

Media

Highlights 2023 Q3

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 quarter.

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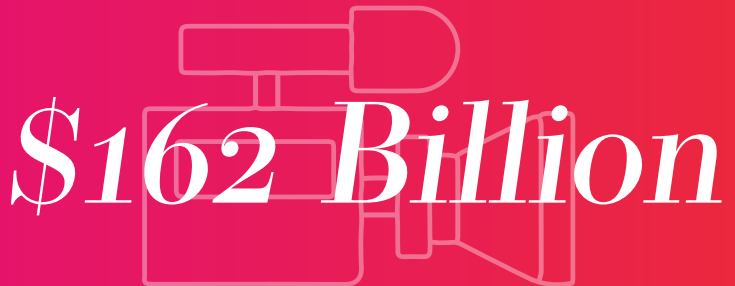
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The ‘manual of repression’ shared by modern tyrants

Outlet
El País

Author
Patricia R. Blanco

Date
July 20, 2023

Practices such as arbitrary detention, torture, or the use of artificial intelligence to control dissidents are common in most authoritarian regimes, according to activists gathered at the Oslo Freedom Forum.



From left to right, Russian President Vladimir Putin; the president of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro; the president of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega; and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Tyrants learn from each other, share information, and observe the tactics of repression used by the world’s dictators and autocrats to reproduce in their own countries. Arbitrary arrests of dissidents, torture in prisons, attacks on activists’ family members, or the use of artificial intelligence to control the population are repeated almost systematically in most authoritarian regimes. “From Egypt and Iran to Russia and Venezuela, dictators copy and cooperate with each other,” warns Iranian journalist and dissident Masih Alinejad. Her denunciation coincides with the account of the dozens of defenders of human rights gathered last June at the [Oslo Freedom Forum](#), the activ-

ist convention organized every year by the [Human Rights Foundation \(HRF\)](#). Their testimonies make up what could be considered a guide to the actions of modern dictators and autocrats, a set of traditional forms of repression reinforced by the options offered by new technology and the constant concern over their public image.

Arbitrary arrests

The arbitrary detention of activists, journalists, or opponents without legitimate reasons or without due process is “a fundamental weapon of autocratic regimes,” says Félix Maradiaga. He is one of the 200 Nicaraguan political prisoners whom [Daniel Ortega’s regime banished to the United States last February](#) after depriving them of their nationality. “They know that by arresting dissidents they divert attention from political movements, which are forced to pause for a while and stop talking about reforms in education and health or addressing issues such as corruption,” he continues. His own experience is proof: after announcing his pre-candidacy for the presidency of the country in 2021, he was arrested on charges of “treason” and spent “611 agonizing days in one of the most atrocious maximum-security prisons in Latin America.”

The aim of these arrests, according to Venezuelan journalist Victor Navarro, is to spread terror. “Autocratic regimes feed on fear and are strengthened by silence,” he summarizes. He too was detained “arbitrarily.” “I worked in social reintegration, but in Venezuela offering

opportunities can be considered a crime,” says the activist, who was accused of “treason” and “terrorism.” “About 35 police officers broke down the door of my house,” he recalls. He was locked up for five months.

Uighur Gulbahar Haitiwaji, on the other hand, had “never been involved” in political or social activities. But Xi Jinping’s regime found her guilty of “disloyalty to the Chinese government,” as part of [Beijing’s crackdown on members of the Muslim minority](#) – some 11.6 million people – in the Xinjiang autonomous region. “I lived in France with my husband and daughters and, following a call from my former employer, I planned a two-week return trip [to Xinjiang]... I had no idea what was waiting for me there,” recalls the woman, who spent three years in so-called “re-education centers,” internment camps where Beijing exercises its crackdown on Uighurs.

Torture

[Beatings, rape and inhuman and degrading treatment](#) are a constant in the testimony of those who have been arrested for political reasons. “In prison I suffered things that I am not yet prepared to talk about in public,” says Nicaraguan Maradiaga.

