facebook and Instagram oversight boards, a merging of Big Tech and human rights activism

that also reflected the naivete of an earlier time. The tech giants had a conspicuous presence in Oslo: Twitter, Meta, and Jigsaw, which describes itself as “a unit within Google that explores threats to open societies,” each had displays and workshop rooms on the Konserthus’ ground floor. That these companies could themselves be threats to freedom, and that they are in an open and very often indecisive self-reckoning with the implications of their own vast power, are facts that are now too obvious to hide. “We can predict what the next conspiracy theory is going to be,” said Beth Goldberg, a research program manager at Jigsaw, during a panel discussion. “How do we boost people’s immunity?”

Google controls more information about more people than nearly any nonstate entity in history (I am typing this very article on a Chromebook, in Google Docs). The line between well-intentioned defense of the information space and a quasi-Orwellian campaign to manipulate hundreds of millions of minds in the service of a preferred corporate or political vision might be thinner than most people at Google or its peers seem to realize, even at this late stage. Goldberg spoke of “pre-bunking at the level of meta-narrative or a rhetorical technique” in response to future conspiracy theories, a form of subtle content manipulation that, she assures us, is “not even political. It’s way more cerebral.” To prevail against disinformation, she said, it was necessary to “tap into people’s deep-seated identities and beliefs.”



*Evgenia Kara-Murza | OSLO FREEDOM FORUM/  
JAN KHUR*

Scott Carpenter, Jigsaw’s director of policy, assured me that there’s nothing to worry about here, and inasmuch as there is something to worry about, Google worries about it too. “The first principle has to be, ‘do no harm,’” he said of the ideal anti-disinformation content regime. “There’s a lot of harm out there already, so you’re balancing harms.” A counterproductive way to balance harms, he said, would be for Google to act as chief censor and force users to adapt to its heavy hand. “We want to get beyond the idea that the only response you have is to take things down,” he said. When lies proliferate on Google’s platforms, there can perhaps be “speed bumps so there’s a little bit of friction. People can push through them if they want.”

A speed bump isn’t a wall or a force field. That’s pretty reassuring. But could any web giant advance freedom in any meaningful sense if it held so much unaccountable power? I noted to Carpenter that his employer probably had the ability to read my email, and to read over my article drafts at the moment I was writing them—although I caught myself and

admitted this is a power I continue to willingly give to Google. His reply pointed toward a fundamental dilemma of existence in the modern world, where people understand very little of the systems and technologies that allow them to live connected and relatively frictionless lives. "In the world in which we live," Carpenter said, "ultimately you have to trust someone. Over the years in working for Google, I find that, in my experience, the commitment to security and protection for our users is really, really high."

"Big Tech was never set up to be civil liberty-oriented," Thor Halvorssen explained to me at the end of an emotionally draining first day of programming. "They're set up to make money." We met in the M.C. Escher-like entanglement of interlocking passageways that formed the Konserthus' lower lobby as attendees filed out of the complex, catching a couple hours of decompression before dinner. Halvorssen is eminently capable of being funny but almost never laughs in public. He evinced no outward sense of accomplishment after a successful day of his organization's premier event. The scope of the work ahead of him was just too daunting, work that extended even to the tech firms that sponsored the forum. "Big Tech needs to have a thorough education in authoritarian government and what it means. So many Big Tech companies have unwittingly become the tools of dictatorships," he said. "Social media is not a place to share photos and opinions. It has become [like] weapons—their weapons."

Twitter, Google, and Meta were all here, I observed. In fact the companies' displays and seminar rooms were just down the hall. "Yes," he said, "they're not just here, they're actually supporters of the Human Rights Foundation, and they are sponsors of the Oslo Freedom Forum. And obviously I'm speaking honestly. We're grateful for their support. That does not mean that we are going to be oblivious and turn a blind eye to what these companies should do and are not doing."

The 30-minute interview was a barrage of righteous accusation. "The billionaire who runs Apple" should declare himself an agent of China under the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act, Halvorssen charged. Fusion GPS, compilers of the debunked Steele dossier, "has been a criminal enterprise" because of its work smearing human rights defenders on behalf of the Russian and Venezuelan regimes. "Now," he said, "we are a small conference that essentially stands in contrast to the world's largest gathering of dictators." Davos? I asked. No, Halvorssen corrected me: "The United Nations."

