Freedom Now is dedicated to protecting the rule of law and eliminating the arbitrary detention of brave individuals for peacefully exercising their human rights.

To combat global repression, we provide legal and advocacy support to prisoners of conscience, report on the systemic causes of arbitrary detention, and offer capacity support to victims of human rights abuses.

“If not for the support of Freedom Now, I would have remained in prison for many more years, away from my family. Their work has a far greater ramification than just my physical freedom. It reinforces and energizes all those who are committed to non-violence, peace, reconciliation, and democracy.”

Eskinder Nega, journalist and former Freedom Now client
Freedom Now was founded with the mission to free prisoners of conscience through focused legal, political and public relations advocacy efforts. We support and represent those who resist authoritarianism and stand up for basic human rights.

Freedom Now remains dedicated to eliminating arbitrary detention and the politically motivated abuse of individuals who peacefully exercise their fundamental rights. Our advocacy on behalf of prisoners of conscience helped free 13 individuals wrongly imprisoned in Azerbaijan, China, Ethiopia, Iran, Mauritania, Rwanda and Uzbekistan.

This year alone Freedom Now campaigned on behalf of 45 individuals silenced via imprisonment for their work to bring about a more just world. Our advocacy on behalf of prisoners of conscience helped free 13 individuals wrongly imprisoned in Azerbaijan, China, Ethiopia, Iran, Mauritania, Rwanda, and Uzbekistan. Providing direct legal representation alongside pro bono law firm counsel, we won six cases before the United Nations. We briefed dozens of policymakers in multiple governments and provided media sources with expert analysis and vital information about human rights abuses, raising the profile of our clients and the issues for which they are willing to sacrifice.

We are proud to share with you Freedom Now’s 2018 Annual Report, which catalogues another successful year for the organization. In the following pages you will find inspirational stories of former prisoners of conscience continuing their crusades, the unfortunate realities of human rights defenders targeted by their governments, and innovative campaigns that address the invasive practice of arbitrary detention.

We hope you will join us in celebrating Freedom Now’s accomplishments. Now more than ever, we also hope you will support our work to ensure respect for the rule of law, democratic values, and individual liberties.

The Board of Freedom Now
BY THE NUMBERS:
WHO WE’VE HELPED IN 2018

14 journalists imprisoned for reporting
12 politicians jailed for roles in opposition
10 targeted for political beliefs or civil activism
5 human rights defenders jailed for advocacy
5 individuals jailed for religious beliefs, practices or advocacy
2 lawyers arrested for defending human rights

16 working within countries
45 representing individuals
13 helping to free clients
UPHOLDING THE RULE OF LAW

Our legal assistance before international bodies is often a prisoner of conscience's only chance to hold their government accountable.

Freedom Now, along with our *pro bono* legal teams, won six cases at the United Nations in 2018 for clients in Mauritania, Morocco, Rwanda, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. We prepared and submitted four more briefs on behalf of clients in Iran, Rwanda, and Tajikistan; communicated with UN Special Rapporteurs on five cases in Mauritania, Morocco, and Tajikistan; and intervened before the European Court of Human Rights involving a case in Azerbaijan.

Our international pro bono partners contributed 4,463 pro bono hours in 2017, worth approximately $2.5 million.

We expect to receive the same level of support in 2018.
RECRUITING CHAMPIONS FOR THE WRONGFULLY IMPRISONED

Despotic leaders tighten their grip on power and avoid accountability when human rights defenders are silenced. We recruit prominent government officials, ambassadors, decision makers, renowned institutions, and ordinary citizens to be a loud, resounding voice for our clients.

These voices join in protests, letters, and campaigns to defend fundamental human rights and bring the full weight of the international community down on authoritarian governments.

In July 2018, Tajikistan sentenced journalist and comedian Khayrullo Mirsaidov to 12 years in prison after he wrote an open letter to the president about corruption in the local government.