[Torture](#) is first and foremost an attempt at “dehumanization,” Navarro says. “I was number 25510806,” the code he was assigned after entering Venezuela’s Helicoide prison. The aggressions, he reveals, were continuous. “They wouldn’t let me sleep; I heard another prisoner being suffocated, the sound of rape...,”



Nicaraguan opponent Félix Maradiaga, during his speech at the Oslo Freedom Forum on June 13.



Gulbahar Haitiwaji, at the Oslo Freedom Forum, on June 13.

recalls the activist, who says he went 129 days without seeing sunlight.

A red bracelet on Haitiwaji's ankle reminds her that she survived torture in Xinjiang detention centers. The officers squeezed her shackles so tightly that they made her bleed. And in the midst of the pain, she says she whispered: "My poor ankle, you have suffered so much for me, if I ever manage to leave this place I promise that I will adorn you with a beautiful chain." It was one of the many times the woman was interrogated in one of the so-called "tiger chairs": "They put a black hood on us, handcuffed our hands and ankles." But those were not the only times she was tortured: "I was chained to a bed for 20 days and the humiliation I felt was unbearable. I struggled for 10 days not to relieve myself in front of them. In the end, with a very strong pain in my stomach, I relieved myself in tears."

The one who cannot recount the torture he suffered is Alaa Abd El-Fattah. This blogger and intellectual symbol of the Egyptian opposition has been imprisoned for almost four years after being convicted in an express trial for

allegedly spreading false information on social networks. But one of his sisters, Sanaa Seif, speaks on his behalf and says that the situation is so terrible that her brother had even thought about suicide: "He said that his life was unbearable, because the worst thing was not torture, but that they deprived him of everything that gave meaning to his life, such as sunlight, music, and books... He said he lived like an animal.

Attacks on family members

In their strategy of spreading terror, dictators and autocrats strive to show that a dissident's activism puts their family at risk. This is what happened to Haitiwaji. "They questioned me about my life in France, they showed me a photograph of my daughter covering herself with an East Turkestan flag [symbol of the Uighur independence movement] during a protest," recalls the woman, who ended up signing a confession in which she declared that she had "gathered people to disturb the social order."

Sanaa Seif did end up in prison three times for demanding her brother's freedom. Aware of the pain that the detention of a loved one inflicts on families, she recounts how she combed her hair and put on make-up to try to look her best during the 20-minute visit with her mother or sister that the authorities allowed her once a month.

Beyond the arrest itself, the [psychological damage caused to families by the detention of a family member is very profound](#). "When they arrested



Gulbahar Haitiwaji, at the Oslo Freedom Forum, on June 13.

me, my mom was told to look for me at the morgue," Navarro laments. Sharing a similar anguish is Evgenia Kara-Murza, wife of Russian journalist and President Putin's political opponent Vladimir Kara-Murza, who was sentenced to 25 years in prison for high treason because "his voice was a danger to Putin's regime." "The pain of having someone you love in prison is immense," she says.

Kleptocrat practices

"It happens in Sudan, in Yemen, in Russia, in China, in Iran... They are kleptocrat regimes," says Casey Michel, HRF's program director against systems of governance that prioritize the enrichment of the rich at the expense of the public interest. [Kleptocracy](#) is, according to Casey, one of the hallmarks of authoritarian systems, but warns that it is "a transnational phenomenon." "Autocracies and dictatorships use the financial secrecy of places like Delaware [United States] to take money out of their country, whether it's Equatorial Guinea or Angola, and enjoy it wherever they want," he complains.

This is well known to activist Ketakan-driana Rafitson, the only judge in Madagascar who has resigned due to interference in justice, has spent her entire life dedicated to the fight against corruption. "This is the source of extreme poverty in my country," she stresses, a state in which 75% of the population lives on less than \$2 a day. "Successive leaders chose corruption as a way to govern the country," she laments. And, as an example, she gives a figure that she considers unaffordable: "In 2013, one of the candidates for the presidential elections spent \$43 million (€38.3 million) on a single campaign, in a country where people go hungry." "If 36 candidates participated in the 2018 elections, how much money was wasted?" she asks.