I came to Oslo wondering if HRF had succumbed to the usual corruption-by-inertia, and if the NGO industrial complex, Big Tech, and politically minded corporate donors had nudged it toward the institutional progressivism that is now the monoculture of the educated West, conquering by attrition until everything looks and sounds like an episode of *Pod Save America*, except duller. Halvorssen is a big

part of the reason this hadn't happened. The founder and CEO of HRF was out to please nobody; he made no pretense toward any self-interest and made no obvious concessions to institutionalism, even in the case of the organization he'd built over 16 years. Maybe this was just the appearance of edginess, a kind of madman theory of human rights activism in the service of fairly conventional aims.

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**Still, there was a plausible case for change that seemed to be organizing everything, one anchored in a certain realism about the sources of unfreedom and the difficulty of overcoming them.**

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"The world has been sliding in the wrong direction now for more than a decade," he explained. "That has everything to do with the West being compromised or the West being cowardly." Tech companies chased giant paydays in China; Tony Blair lived in a mansion paid for in part by a lobbying deal with the government of Kazakhstan. Held beside the flagrant corruption infecting the upper reaches of Western societies, human rights advocacy could be

something countercultural, a way of exposing a dishonest elite and a redoubt of honesty in a world of lies. But those claiming liberal democracy could bring paradise on Earth no longer sounded credible, and those who did often sound credible, like Halvorsen, knew better than to make any sweeping utopian claims.

What next, after utopia? Many of the liberating hopes of the 20th and 21st centuries have taken a pretty awful beating lately. The dream of de facto global governance under a multilateral liberal regime has proven delusional or worse. Only an ideologue still argues that freer markets automatically result in freer societies. These days, no one talks about the emancipatory potential of social media unless they work for a social media company. The internet might spread ideas and connect activists to one another, but it's also a means to surveil and manipulate people on an unprecedented scale, as well as a medium through which young children get hooked on Chinese government-owned spy apps and slightly older children get hooked on porn. By now we know that liberal democracy is a superior way to organize society while also being as potentially dangerous as most other messianic ideas.

The former modes of progress were premised on grand centralities, vast organizations standing for immutable universal truths and governed by virtuous administrators. Forget all that, the very large Bitcoin contingent at the forum seemed to say, and forget every other big idea

to fix all the world's problems—the administrators are mostly getting in the way of things. In Oslo, the Bitcoiners sought to progress beyond existing frameworks without anyone's help or permission.

The Bitcoiners were easy to spot: The guy in the Pikachu hat and the cartoon Bitcoin gold chain was a Bitcoiner, as was the guy in the Long Bitcoin sweater. The guy in the Bitcoin is Dead sweater offered a more complicated case. Both presenters who went on the main stage in face-shadowing baseball caps were Bitcoiners. The crypto folks were cliquish and tended to be oblivious to the business casual and formal dress codes, like they'd achieved some new level of being in which our rules no longer applied to them. I get it, I thought to myself: The old level of being, the one I'm stuck in, is terrible a lot of the time. In this terribleness lies the optimistic long-term case for Bitcoin, namely that it could serve as a platform for solving problems that have never been solved before, and thus has both the velocity and the permanence of any other unkillable idea.

"In Nigeria everyone is governing themselves," explained Bernard Parah, a 23-year-old from the Middle Belt city of Jos and the founder and CEO of a Bitcoin platform called Bitnob. "Even the government doesn't trust itself," a friend and fellow countryman chimed in from across our lunch table. In Nigeria, Parah explained, food prices were skyrocketing, and the national government's dysfunction had made the currency practically useless. Parah

knew a woman who was able to start a laundry business and pay her kids' school fees just from a bump in Bitcoin prices after 2020.

"If you can rationally explain something about Nigeria," Parah said, "you do not understand it." In many parts of the world, in places where the cruelest and most capricious actor is the state itself, Bitcoin can actually be a hedge against the irrational. "In the next few years, Bitcoin will be more common in Nigeria than anywhere else in the world," Parah promised.