Freedom Now participated in a social media campaign targeting the Tajik government ahead of Khayrullo’s appeal hearing. This picture was taken in front of the Tajik embassy in Washington, DC and disseminated widely prior to the hearing. In August 2018, the government released Khayrullo from prison.

In November 2017, a Mauritanian court of appeals quashed the death sentence against blogger Mohamed Mkhaitir and reduced his prison sentence to two years. Having been imprisoned since January 2014 on charges of apostasy for a blog post he wrote, Mohamed should have been released immediately. However, more than a year later he remains in administrative detention, ostensibly for his own protection from the hundreds of protestors who have called for his death.

Freedom Now has undertaken a campaign to free Mohamed from this legal limbo. In June 2018, we coordinated a letter from four U.S. Senators to Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz calling for Mohamed to be freed and allowed to leave Mauritania without further delay.

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(Phot/Freedom Now)
DEVELOPING NEW HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Freedom Now provides training and guidance to international organizations, law firms, and individuals on inventive strategies to combat human rights violators.

In October 2018, Freedom Now and the Human Rights House Foundation coordinated an interactive training for local activists in Tbilisi, Georgia on international sanctions regimes. Activists in the country are now discussing the path forward for placing sanctions on human rights abusers.

Throughout the year, Freedom Now provided trainings to its law firm partners on drafting legal petitions to international legal tribunals and conducting political advocacy. Legal Director Kate Barth trained more than 35 lawyers who have volunteered to work on new cases in Burundi, Cameroon, Tajikistan, and Vietnam.

(Photo/Freedom Now)
EXPOSING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

Human rights abusers flourish in the shadows. We widely diffuse the stories of clients through traditional and new media, ensuring that their vital work is put in the proper context, not marred by the falsehoods and propaganda used to justify their imprisonment.
A LIFE RENEWED

After eight interminable years under house arrest, Liu Xia boarded a flight on a July morning from Beijing to Germany. Her detention was viewed as reprisal for support of her husband, Nobel Peace Prize Laurate and renowned dissident Liu Xiaobo. A former Freedom Now client, he was imprisoned in 2009 for his role in drafting Charter 08, a political manifesto that calls for increased rule of law, greater respect for human rights, and the end to one-party rule in China.

In December 2009, he was sentenced to 11 years in prison and two years deprivation of political rights. He was granted medical parole in June 2017 and passed away a month later while receiving treatment for terminal liver cancer. Liu Xia's mental and physical health had worsened considerably since the death of her husband.

Freedom Now joined the international community in celebrating Liu Xia's release. It is our hope that she will finally have the space and support to grieve and heal. The tragedy of what has been done to her by the Chinese government is shameful. We are relieved she is now safely outside the country that was her prison for so many years.
ETHIOPIA’S NEW YEAR

Over the past decade, Ethiopia’s attempt to crush dissent has resulted in the imprisonment of hundreds of opposition politicians, journalists, and peaceful activists. Beginning in November 2015, the government resorted to shocking violence to quell protests, resulting in the deaths of more than 800 individuals.

When 2018 began it was unclear whether Ethiopia would recover from a period that almost certainly represented a nadir in the government’s respect for human rights. The reforms that Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn promised had not materialized and the international community was losing patience.

On Valentine’s Day, the doors of the notorious Maekelawi prison opened and into the world stepped journalist Eskinder Nega and opposition politician Andualem Aragie for the first time in seven years. Both men had been imprisoned in September 2011 for criticizing Ethiopia’s overly broad and often politically-applied anti-terrorism law. Eskinder, one of the country’s most prominent journalists, had been arrested with his pregnant wife, who gave birth to their son in prison. Thankfully, she was not detained for very long and was able to settle in the U.S. Eskinder was reunited with his family this summer, but has since returned to Ethiopia to campaign for greater press freedom.

Eskinder Nega’s supporters greet him upon his release from prison on February 14, 2018.