The big mistake, according to Thor Halvorsen, founder of HRF, is "to believe that there are different dictatorships, right and left, socialist and capitalist, when the reality is that it is a question of good and evil," he states. This classification, "whose objective is to divide people," leads one to think, according to Halvorsen, that [Venezuela's](#) regime is, for example, socialist. "But it's not, because everyone in power is a millionaire or a billionaire," he says.

The care of the international image

Asma al-Assad, the wife of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, held a video call last March with Sham Sheikh Mohammed, a nine-year-old Syrian girl who survived the earthquakes that struck Turkey and Syria on February 6, while she was receiving treatment in a hospital in Abu Dhabi.



Abdulrahman Almadawwas, speaking at the Oslo Freedom Forum. The background screen shows the girl Sham Sheikh, while she was trapped in the rubble of her home (left) and an image of the video call she had with Asma al-Assad.

"She was trapped for more than 40 hours," says Syrian activist Abdulrahman Almadawwas, co-founder of the White Helmets, the Syrian volunteer organization specializing in rescues. The hurtful thing about that call is that the girl Assad phoned lived "in northern Syria, [an area that has been attacked and bombed by Damascus for the last 10 years](#)," explains Almadawwas, who also criticizes how dictators try to "clean up their crimes before international public opinion."

But the most recent illustrative example of how authoritarian regimes try to whitewash their image is, for Sanaa Seif, the celebration of the United Nations Climate Summit in the Egyptian town of Sharm el Sheikh in November of last year. "Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's regime didn't want the stories of political prisoners to spread, so I took the risk of flying there," she said. Her brother was on hunger strike at the time to demand improvements in his detention conditions. "Climate activists from all over the world

chanted the name of Alaa and [British Prime Minister] Rishi Sunak, [German Chancellor] Olaf Scholz and [French President] Emmanuel Macron called for his release," she recalls. Her brother's prison conditions suddenly improved.

The use of new technology

Rwandan activist Carine Kanimba's mobile phone was infected with [Pegasus spy software](#). The young woman, daughter of Rwandan opponent Paul Rusesabagina, the famous former manager of the Hotel Mille Collines – which Hollywood immortalized in the film *Hotel Rwanda* – has been protesting since 2020 that her father was kidnapped from his home in San Antonio (Texas) and taken to Rwanda, where he was convicted of terrorism and sentenced to 25 years in prison. Resesabagina, an opponent of President Paul Kagame, "would never have traveled" to the African country, says his daughter, who with the help of several orga-

nizations says she discovered that the Rwandan government had been "tracking the whole family."

"All dictatorships do the same things, although they seem to be very different; for example, now they have started using artificial intelligence and facial recognition cameras," explains Serbian activist Srdja Popovic, promoter of the student mobilizations that precipitated the fall of former Serbian dictator Slobodan Misolevic, and current director of the Center for the Application of Nonviolent Actions and Strategies (CANVAS). So it was for Haitiwaji. "When they arrested me, they took blood samples, scanned my face and irises and recorded a sample of my voice," she says.

And dictators share these systems, warns Nathan Law, one of the leaders of Hong Kong's so-called umbrella revolution. "China has taken advantage of the preoccupation of the narrative that prioritizes security over freedom and sells technology that serves to identify people," warns the young man, currently exiled in London. This software, remember, has only one purpose: to suppress protests and ensure the survival of the regime.

Grassroots organizations must provide humanitarian aid in Ukraine

U.N., large NGOs aren't cutting it.

Outlet
Op-Ed
Washington Times

Author
Elle Ota,
Program Officer

Date
Aug. 21, 2023



Grassroots Humanitarian Aid for Ukraine Illustration by Greg Groesch/The Washington Times

The town of [Chasiv Yar](#) is 3 miles from Bakhmut, the front-line city where Ukrainians are slowly repelling the invading [Russian army](#). [Chasiv Yar](#) once had a population of over 10,000. Today, virtually every building has been hit by artillery or missiles. Rooftops are caved in, and exteriors are charred. There's no running water, no electricity.