Bitcoin, explained HRF Chief Strategy Officer Alex Gladstein during a main-stage presentation, is "an open and neutral new kind of currency," one that could sneak behind barriers to financial autonomy, evading the reach of autocrats who "relentlessly persecute their critics with the weapon of money."

"What makes Bitcoin so incredibly powerful is that no one controls it," said Elizabeth Stark, CEO of Lightning Labs during a panel discussion. "In Africa, banks are like a luxury brand," noted Fode Diop, the Senegalese founder of the Bitcoin Developers Academy, who during his time on the main stage recalled his family's savings being cut in half when the West African franc was devalued in the 2000s. "The future of banking is an Android device connected to the Bitcoin network itself," he predicted. Jack Mallers, the CEO of Strike, explained in a tone of blissed-out evenness that Bitcoin could "escrow value anywhere on the planet ... at the speed of light, across oceans ...

across regimes." It didn't matter that the digital currency was plunging in value at the time, as it periodically does. "This illustration works if Bitcoin's at \$10,000 or \$1,000."

"I'm a philosopher," said Reed College professor Troy Cross during a panel, remembering when he'd first learned about Bitcoin in the early 2010s. "I thought, this is one of the most beautiful ideas I've ever encountered."

The next day, Cross and I found ourselves seated in the same bank of couches. Since he is a philosopher enchanted with the idea of Bitcoin, he seemed like exactly the person to ask about the technology's potential dark side. Perhaps, I suggested, the people convinced that Bitcoin is the key to securing financial rights beyond the reach of autocrats and kleptocrats were repeating the mistake of early internet or social media enthusiasts high on the hypothetically democratizing power of a new technology. Cross, it turned out, wasn't a starry-eyed crypto dreamer, but an intellectually curious man—a lover of long walks in the Oregon woods, I imagined—who wanted to explore the implications of something that seemed genuinely revolutionary. "I bought two dozen pairs of socks for five Bitcoin each from an Alpaca farmer in New Hampshire in 2011," he recalled. "I thought it was probably gonna fail. Most of us did."

Over the following decade, Cross watched as the value of Bitcoin rose, as crypto turned from the realm of oddball hobbyists into a series of exotic financial products,

the true nature of which was poorly understood even among its biggest boosters. "It's not gonna improve humanity," Cross explained, referring to both the idea and the reality of an ungovernable global network for holding and transferring value. "It's not gonna make us better. It's a tool, like the internet. Even more than the internet, it's gonna be like electricity itself. Imagine saying electricity is aligned with a philosophical mission—it's a force of nature." By this interpretation, Bitcoin is a system beyond all systems, outside of anyone's real control, of a kind that would be built as soon as the technology existed. It would find its purpose, however beneficial or malign, once the old consolidating projects were exposed as inefficient or oppressive.

I realized that Bitcoin is useful to Nigerian peasants or Ukrainian defense militias or drug traffickers because it is in tension with the old and familiar human rights idea, which depended on state power, moral authority, and coercion. States, the source of fiat currency, appear less stable and less trustworthy; the forces of good are getting harder to identify, and outside pressure has very real limits when applied to oppressive governments. Bitcoin's "use cases," to borrow the 'coiner jargon, spring from a myriad of failures.

"It's not debt, it's not a unit of account, it's not a means of exchange, it's not a good store of value in the short term," Cross said of Bitcoin, meaning it fits none of the usual criteria to even be considered "money." Bitcoin was,

Cross explained, “part of nondeal political philosophy ... In a perfect world it’s not viable. Its value is in the imperfection of our world.”

Bitcoin is almost a banality, or maybe a futile last gasp at agency against the world’s wrongdoers, when held beside someone like Carine Kanimba, adopted daughter of Paul Rusesabagina, who Don Cheadle played in *Hotel Rwanda*. Rusesabagina’s continuing imprisonment in Rwanda seems an insult aimed at a specifically American view of human progress and of reality itself. If a beloved actor gets an Oscar nomination for playing you in a movie, a movie that millions of people saw and that became a sociopolitical event unto itself, then nothing bad can possibly happen to you, according to the American faith in the metaphysical grandeur of entertainment and fame. You are untouchable, and the power of popular culture has taken you beyond the realm of the merely human.