(Photo/Addis Standard)
The day after Eskinder and Andualem were released, Prime Minister Hailemariam resigned his position. In subsequent months, more than 300 political prisoners were released including opposition politician Yonatan Tesfaye and charges were dropped against those still facing prosecution, such as a handful of Zone 9 bloggers. Despite this progress, many political prisoners remain detained in the country. Freedom Now continues to explore ways to dismantle the systemic causes of arbitrary detention in Ethiopia and ensure the country respects rule of law and human rights.

With these releases, it will be the first year since 2012 that Freedom Now has not had a client in Ethiopia. In that time we filed three petitions to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, an application with the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, coordinated letters from the European Parliament and prominent NGOs, and published op-eds in the Wall Street Journal and Al Jazeera. We will continue to monitor Ethiopia’s progress and ensure it respects the human rights of its citizens.
When Eskinder Nega traveled to the U.S. in July 2018, we were thrilled to have the opportunity to connect him with members of Congress and their staff. He was able to brief decision makers on the latest developments in Ethiopia and made a powerful plea for U.S. engagement on human rights in the world.
A REINVIGORATED OPPOSITION IN AZERBAIJAN

Ilgar Mammadov had just announced his intentions to run for president of Azerbaijan when he was arrested in February 2013. According to the government, he was guilty of fomenting public unrest. In reality, he had written a blog criticizing the government’s response to riots in the Ismayilli region. He was ultimately sentenced to seven years in prison.

While in prison, Ilgar regularly wrote letters to his supporters and continued his criticism of the government. In January 2017, he published “A letter from an inmate of the Southern Gas Corridor”, which exposed how Western governments were prioritizing economic issues over human rights concerns in dealings with Azerbaijan.

Ilgar was the subject of two separate decisions by the European Court of Human Rights, which found that Azerbaijan violated his fundamental rights by keeping him detained and that it had acted with political malice in doing so. In December 2017, the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers launched infringement proceedings against Azerbaijan for its continued failure to implement the judgement. It was the first such time such proceedings had been launched.

On August 13, 2018, Ilgar was finally released from prison after serving more than five years of his sentence. He has since returned to his role as the leader of the Republican Alternative (REAL) opposition party and continues to fiercely criticize the government.

Despite Ilgar’s release, more than 120 prisoners of conscience remain in Azerbaijan, including journalist Afgan Mukhtarli, youth activists Giyas Ibrahimov and Bayram Mammadov, and religious leaders Taleh Bagirov and Abbas Huseynov. Freedom Now continues to campaign for the release of all prisoners of conscience in the country.
Abdellahi Matalla Saleck and Moussa Bilal Biram are fearless activists with the Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement in Mauritania (IRA-Mauritania). They have selflessly dedicated themselves to abolishing the heinous institution of slavery in one of the only countries in the world where it is openly practiced with little consequence.

The two men were arrested in June 2016 after a larger crackdown by the government against IRA-Mauritania. Thirteen IRA-Mauritania members were arrested after the government accused the organization of fueling violent riots that came after the forced relocation of hundreds of residents of an informal settlement in the capital city of Nouakchott. Coincidentally, the crackdown occurred as our former clients IRA-Mauritania president Biram Dah Abeid and vice-president Brahim Ramdane were in Washington, DC, being awarded the Trafficking in Persons Report Hero Award by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and visiting members of Congress along with Freedom Now staff.

On August 18, 2016, the 13 activists were convicted, receiving sentences ranging from three to 15 years. On November 18, 2016, an appeals court acquitted three activists and released seven more after reducing their sentences. An eleventh activist was released after his sentence expired in December 2016. In January 2018, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, prompted by a petition filed by Freedom Now, issued an opinion finding Mauritania to be in violation of international law for detaining the activists. Abdellahi and Moussa were released in July 2018, having served their sentences.