Even more unsettling than the constant sound of artillery is that civilians are still living here and all along the front lines in towns and villages like it. Many are older adults who refuse to leave – they say if they could survive Stalin, they can survive this – but some are younger and have no option.

Last month, I visited [Chasiv Yar](#) and five other villages along the front lines in the Donetsk region with Renegade Relief Runners. The Ukraine-based 501(c)3 organization, known as 3xR, is focusing on delivering aid to isolated vil-

lages cut off from the main humanitarian corridors.

World Humanitarian Day is designed to reinvigorate the news of humanitarian crises worldwide, including the war in [Ukraine](#), where Russian dictator Vladimir Putin and his army frequently target civilians, bomb schools and hospitals, and use land mines to terrorize the local population.

But there's a fundamental problem with how the international community thinks about humanitarian aid, which then affects the organizations we choose to support. What has become overwhelmingly clear is that we need to start prioritizing grassroots organizations and civil society over the United Nations and other large international organizations.

Even a year and a half into the invasion, 3xR still finds villages that have yet to receive humanitarian aid.

Part of the problem is that large international nongovernmental organizations and the U.N. often focus on urban centers over these more isolated, high-risk places. These villages are too near the front line, and the [Russian army](#) likes to target humanitarian aid missions.

After the Russians destroyed the Kakhovka Dam and flooded the city of Kherson, displacing thousands of people, Russia targeted aid workers to dissuade them from coming. Volunteer aid workers told me that in the weeks following the attack, it was more dangerous to be an aid worker than it was to be a soldier.

Many of these villages are also quite isolated. They're far from major cities, and the eastern and southern regions of [Ukraine](#) are now heavily mined. Roughly 174,000 square kilometers are contaminated by land mines — more than any country in the world — and will take decades to clear.

It can be dangerous for residents to travel to neighboring towns. Even if they wanted to leave, many villagers have no means of transportation because the [Russian army](#) stole their cars. One man who lived under Russian occupation told me the soldiers would run over civilians' cars with tanks when they got bored.

The ones that are most equipped to deliver aid to villages near the front lines are local, [Ukraine](#)-based organizations that are familiar with the terrain, as well as specific community needs.

Despite the significantly increased risks these groups face, they receive an unimaginably small fraction of humanitarian funding. Seventy-one percent of international humanitarian funds go to the U.N., and 16% go to the Red Cross and other international NGOs.

The Ukrainian groups doing the most intrepid work receive 0.0003% of funding.

The U.N. reallocates some of this money to local NGOs in [Ukraine](#), but it also does what it does best: It raises bureaucratic hurdles in terms of transparency and reporting that smaller organizations simply can't overcome.

We need to start prioritizing grassroots organizations and civil society over the United Nations and other large international organizations.

As a result, the funding continues to circulate among larger organizations that may be doing good work but have limits on where they can go.

The smaller, Ukrainian-based organizations end up scouring [Ukraine](#) and nearby Poland for supplies. Many rely on the generosity of friends and neighbors, and word-of-mouth from supporters. Some dip into their personal savings.

Renegade Relief Runners' mascot is a raccoon armed with a paper towel roll and a trash can lid.

"We're like raccoons when it comes to humanitarian aid," co-founder Julia Abratanska tells me. "We'll take any leftover supplies we come across, and find people who desperately need them."

3xR and many local groups it works with are determined not to let anything go to waste — especially when they have witnessed firsthand so many villagers near the front lines with nothing. I observed shouting matches over soap and other necessities because there were not

enough supplies to go around. Ms. Abratanska and 3xR deliver most supplies within a week of receiving them due to high demand.

Meanwhile, medical supplies and food kits amass, untouched, in warehouses across Europe. This discrepancy has fostered cynicism and burnout.