*Carine Kanimba | OSLO FREEDOM FORUM / JULIE HRNCIROVA*

In the case of the *Hotel Rwanda* rescuer, who saved the lives of 1,268 Tutsis and their sympathizers at the Mille Collines hotel in Kigali in the spring of 1994, it was force that mattered in the end. In September of 2020, Rusesabagina, a U.S. green card holder, was lured from his home in San Antonio, Texas, onto a private jet in Dubai, which he believed was taking him to a speaking engagement in Burundi. He was drugged onboard, and the plane landed in Kigali, Rwanda’s capital. The forum, with its presentations from family members of the dead and imprisoned, could be an unintended reminder of the pathetic limits of awareness-raising and the puny dimensions of thought. The Uyghurs remain in concentration camps and Assad still rules Syria, neither of which are particularly obscure facts these days. Rusesabagina was tortured and sentenced to 25 years in prison by the regime of Paul Kagame, a former darling of the international development human rights industrial complex—the harsh sentence being an especially flagrant attack on the idea that publicity can advance the work of human rights activists and protect them against harm.

As Kanimba explained when I interviewed her in Oslo, Rusesabagina is her uncle by marriage. Her parents were slaughtered in the opening days of the genocide; amid the chaos Rusesabagina made sure that Kanimba and her sister, both little older than toddlers at the time, were rescued from a displaced persons camp and taken to safety at the Mille Collines. She is now in her late 20s, a

poised and elegant spokeswoman for her father's cause and someone whose years living in Belgium and the United States mean she can plead his case on different continents and in multiple languages. She does not remember the genocide, or her biological parents. "I think they waited until we were 6 or 7 to tell us that we were adopted because as kids they didn't want to scare us," she said of Rusesabagina and his wife, Tatiana. "And so watching the movie, it was also a way for me to learn about my life, what our family went through. And it was a way for them to be able to explain it to us in a way that we could understand."

In a place like Kigali in the mid-'90s, a luxury hotel manager such as Rusesabagina was a person whose social and political clout went beyond his job title. He met Paul Kagame when he allowed the Mille Collines to be used for meetings of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, the Tutsi militia group that ended the genocide before transforming itself into one of the most durable and sophisticated dictatorships in Africa. As an ethnic Hutu, Rusesabagina was too admired by Tutsis as a hero to be safe under a leader as jealous of admiration as Kagame. "Also," Kanimba alleged, "they wanted to eliminate the influential Hutus," which described Rusesabagina.

Rusesabagina moved his family to Belgium after the civil war. Kagame's regime often sent representatives to ask him to return, dangling the prospect of high-level government employment. Rusesabagina realized

this was a ploy to either imprison him or win his public loyalty. Then came Hotel Rwanda, released in 2004, in time for the 10th anniversary of the genocide. Rusesabagina felt he was in too much danger to attend a special screening at the national stadium in Kigali. Tatiana went instead, and watched from the same box as Kagame. "He stood up afterward and noticed how people were crying and people were admiring my father in the stadium," Kanimba said of Kagame. Her adoptive mother had enough awareness of her country to know it was time to get out, more or less right that second. "She immediately left for the airport," Kanimba recalled.

The serious threats didn't begin until Rusesabagina's two visits to the White House of George W. Bush after the release of Hotel Rwanda, once to meet the president, and then again to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Over the years, Kagame's henchmen fabricated receipts connecting Rusesabagina to a rebel movement in the Congo and attempted to plant child pornography on his computer. The family moved to San Antonio, where Kanimba is certain Rwandan regime agents continued to surveil her father. Now in prison, Rusesabagina joins the annals of wartime heroes whose lives became haunted by their own heroism: Soviet agents murdered both Gareth Jones and Raoul Wallenberg, Oscar Schindler died poor, Varian Fry descended into alcoholism and obscurity and bitterness. One key difference in Rusesabagina's case is that the worst of his suffering

happened after he became a global symbol of human decency.

