Freedom Now
Annual Report 2015
Freedom Now comes to the aid of prisoners of conscience all over the world. We are devoted to working on behalf of changemakers who are detained for peacefully exercising fundamental rights: freedom of speech, belief, association, and assembly. It is because of their courage and commitment to human rights in the face of harsh punishment that our clients are imprisoned.

It is this commitment to justice and progress that inspires us and our work.

“For dozens of prisoners of conscience around the world, Freedom Now’s dedicated lawyers provide a glimmer of hope when the regimes that imprison their clients, try to strip that hope away. Freedom Now fills a vital need internationally, giving political prisoners a fighting chance when the odds against them are stacked as high as the walls that imprison them.”

Statement by Ambassador Samantha Power to The New York Times
U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations
A t Freedom Now, we have the honor to work for a cause that is meaningful and impactful: helping to free prisoners of conscience and fighting back against repression and authoritarianism. The work undertaken by Freedom Now – including legal, political, and public relations advocacy - has helped bring about the release of dozens of individuals and focus international attention on sacred fundamental rights that compel urgent action.

Those who are fighting for human rights are too often the target of efforts by their governments to silence them; changemakers stopped from making changes so urgently needed. Imprisonment is a chief tactic of insecure governments. We must help those who are put behind bars for championing human rights at home. Their communities need them.

2015 was particularly noteworthy for us. Freedom Now helped secure the release of 13 prisoners of conscience in Indonesia, Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, Belarus, and China. We are delighted to have obtained NGO Special Consultative status, after a prolonged affair stymied by authoritarian governments, many of which are the jailors of our clients.

Yet, in the midst of these victories, the global crackdown on civil society continued unabated and appears to have further escalated. Authoritarian governments in Azerbaijan and the Maldives locked away more people and enacted more laws that greatly hinder freedom of expression and association. Friends and colleagues are among those who continue to be imprisoned in Azerbaijan. In October, we were greatly heartened to see human rights lawyer Intigam Aliyev win the International Bar Association’s Human Rights Lawyer of the Year Award. There is no one more deserving than this exceptional lawyer, who I have known for many years. But, the occasion was sorrowful too, because he is a prisoner of conscience and could not be there. His children accepted the award in Vienna and read a statement prepared by him that was filled with the modesty and humility that are his trademark.

Freedom Now’s efforts are needed now more than ever as thousands of civil society activists, journalists, and lawyers continue to linger in prison.

This report spotlights Freedom Now’s success in 2015. However, none of this would have been possible without your support. Thank you for joining Freedom Now and contributing to the protection of the rule of law and the improvement of human rights throughout the world.

Maran Turner, Exec. Director
November 2015
2015 Casework Overview

7 journalists imprisoned for reporting
13 targeted for political beliefs or civil activism
8 human rights defenders jailed for advocacy
2 individuals jailed for religious beliefs, practices or advocacy
5 politicians jailed for roles in opposition

16 countries
57 individuals
13 clients

Azerbaijan
Bahrain
Belarus
China
Ethiopia
Gambia
Guatemala
Indonesia
Iran
Maldives
Mauritania
Qatar
Rwanda
Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan
Vietnam
Working to free the Changemakers

Partnering with foundations, such as the Oak Foundation and law firms, such as Dechert, Woodley & McGillivary, and McKool Smith, which provide free legal support, enables us to provide much individualized assistance to prisoners of conscience in need. Our efforts included the following activities:

• Provided legal representation before international bodies, such as the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the European Court of Human Rights, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights;
• Spoke publicly and published materials about our clients’ cases;
• Highlighted issues related to our clients’ wrongful imprisonment, such as controversial legislation;
• Advocated for proper medical treatment for our clients;
• Provided briefings to government officials and international institutions positioned to effectively escalate our cases;
• Partnered with local activists and international NGOs to raise awareness; and
• Mobilized influential figures, including members of the U.S. Congress and Nobel laureates, to engage on our cases both publicly and privately.