This is why it's imperative that we support civil society. Local humanitarian groups, advocates, journalists — these are the people risking their lives to ensure human dignity in [Ukraine](#) and protect the country's democratic future.

Oleksandr Leonidovych Duka, founder of the humanitarian aid group Here & Now, survived the occupation of Borodyanka in March 2022 with his wife and young daughter. He risked his life shuttling food, water and medicine to his neighbors, despite the deliberate killing of humanitarian aid workers by Russian soldiers. Now, he does the same for villagers on the front lines.

"Even before the start of full-scale war, I understood that it was up to each of us," Mr. Duka told me. "I founded a small movement of like-minded people who are fruitfully working for our victory. Right now, the main thing is to survive and help others to survive, to defeat the [Russian army](#), and then continue to build a free and strong, and most importantly, independent [Ukraine!](#)"

Elle Ota is program officer for the Human Rights Foundation.

Google Axes Bad Reviews of Tracker Exposing Uyghur Forced Labor

Outlet
Bloomberg

Authors
Margi Murphy

Date
Aug. 24, 2023



Google offices in Dublin, Ireland. Photographer: Paulo Nunes dos Santos/Bloomberg

[Alphabet Inc.](#)'s Google has removed hundreds of negative reviews for a tracker that identifies apparel brands linked to forced Uyghur labor after its creator said the reviews were part of a disinformation campaign.

The Human Rights Foundation's [Uyghur Forced Labor Checker](#) had been experiencing a spate of unusual activity in recent months, with the number of downloads fluctuating dramatically, according to Claudia Bennett, the nonprofit's legal and program officer. The tool, a Google Chrome extension, alerts internet users if a retailer or business whose website they are visiting has links to forced [Uyghur](#) labor.

Human Rights Foundation [won a Webby](#) People's Voice award in public service and activism in 2022. In May,

the organization's legal department alerted Google to a barrage of one-star ratings, which they suspected were part of a computer bot attack. The reviews in question came from accounts using similar cartoon avatars as profile pictures, had nonsensical first and last names, and spoke in broken English, according to screenshots seen by Bloomberg News.

"Malicious slander," one of the reviews stated. "Leakage of privacy," claimed another. A third said, "Isn't it too boring."

A Google spokesperson said the company carefully monitors the Chrome Web Store and removes reviews that violate its policies, including those removed from the Uyghur Forced Labor Checker. It wasn't clear who was behind the negative reviews.

The US has accused China of forcing Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region to work under [what officials have described](#) as a broader campaign of genocide.

Bitcoin And Human Rights: A Common Ground For Activists Worldwide

Outlet
Forbes

Authors
Javier Bastardo

Date
Aug. 30, 2023



MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA - MAY 19: Alex Gladstein speaks on stage during Bitcoin Conference 2023 at Miami Beach Convention Center on May 19, 2023 in Miami Beach, Florida. (Photo by Jason Koerner/Getty Images for Bitcoin Magazine)

Human rights activism is one of the most dangerous and necessary ways of building political movements worldwide. Still, these activists face incredible persecution by their local governments, sometimes leading to financial exclusion or worse. Activists could improve their actions and agendas through Bitcoin and cryptocurrencies, due to its decentralized nature.

There are some cases of people using Bitcoin to resist authoritarian regime persecution. And an international organization is trying to gather all these efforts and teach more activists how to improve their activities and resistance through decentralized technologies.

[The Human Rights Foundation](#) is a nonprofit organization that promotes and protects human rights globally, founded in 2005 by Venezuelan human rights advocate Thor Halvorssen Mendoza. It has been openly promoting and working around Bitcoin since 2013, when it helped a group of Ukrainian activists understand how to use bitcoin for their financial goals.

"We started receiving bitcoin donations in 2014, and it's something that I continue to see pop up in the human rights field over the next few years. In 2017, we started actually having a Bitcoin Human Rights Foundation program. Then three years later, we launched the Bitcoin Development Fund, which gives money for open source projects focusing on Bitcoin", HRF Chief Strategy Officer Alex Gladstein told me in an interview.