What does one even do in response to something like Rusesabagina's imprisonment, grim evidence of what dictators can achieve when they gamble—often correctly—that their public image, and reality itself, can be discarded and reconstructed at will? The question of how to shame, pressure, or remove dictators, which animates the forum and its work, can sometimes only be answered one murder or prison sentence at a time. Hopefully it will be answered through the work of people like Kanimba, too. When her father was kidnapped, Kanimba quit her job at a New York-based impact investing firm. The campaign for Rusesabagina's freedom has notched one significant policy win: In May, the U.S. government declared he was being "wrongly detained," notable given that Kagame-era Rwanda and the United States have had generally friendly relations. With the help of her sister, Kanimba began filing lawsuits wherever she could to prove their father's imprisonment was a state-sponsored hostage-taking. "I can send you the transcript of his torture and this kidnapping," she said, the bitter fruits of one such legal expedition. She knows that her father was kidnapped using a private jet leased from a Greek company for \$120,000. "We have the receipt," she explained, "and it's paid to the Office of the President."

When Rusesabagina arrived in Kigali, Kanimba told me, "they held him in solitary confinement." We were meeting in a modest dressing room behind the Konserthus stage. "I cannot imagine the pain that he felt because the room was smaller than this. The only lights that he had were between the door and the bottom."

For Kanimba, the question of moral action in the face of an immovable dictator isn't abstract—it's not some metaphorical needle to be threaded between the figurative gaps in something called "human nature," but an oppressive fact of existence filling every second of every day, aimed at destroying whomever it touches. The fight to change the mind of Paul Kagame hasn't destroyed Kanimba, though. It is her privilege, she believes, to be able to carry such an immense burden on her father's behalf, and perhaps on everyone else's behalf too. "Here's the thing," she said. "Both my biological parents were slaughtered with machetes. My life was spared for a reason. And I was adopted by Paul Rusesabagina for a reason, and I'm grateful to be alive and I'm grateful to be able to stand up for him today. And so I think this is why I was saved."

# *More Than Ever, We Need a General Assembly for Dissidents*

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Outlet  
*Op-Ed*  
**NY Daily News**

Authors  
**Thor Halvorsen**  
CEO  
**Céline Boustani**  
President

Date  
**Sep 23, 2022**

*President Joe Biden addresses the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly, Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2022, at U.N. headquarters. (Julia Nikhinson/AP)*



This week, the heads of state of almost every nation on earth made their way to midtown Manhattan for the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly – the closest thing the global village has to a campfire.

You don't need to be an expert on international human rights to know that this is hardly a reason for celebration: From Russia to China, from Belarus to North Korea, from Somalia to Sudan, from Saudi Arabia to Cuba, freedom everywhere is imperiled, and tyranny is on the rise. According to the latest research of our organization, the Human Rights Foundation, [54% of the world's population lives under authoritarianism](#), meaning that more than half of all humans on earth now live in nations where basic human rights are denied.

How must we respond?

We ought to begin by acknowledging the problem. It is more vast than we may assume. Too often, we focus our attention on Xi Jinping, or Vladimir Putin, or any of the despots responsible for some of the worst abuses. We do so because we're a species that understands itself through telling stories, and most good stories need a villain.

It's far more complicated – and, in a way, far scarier – to acknowledge that these bad actors aren't the malady, but its symptoms. What we're dealing with here is a pandemic of "un-freedom," a dangerous disease that mutates from nation to nation yet leads to the same morbid outcome: the slow death of democracy across much of the globe.

What to do? Again, sheer logic dictates two urgent steps. First, we must get together and assess the myriad conditions – some deeply intricate and others much more obvious, some country-specific and others universally applicable – that allow illiberalism and oppression to fester and perpetuate themselves.

Second, we would do well to put all those who share the fight for freedom in the same room, creating a General Assembly for dissidents and allowing disparate activists to come together, compare notes, and understand that their struggle is the same. This is especially necessary since "activist" is too broad a term, referring both to seasoned players on the world stage, like chess master and Putin critic

Garry Kasparov, and to courageous newcomers like Fatou Jallow, a Gambian rape survivor turned advocate in the fight to curb violence against women in her country.