We ensured our clients were not ignored; the injustice they suffer recognized; and the governments who illegally imprison them held to account under international law.
Freedom
Clients freed in 2015
On December 1, 2004, several hundred Papuans gathered at Trikora Field in Abepura, Papua, to celebrate the anniversary of the 1961 Papuan Declaration of Independence from Dutch rule. Among them was Filep Karma, a prominent Papuan political activist. Mr. Karma was arrested for his participation in the gathering and a few months later was convicted of sedition and sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Having spent nearly one-fifth of his life in prison, Mr. Karma suffers from a number of health issues, including acute prostate problems and leg injuries, which date to injuries from rubber bullets fired by armed forces during an earlier demonstration. These health issues have worsened dramatically over the last decade, and the Indonesian authorities often delay proper treatment.

After spending more than ten years in prison, Mr. Karma was freed on November 19, 2015.

Mr. Karma’s case has attracted considerable international attention. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled his detention arbitrary in 2011 and requested his immediate release. In 2008, 40 Members of Congress urged then-President Yudhoyono to release Mr. Karma; 26 Members of Congress signed a similar letter in 2011. In June 2015, we worked with the House of Representatives’ Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, to issue a letter to Secretary Kerry that highlighted Mr. Karma’s case. The letter was issued as Indonesian President Joko Widodo prepared for his visit to the US in October 2015.

In 2014, Mr. Karma was released from prison for one day in order to attend his daughter’s wedding.
Bashir Sulemanli is the Director of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center. In 2013, the Center monitored the presidential election in Azerbaijan, issuing an extensive report that alleged widespread electoral irregularities.

After the report was released, authorities arrested Mr. Sulemanli and the Center’s Chairperson, Anar Mammadli.

On May 26, 2014, after repeated delays, the government convicted the two NGO leaders under various charges and sentenced Mr. Sulemanli to 3 ½ years in prison and Mr. Mammadli to 5 ½ years.

Following an international campaign, Mr. Sulemanli received a presidential pardon and was released on March 19, 2015.

Mr. Mammadli continues to serve his sentence and Freedom Now is actively working to secure his release.

After his release, Mr. Sulemanli returned to his position at the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center where he advocates on behalf of his colleagues still unjustly imprisoned in Azerbaijan.
In 2013, a group of Ethiopian bloggers and journalists came together to create an independent news outlet for unbiased reporting, free from government-controlled sources.

They feared that Ethiopia was becoming a giant prison and thus named their blog “Zone 9,” a reference to the notorious Kaliti state prison that is separated into eight zones.

The Ethiopian government arrested six Zone 9 bloggers and three journalists under a number of charges including terrorism in April 2014. The court delayed hearing the case 39 times and extended the trial over a tortuous period of 18 months.

By July 2015, authorities dropped all charges and released three journalists and two bloggers.

Three months later, in October 2015, the court dropped the terrorism charges and released the remaining four bloggers.
Chen Kegui, the nephew of renowned blind barefoot Chinese lawyer Chen Guangcheng, was arrested in May 2012 and sentenced to 3 years and 3 months in prison on charges of “intentionally inflicting injuries” on a local Chinese communist party official.

The “official” was among a group of state-sponsored thugs that invaded Chen Kegui’s home on the night that Chen Guangcheng escaped illegal house arrest to flee to the U.S. Embassy in Beijing.

On July 29, 2015, the Chinese government released Chen Kegui.

Kegui is now back at home with his family in eastern China, and is finally receiving the medical attention he has urgently needed for serious stomach ailments.
Mikalai Statkevich
Belarus

Mikalai Statkevich is a politician who ran as an opposition candidate in the 2010 presidential election.

On December 19, 2010, he joined thousands of protesters peacefully demonstrating against election fraud in downtown Minsk.

Mr. Statkevich was one of hundreds arrested when police violently dispersed the protest. On May 26, 2011, Mr. Statkevich was sentenced to six years in prison.

Freedom Now worked with partner Hogan Lovells to file a petition with the UN Human Rights Committee on his behalf.

On August 22, 2015, the Belarusian government released Mr. Statkevich from prison.

Since his release, Mr. Statkevich has vigorously campaigned for free elections in Belarus. He has held several public demonstrations in Minsk and been subject to fines for refusing to file the necessary permits.
Global
Updates about our work across the world
On July 15, 2015, Leyla Yunus saw her husband Arif for the first time in nearly a year. The two were arrested in the summer of 2014 and kept separated as they were held in pre-trial detention. They should have been celebrating their 37th wedding anniversary this year; instead they were on trial for daring to oppose President Ilham Aliyev’s regime. Leyla and Arif Yunus were sentenced to 8 ½ years and 7 years, respectively, in August 2015 and still face charges of treason. In November of this year, Arif Yunus was permitted to go home as a result of extremely ill health. He is now officially held under house arrest.