For Gladstein, the link between bitcoin and human rights activism is clear: You need a way to keep your activities alive, even if your local government doesn't want them.

"If you are a human rights activist, you need a way to receive donations and make payroll and pay people without the government being able to stop that. That's extremely important. This idea of decentralized

ensorship-resistant money is very important if you want to do stuff that the government doesn't want you to do", Gladstein argued.

A Fund To Develop Freedom Through Bitcoin

The Bitcoin Development Fund has been active since 2020, and there are several developers and activists who received a financial impulse to keep building their tools. This fund focuses on improving Bitcoin's decentralization, privacy, and resilience, but it even grants resources beyond technical goals.

The first fund grant was received by developer Chris Belcher to implement his CoinSwap protocol, conceived to improve Bitcoin's privacy. But besides backing developers like Belcher, HRF's fund opened to other kind of efforts. For instance, researcher and privacy advocate Janine Roem received a grant for her privacy-focused newsletter, and even some translation efforts like Arabic_HODL's project received part of these grants.

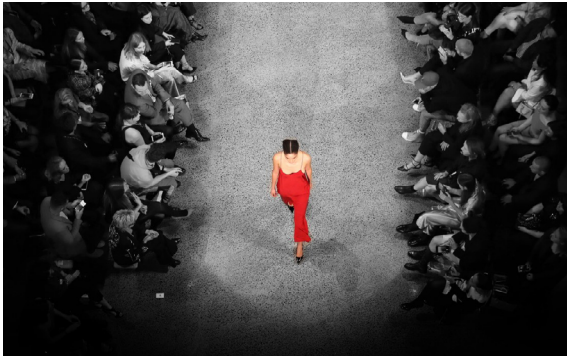
But it didn't stop there. This year, in late July, the HRF announced a 20-bitcoin bounty program, with several specific challenges like building a mobile wallet integration of privacy-focused Bitcoin technology like Silent Payments, more self-custodial Lightning Network wallets or even some decentralized communications products based on Nostr, a popular protocol among bitcoiners. These challenges will be open until the end of 2024.

Your Favorite Fashion Brand Is Using Slave Labor. Wake Up!

Outlet
Op-Ed
Newsweek

Author
Claudia Bennett

Date
Sept. 8, 2023



In August, [Bloomberg](#) reported what we at the Human Rights Foundation already knew: The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was sending in bots to attack our award-winning [Uyghur Forced Labor Checker](#) to deter you from downloading it and discovering the truth behind where your clothes are made and, more importantly, who makes them.

That's what our [Google](#) plug-in does—it lets you know when your shopping cart might be filled with items made by one of the 1.5 million Uyghurs the CCP has forced into concentration camps and asks you to think twice about your purchases.

That dress you're pining over from New York Fashion Week? It was made by a 16-year-old girl whose family doesn't know where she is or if she is even alive. That T-shirt Gigi Hadid wore on the runway? Made by a man in his 50s who has been tortured, raped, and is under constant surveillance. That coat you saw someone wearing to the afterparty? Made by a woman who used to be a teacher but is now being forced to eliminate her identity as a Uyghur Muslim.

The Uyghur people have their own language, their own culture, and their own identity distinct from the Han Chinese. The CCP is trying to erase their identity, and they're doing so by subjecting them to political indoctrination and grave human rights abuses. They are "reeducated" and made to learn Mandarin Chinese. They are forced to have abortions, use intrauterine devices, and receive sterilizations. And they are mandated to work non-stop with little to no pay. Most notably, picking cotton and working in clothing factories.

The CCP doesn't want you to know these things. In fact, they do everything in their power to ensure you don't by silencing activists and persecuting their families. The first and most obvious reason is that they're trying to eliminate the entire Uyghur population and want to do so without any backlash. And the second is that they have ties to major Western fashion brands, and they don't want that to change.