We need multiple platforms for these diverse warriors of the light to congregate – and HRF is grateful to have the opportunity to continue its legacy and have the Oslo Freedom Forum serve as one such platform on Oct. 3 in New York. But just huddling together at a Manhattan event, no matter how moving, isn't going to get us any closer to improving the world's dismal freedom score. To do so, we need three groups of stakeholders to do three distinct and crucial things.

First, and easiest, are governments. As we approach the midterm elections in the United States, we need to ensure American commitment to assiduously and diligently fight human rights abuses wherever they occur remains an unassailably bipartisan issue and one that is engaged in with consistency.

Crucially, it is up to journalists and authors to continue to shine a light on those who suffer, a task that grows more deadly each day. This summer, the NYPD arrested a man, later deemed an agent of Iran, who was allegedly planning to assassinate Iranian-American author and journalist Masih Alinejad, who frequently reports on human rights abuses in her native country.

The assassination attempt is a jarring reminder that not even the great city of New York is safe for

those who stand up to the enemies of freedom. Liberal democracies should ensure that tyrannies like Iran and Russia cannot send agents into free countries to kill activists. There must be consequences. If dissidents cannot feel safe inside their homes in a free country, we will see a chilling effect that could have measurable repercussions on the willingness of journalists and authors to carry out their valuable work.

Finally, however, the global fight against tyranny will not achieve much unless we all commit to playing a part, however small, in its battles. The overwhelming prevalence of oppression is an invitation – if one was needed – to think of ourselves not as passive consumers of information and goods but as global citizens, beholden to each other and dedicated to confronting those who, by challenging freedom somewhere, threaten it everywhere.

Choosing to read and stay informed about conflicts that occur far from the usual spotlights of the media, donating to organizations that support activists and dissidents, raising funds, and petitioning elected officials – there's a lot we can do, even from halfway across the world, to help make a real difference.

As too many tyrants have ambled into Midtown, let us head in the opposite direction and join in the fight to keep the world safe and free.

# *What the Nobel Peace Prize-Winning Ukrainian Human Rights Group Wants From the West*

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Outlet  
**TIME**

Author  
**David Andelman**

Date  
**Oct 7, 2022**

Oleksandra Matviichuk heads Ukraine's Center for Civil Liberties, which was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday along with [Memorial](#), the largest human rights organization in Russia, and [Ales Bialiatski](#), a democracy and human rights advocate in Belarus.

Founded in 2007 to strengthen civil society and democracy in Ukraine, the [Center for Civil Liberties](#) has this year focused on investigating and documenting [war crimes](#) against the country's civilian population by the Russian military following its invasion. The Nobel Committee, in handing its highest award to human rights activists in neighboring countries, [cited](#) "their consistent efforts in favour of humanist values, anti-militarism and principles of law."

I spoke with Matviichuk on Sept. 30 as she prepared to travel to New York for the Oslo Freedom Forum, which [convened](#) leading human rights activists from around the world five days before the Nobel was announced.

**Andelman: How has human rights changed since the first Oslo Freedom Forum more than a decade ago?**

**Matviichuk:** I can say that in parts of the region, of my region, we see how the negative trends of international law become more and more visible. And Ukraine is maybe the only state in our part of the world which in all these ten years has been trying to counteract this negative trend.

What do I mean? Eight years ago, Ukrainians started a revolution of dignity. They struggled for their right of democratic choice—just for the chance to build a country where the rights of everybody are protected, the judiciary is independent, government is accountable, and police do not beat peaceful student demonstrations. And Ukrainians paid a high price for this revolution of dignity. You know that police broke up peaceful student demonstrations in the main square of our capital. And then when Ukraine received a chance to provide a real democratic transformation, after the collapse of the Soviet Union regime, in order to stop us Russia started the occupation of Crimea and underground work in the Donbass, which resulted in the occupation of parts of the Lugansk and Donetsk regions.

This is the crucial point. Because in our region, Russia tried to dictate a trend of authoritarianism. And many people in the world think that this work by Russia started in February 2022 but the truth is this war started in February 2014. And the real reason is not that Putin is afraid of NATO—however he might try to describe his actions this year. The truth is that Putin is afraid of the idea of freedom. And all these past eight years, Ukrainians, have been trying to counteract this negative trend of authoritarianism in different countries, which we see in Russia, in Belarus in Kazakhstan, in Tajikistan, in Poland, in Hungary.