In the past year the crackdown on civil society in Azerbaijan continued unabated as arrests and convictions accelerated. Human rights defender Rasul Jafarov and lawyer Intigam Aliyev were both sentenced in April 2015 to 6 ½ years and 7 ½ years, respectively.

Journalist Khadija Ismayilova, arrested in December 2014, was sentenced to 7 ½ years in prison in September 2015.
A moment of great celebration this year in Azerbaijan was the evacuation and freedom of Emin Huseynov, who had been in hiding in the Swiss embassy in Baku for 10 months. The journalist and civil society leader had been indicted on charges that were similar to those for which his colleagues have since been convicted. Emin was taken from the embassy to the airport where he then flew to Switzerland, accompanied by Swiss officials. He has since been offered asylum.

In October, the International Bar Association honored Intigam Aliyev with its 2015 Human Rights Award. Mr. Aliyev was nominated for the award by Freedom Now, the Human Rights House Foundation, and the Polish Helsinki Foundation. In his place, Intigam’s children Necmin and Narmin accepted their father’s prize, reading a statement he prepared which said in part:

“Today, in my country, my friends, colleagues, conscientious people are facing prosecutions, pressures, and imprisonments. They deserve this award at least as much as I do. Therefore, I am accepting this award behalf of them.”

Intigam Aliyev is a devoted human rights lawyer, who has worked tirelessly for many years on behalf of others who were being persecuted and imprisoned. He is sadly an expert in this area of law and submitted many cases to the European Court of Human Rights. His enforced absence from this important work has left a void filled by few colleagues able to carry on in this effort and who do so at great personal peril.

In July 2015, we worked with Senator Richard Durbin’s office to issue a letter from 16 US Senators to President Aliyev citing their concerns about the human rights situation in the country and requesting the immediate release of all prisoners of conscience. This letter is the first time so many members of the Senate have spoken with one voice about Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan hosted the first European Olympic Games in June 2015 and provided a valuable opportunity to focus the world’s attention on the regime’s human rights abuses. Freedom Now is a member of the Sport for Rights Campaign, a conglomerate of more than 20 organizations working toward human rights in Azerbaijan. In the run up to the Games, we dispatched many communications to international bodies, foreign governments, and corporations, made public appeals and obtained critical media attention.

Freedom Now joined several other organizations in admonishing Lady Gaga for participating in the European Olympic Games and assisting Azerbaijan in whitewashing its human rights record. (Photo: AP)
Injustice in the Maldives

On February 22, 2015, Mohamed Nasheed, former President of the tiny island nation of the Maldives, was arrested for allegedly ordering the kidnapping of a federal judge. Within three weeks he was tried, convicted, and sentenced to 13 years in prison.

Mr. Nasheed made a name for himself as a dissident journalist and environmentalist, challenging the authoritarian regime of former president Maumoon Gayoom. In 2008, he was elected president and used his position as a platform for democratic reforms and climate activism. In 2012, he was featured as the subject of the critically-acclaimed documentary The Island President, which detailed his efforts to save his country from catastrophic sea-level rise.

In March 2015, Freedom Now’s founder Jared Genser partnered with Amal Clooney of Doughty Street Chambers and Ben Emmerson of Matrix Chambers to provide Mr. Nasheed international pro bono legal counsel.

The legal team filed a petition with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in April 2015 and conducted a trip to the Maldives to visit Mr. Nasheed in July 2015 to assess the conditions of his imprisonment.
In September 2015, the UN Human Rights Council considered the Universal Periodic Review of the Maldives. Because it was recently accredited by the UN, Freedom Now was able to secure a speaking slot for Meera Leila Nasheed, Mr. Nasheed’s daughter, that allowed her to directly address the Council about her father’s imprisonment.

Meera Leila Nasheed (center) addresses the UN Human Rights Council on behalf of her father.

“My father is also one of my best friends and we miss his humor, his boundless energy and his gentle smiles. We hope to soon have him safely by our side.”