Supporters of the East Turkistan National Awakening Movement rally in front of the White House to commemorate the 13th anniversary of the 2009 Urumqi Massacre on July 5, 2022, in Washington, D.C. The group is also calling on governments to support the Uyghurs' right to self-determination by recognizing East Turkistan (Xinjiang, China) as an occupied country. DREW ANGERER/GETTY IMAGES

Do you see the connecting thread?

[One in five pieces](#) of cotton clothing worldwide is linked to Uyghur forced labor. Either Uyghurs were forced to pick the raw material, the cotton, or they cut the fabric and made the clothes that you are wearing. Fast fashion brands like [Shein](#), [Nike](#), [Zara](#), and many others, meanwhile, have been in the spotlight due to their use of Uyghur forced labor. Consumers have [boycotted](#) these brands. They have been ridiculed on social media and [in the news](#). And mass [protests](#) [have](#) occurred to raise awareness of their supply chain.

But you will likely see a Uyghur original on the runway in New York this week. That's because high-end and luxury brands have, for the most part, gone under the radar when it comes to cotton picked by forced labor—until now. The luxury fashion industry is no stranger to mishaps, criticism, or scandals.

But when it comes to forced labor, they're trying to skirt responsibility—even as [brand representatives](#) insist it won't be "tolerated." They simultaneously admit when pressed they don't source their own raw materials. So how could they possibly know where it comes from? Blissful ignorance is appalling when lives are at risk.

[Democratic governments](#) worldwide have called the CCP's actions a genocide. But their responses and efforts have been lackluster. The U.S. enacted the only legislation in the world that addresses this issue: the [Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act](#)

(UFLPA). The UFLPA was enacted in 2022 and [prohibits goods produced in the Uyghur region](#) from being sold in the U.S. unless there's a clear and convincing evidence that they weren't picked by slaves.

Yet clothes made by Uyghurs continue to be sold in the U.S. en masse. There's practically a Zara on every block in New York City. Moreover, for an individual shipment to trigger the reporting requirement, the amount has to [exceed \\$800](#). So that \$200 Shein order you just bought won't get flagged.

This means it's entirely up to you, the consumer, to demand to know where and how your clothes are made.

Don't be fooled by the pretty colors, sparkles, or the newest tren unveiled during New York Fashion Week. It's not enough to live by your values; [you must wear them, too](#). Lives depend on it.

Claudia Bennett is a legal and program officer at the Human Rights Foundation.

Hold Iran to account for Mahsa Amini's murder (and other horrors) when UN meets next week

Outlet
Op-Ed
New York Post

Authors
Claudia Bennett

Date
Sept. 15, 2023



One year ago, Iran's police arrested Mahsa Amini as a few strands of her hair were flowing free of her hijab and died 3 days later leading to a year of mass protests against the mandatory hijab law. REUTERS

The first anniversary of [Mahsa Amini's murder](#) on Sept. 16, 2022, couldn't come at a better time: It coincides with the commencement of the UN General Assembly's 78th session— the perfect time to hold Iran's feet to the fire.

One year ago, Iran's morality police arrested 22-year-old Mahsa simply because a few strands of her hair were flowing free of her hijab.

Three days later, [she was dead](#).

Her death sparked a women-led revolution, despite the high levels of state repression in the country.

A full year of mass protests against the mandatory hijab law and unequal treatment of women.

A year of merciless executions, sham trials and widespread arbitrary arrests and detentions.

And most important, a year of the Iranian people bravely determined to oust Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

The eerie timing of the anniversary of Amini's murder as UNGA gathers to discuss human rights and global issues serves as an important reminder of what we in the human-rights world see every day: The United Nations isn't doing its job.

Then again, it's hard to do one's job — to discuss, debate and make recommendations on subjects pertaining to international peace and security — when you hand the very people committing the horrors a seat at the table.

The UNGA is now largely a space for dictatorships and human-rights violators to discuss and voice their opinions on how best to protect *them*.