In parallel with defending our country and our people, in this war with Russia we try to provide democratic reforms. And I would point to the Chatham House report which said that in the four or five first years after the collapse of its authoritarian regime, Ukraine made much better, more positive impact developing democratic reform in the country than in the previous 20 years before.

**What kind of organization should we have in place, that can react more effectively than the UN to solve problems of the sort being unleashed by Russia?**

We are in the forefront of the battle between autocracy and democracy in this world. We are fighting for our right to have a democratic choice.

And Putin? This work has not only a military but a value dimension. That's why it's not only the war between two states. It's a war between two systems—authoritarianism and democracy. And Putin in his work is trying to convince Ukrainians and the whole world that our values—like democracy, rule of law, freedom of human rights—are artificial, are fake values. Because he tried to convince people, if they are real why couldn't they protect you during this war? He's tried to show that the whole UN system is unable to release even one single person from captivity, and this leads to a severe situation for myself as a human rights lawyer who has experience of 20 years defending human rights and freedom.

*We are in the  
forefront of the  
battle between  
autocracy and  
democracy in this  
world. We are  
fighting for our  
right to have a  
democratic choice.*

*- Oleksandra Matviichuk*

*Ukrainian activist Oleksandra Matviichuk holds a sign which translates to "For Your and Our Freedom" as she protests in front of the Russian Embassy in Kyiv, Ukraine, on September 5, 2019. (Photo by Sergii Kharchenko/NurPhoto via Getty Images)*

A woman with dark hair, wearing a white dress with vertical stripes in black, olive green, and gold, stands in front of a black metal gate. She is holding a white rectangular sign with both hands. The sign has the text 'ЗА НАШУ І ВАШУ СВОБОДУ' written in bold, black, uppercase Cyrillic letters. She is also wearing a multi-strand necklace of dark beads and small earrings. The background is slightly out of focus, showing more of the gate and some foliage.

**ЗА НАШУ  
І ВАШУ  
СВОБОДУ**

Now, for the question, how can you help Ukraine? The answer: please provide Ukraine with weapons. But this is [still] not a world which is safe to live in. When a human rights lawyer can't use any legal instrument to defend people from Russian atrocities, this is a very dangerous world to live in. I totally believe that this period is temporal, and we have to make several important goals on the level of the international community because these problems cross international borders.

First, we need to reform international organizations because the whole architecture of international peace and security were laid in ruins by these Russian activities. Because the whole UN is incapable of doing anything with Russia as a permanent member state. And when the General Secretary of the UN was in Kyiv, a Russian rocket hit Kyiv and killed a journalist of Radio Liberty on that same day.

Second, we need to show justice for people. We have to create an international tribunal for war crimes against humanity and genocide and hold Russian perpetrators accountable. It's important, not only for Ukraine, but for many nations in the world. Russia committed war crimes in Chechnya, even in Syria, in Mali, in Libya, in other countries of the world. Authoritarian leaders of other countries are inspired by this example. They start to think, yes, we can do whatever we want because there is no tool to push us to be in line with human rights. This is our task.

### **What can international human rights organizations do to help you in this task?**

I have been documenting war crimes for eight years. After the large-scale Russian invasion we united with several dozen regional organizations. And working together for seven months, we have documented more than 19,000 episodes of war crimes. It's different types of war crime. It's deliberate shelling of residential buildings, churches, hospitals, schools. It's attacks against evacuation corridors. It's murders, torture, sexual violence and abductions of civilians in occupied territories.

And the question I asked myself is, for whom are we documenting all this? Because we are not historians. We don't do it for national archives. We want to see Putin, those surrounding him, and Russian perpetrators who committed these crimes by their own hands held accountable.