Meera Leila Nasheed, addressing the UN Human Rights Council

The Working Group released its opinion in October 2015, finding Mr. Nasheed’s detention to be arbitrary and calling for his immediate release. The opinion was covered heavily by media outlets, including The Guardian, CNN and The Telegraph, and drew a statement of support from Sir Richard Branson.

President Nasheed during his brutal arrest by the military junta

In September 2015, the UN Human Rights Council considered the Universal Periodic Review of the Maldives. Because it was recently accredited by the UN, Freedom Now was able to secure a speaking slot for Meera Leila Nasheed, Mr. Nasheed’s daughter, that allowed her to directly address the Council about her father’s imprisonment.

Meera Leila Nasheed (center) addresses the UN Human Rights Council on behalf of her father.
In October 2010, Dr. Liu Xiaobo became the first Chinese citizen to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his long and non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights. This followed his arbitrary detention in December 2009 on suspicion of “inciting subversion.” He was sentenced to 11 years in prison and a further two years “deprivation of political rights.”

His wife Liu Xia has been held under house arrest in Beijing since October 2010 for her association to her husband’s work. Concerns have been raised regarding her health resulting from her confinement.

Freedom Now has served as pro bono counsel for the Lius since early 2010. This year, we facilitated a letter from 12 Nobel Laureates to President Obama condemning the arbitrary detention of the Lius.

“We are writing as your fellow Nobel Peace Prize Laureates to ask that you call publicly on the Government of China to release from house arrest Liu Xia, the wife of our imprisoned fellow Laureate Dr. Liu Xiaobo, and to allow her to travel abroad for medical treatment as she has requested. We also ask that you urge his immediate release as well . . . All attempts to resolve their detentions through private diplomacy have failed. We believe that unless leaders like you take urgent action, both publicly and privately, that China will continue to believe it can act with impunity and without consequence for its behavior.”

Excerpt from the Nobel Laureates’ letter to President Obama, September 2015
An Important Victory at the UN

In July 2015, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations officially awarded – by vote – Freedom Now NGO Special Consultative status. 29 countries voted in favor of a resolution supporting our application, with only 9 opposing.

The vote was the culmination of a six-year application process unnecessarily prolonged by politics. Freedom Now was able to generate substantial media coverage of the accreditation process, particularly how the NGO Committee systematically blocks accreditation of NGOs focusing on human rights. Stories about the process and Freedom Now’s struggles appeared in The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, the Guardian, The Associated Press, and the Mail & Guardian.

Freedom Now intends to use its heightened UN access to increase attention and global efforts to address human rights violations and arbitrary detention. Following this experience, we would like to bring forth greater discussion about reforming the NGO accreditation process and making the UN a more welcoming place for civil society.
How You Can Help in 2016

Freedom Now is funded entirely through public support from individuals and foundations. We are a small results-driven organization that seeks first and foremost to help individual victims of human rights violations.

Our work is only possible because of the generosity and support of people like you.

Your donation will also leverage pro bono assistance from law firms who provide us with invaluable case assistance. We also accept gifts of stock and donated office equipment.
Who We Are

**Freedom Now** is a nonpartisan US and UK-based nonprofit organization that works to free prisoners of conscience through legal, political, and public relations advocacy.

We serve individuals who have been wrongly imprisoned all over the world, seeking their freedom from detention and justice for the violation of their most sacred human rights.

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**Lord Lester of Herne Hill QC**
Liberal Democrat life peer in practice at Blackstone Chambers

**Dr. Yang Jianli**
Former political prisoner in China
Our Law Firm Partners

Freedom Now is grateful for the support we receive from our law firm partners. It is because of this generous pro bono assistance from law firms we are able to provide individualized case assistance to so many prisoners of conscience.

Our Supporters

Our supporters make it possible for Freedom Now to perform its critical work. The foundations and individuals who support us share in our success. It is this joint commitment to the mission, that results in so many inspirational leaders being able to return to their communities.

A heartfelt thank you to all those who supported our work in 2015!
We are proud to have collaborated with many human rights organizations throughout 2015 that share our commitment to human rights.
Financial Report
2014/2015

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*Includes the 1,371 hours of pro bono time provided by law firm volunteers only and obtained during the 2014 calendar year. Pro bono rates are calculated at $565/hr, which is an average of rates charged by the law firms that provide us with services.

Expenses by Category

Expenses by Category

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Program 91%

Fundraising 2%

Admin 7%