Those in attendance include [Vladimir Putin](#), who's waging war crimes in Ukraine; the Chinese Communist Party, which is engaged in genocide against the Uyghur people; the Cuban regime, which continuously cracks down on any slight dissent; and many other serial human-rights violators.

These dictators sit smugly alongside democratic leaders at the place where human-rights treaties were born.

It's a tragic joke, really. And no one's more pleased than the Islamic Republic.

In a complete slap in the face to the Iranian people, the regime was elected as one of the vice presidents of the UNGA.

Heidar-Ali Balouji, the first counselor of the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic to the UN, was elected as the rapporteur of the first committee, where he is to lead conversations on disarmament and global threats to international security.

Meanwhile, the Islamic Republic arms some of the biggest war criminals in the world, including Putin and Syria's Bashar al-Assad, not to mention the violence it commits against its own people.

It takes foreign hostages, promotes terror abroad and seeks nuclear weapons.

And the situation in Iran isn't improving.

Quite the contrary.

Late last year, 290 schools across 28 provinces saw mass poisonings of school girls in an attempt to stifle dissent.

In July, news broke that the morality police were employing mass surveillance tactics, including CCTV, to target 1 million women for not wearing headscarves.

The regime declared that it will deny medical care to women who refuse to wear hijabs.

Recently, Iranian actress Afsaneh Bayegan was ordered to visit a

psychological center once a week to "treat her anti-family personality disorder" after she posted photos of herself unveiled on Instagram.

Effectively countering regimes like Iran is the reason the UN Declaration of Human Rights was passed and the ultimate reason the UN was created.

By giving the Iranian regime a spotlight on the global stage, the UNGA legitimizes human-rights abusers and, in turn, their abuse — while ignoring the millions who've risked their lives demanding human rights, democracy and equal treatment of women and men.

Rather than giving the dissidents, protesters and those in exile a voice, their oppressors get the stage.

While Iran and other dictatorships sit at the United Nations as equals to their democratic counterparts there, the women of Iran can't leave their houses without a hijab, for fear of not returning home alive.

The men know singing a song could land them in prison for life.

Children know if things don't change, their futures will not look much brighter than that of their parents.

When will the UNGA live up to the human rights the body claims it promotes?

When will it support those living in dictatorships like Iran and hold their unelected leaders accountable.

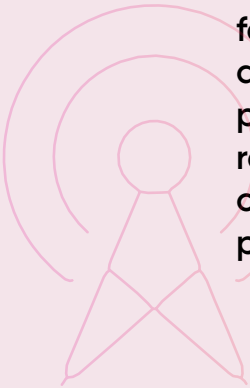
How many more times do we have to ask?

How many more people have to die?

Claudia Bennett is a legal and program officer at the Human Rights Foundation.

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:



abc NEWS

Sept. 19, 2023



1 year after Mahsa Amini's death, Iranian activists still fighting for freedom despite regime's cruelty

wbur

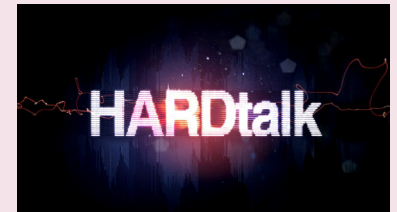
July 6, 2023



Hong Kong police put bounties out for overseas democracy activists

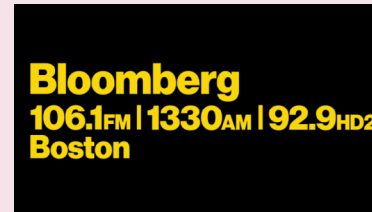
BBC

July 20, 2023



Interview Combating Kleptocracy Program Head Casey Michel

Bloomberg Radio Aug. 24, 2023



Google Axes Bad Reviews of Tracker Exposing Uyghur Forced Labor

BBC WORLD SERVICE Sept. 20, 2023



Human Rights Group Projects Human Costs of the Fashion Industry