### **Do you really see Putin jailed by the International Court of Justice? I mean, that's fairly unrealistic, right?**

This is a problem which I see as a lawyer—the gap of impunity—which Ukrainian people face, which Syrian people faced before us, people in other countries face. What do I mean? When national systems don't want to prosecute or are not capable, because now the Ukrainian system wants to prosecute but is not capable. We have enormous amounts of war crimes, and the best prosecutor's office in world could not effectively

investigate 2,000 criminal proceedings which we have at our current moment. But the international system will provide an effective response because the court of justice is not about criminal responsibility. It's another type of court. The only court which can bring people to individual responsibility is the International Criminal Court. The problem with the International Criminal Court? The ICC limits itself only to several selected cases.

And this is a question: who will provide justice for hundreds of thousands of victims of war crimes? And this is a question that interests not only Ukrainian people but all people.

**At the Nuremberg trials, they convened a special court just for war crimes in the Second World War. Perhaps that's something that really needs to be considered here?**

We have to. We must move further with Ukraine. What do I mean? When we speak about the Nuremberg trials, it was an essential step in the past century to bring justice—but only after the Nazi regime had collapsed. Now we are in a new century and must make an additional historical step. We must bring justice regardless of whether a regime stays stable. Justice must not be dependent on the existence of the Putin regime. And that's why we cannot, we must not wait.

**How effective do you think the OSCE (Organization for the Security and Co-operation in Europe) has been?**

After the Russian invasion, I was invited

to open a special international event for the civil society of Ukraine. I said that the OSCE failed in its mandate to preserve security in our region. And this is a time for a broader conversation for several reasons which I named in my speech. The first reason is that human rights, when separated from the security issue and economic issues, became like something secondary. The main political decisions were based not on human rights values. Even in this extreme situation, human rights has the same importance as security and economics. And states that violate systematically human rights for years pose threats for the whole region.

I was told that human rights wasn't central and not present in the rooms where decisions were taking place. But now we have the voice of armies exactly because the voice of civil society wasn't heard properly.

**Putin has just made his declaration annexing the four eastern regions of Ukraine...and now the US is imposing more sanctions.**

He annexed these regions. He signed the document joining these oblasts of Ukraine to the territory of Russia, and he proclaimed that now they are Russia. In response our president replied that Ukraine will apply for urgent membership in NATO.

We live in very dramatic times, and political leaders of the world have to take historical responsibility because for decades, I've seen that political leaders behave like they believe the problems we face will vanish. But the truth is that these problems will not

vanish. They have to take responsibility and to solve these problems for the next generation and not think only about the electoral period or the future of their own parties.

First of all, they have to restore the whole international system of peace and security and make the international mechanism of human rights effective. It is their responsibility for the whole world. Ukraine is only one of the examples of a global problem, and this disease manifests itself globally. Russian war is a disease.

Second, we live in a very interconnected world and only spreading freedom can make our world safer. And if political leaders will not take this historical responsibility, people can take this historical responsibility.

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**All of my experience as a human rights defender has showed me that ordinary people have much greater impact than they can even imagine. And massive mobilization of ordinary people around the world can change the world's history much more quickly than any UN intervention.**

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# BROADCAST AND TELEVISION

HRF's work is consistently featured in top media outlets around the world. Besides print and online formats, HRF regularly makes appearances on television, the radio, and podcasts. Here's a snapshot:



**Garry Kasparov: “Putin is playing poker. He’s bluffing.”**

*Author*  
Ali Velshi

*Date*  
Jan 29, 2022



**How crypto could change the way organizations provide humanitarian aid**

*Author*  
Tanaya Macheel  
& Darren Geeter

*Date*  
Mar 1, 2022



## Outspoken Putin critic Garry Kasparov says Ukraine is just Putin's first step

Author  
Scott Simon

Date  
Apr 30, 2022



## Human Rights groups calling out FIFA for applying a double standard with how it applies sport sanctions

Author  
Stephen Quinn

Date  
Mar 9, 2022



## Dagsrevyen

Author  
NRK

Date  
May 25, 2022



## Connect the World

Author  
Ali Velshi

Date  
Jan 29, 2022



## Chinese artist Badiucao: Drawing truth to power - 60 Minutes

Author  
John Wertheim

Date  
Jul 31, 2022



## The Human Rights Foundation and Justice in Syria

Author  
Commonwealth Club of California

Date  
Jul 27, 2022