Despite their release, the government continues to harass IRA-Mauritania activists. In August 2018, Biram Dah Abeid was arrested again and several weeks later the government violently dispersed protestors calling for his release. Freedom Now continues to advocate for anti-slavery activists in the country.
CHANGES CONTINUE IN UZBEKISTAN

The past twelve months in Uzbekistan has continued to show encouraging signs of progress. The government released journalist Dilmurod Saidov in February and human rights defender Gaybullo Jalilov in March.

Dilmurod wrote many critical articles about the government, accusing local authorities of corruption and asserting that their nefarious dealings were impoverishing farmers. He was arrested in February 2009 and sentenced to 12 and a half years in prison. He combatted numerous hardships in prison, including tuberculosis and the tragic death of his wife and son in a car accident on their way to visit him in 2010.

A religious freedom activist, Gaybullo was arrested in September 2009 and sentenced to 11 years in prison. He ran afoul of the government for collecting information on over 200 arrests of independent Muslims in the country. He suffered greatly in prison, receiving periodic beatings that left him deaf in nearly both ears and kept incommunicado, without contact with his family since October 2011.

Freedom Now filed petitions with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on their behalf and in November 2012 and April 2013, the Working Group issued opinions on each case, respectively, finding violations of international law.

Freedom Now continues to explore ways in which we can support the renewed space for civil society in Uzbekistan, including by providing direct support to former prisoners of conscience.
VICTORY FOR THE LEGAL PROFESSION IN IRAN

In November 2018, lawyer Abdolfattah Soltani walked out of Evin Prison. He had spent the last eight years in Iran’s most notorious detention facility, known for inhumane conditions and widespread use of torture.

Abdolfattah was a founding member of the Centre for Human Rights Defenders, an organization created leading human rights advocates in Iran, including Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi. The government banned the Centre in 2008, but this did not deter Abdolfattah and his colleagues. They continued their groundbreaking work by reporting on human rights violations in the country and providing pro bono legal assistance to political prisoners and support to their families.

Abdolfattah served as a lawyer for individuals targeted by the Iranian regime, including journalist Akbar Ganji, academic Haleh Esfandiari, and photojournalist Zahra Kazemi, who died in Evin Prison shortly after her arrest. Shortly before his own arrest in September 2011, Abdolfattah was preparing to represent members of the Bahá’í religious group, a minority that has faced consistent persecution in Iran. He was ultimately sentenced to 13 years in prison.

In October 2012, the International Bar Association awarded Abdolfattah its Human Rights Award in recognition of his “outstanding contribution as a legal practitioner to human rights,” noting that he “has worked courageously and determinedly throughout his career to provide pro bono legal counsel to those in need and, as a result of his human rights defense work, has endured persistent persecution from the Iranian government and has been imprisoned on several occasions.”

In addition to the extended periods of solitary confinement, mistreatment, and torture, he experienced in Evin, Abdolfattah faced personal hardship while he was detained. He was briefly released in August 2018 to attend the funeral of his daughter Homa, who died at age 27 of heart failure.

Freedom Now continues to campaign for the release of prisoners of conscience who remain detained in Iran, including writer and activist Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee.
IMPRISONED FOR A FACEBOOK POST

In August 2015, Nguyen Huu Quoc Duy used Facebook to express frustration with his government. It was something he had done numerous times before; going online to criticize Vietnam's regime for corruption, police violence, and deficiencies in the education system.

In this particular post, Duy's target was the arrest of his cousin Nguyen Huu Thien An. Days earlier, An had been arrested for spray painting a colorful anti-communist message on the side of a police station. Duy was initially arrested along with his cousin, but released after three days.

The police arrested Duy again in November 2015 and held him incommunicado for nine months. His mother repeatedly tried to visit him, but was denied each time.

Duy’s trial was finally held on August 23, 2016, but closed to the public. His family attempted to attend, but were turned away by the police. The authorities were so intent on keeping the public away that they confiscated Duy's mother’s phone, forcibly removed her from the courthouse, and kept her in a police station until the trial was over.

Duy was convicted under the notorious Article 88 of the 1999 Penal Code, which is routinely used against activists who allegedly engage in spreading “propaganda.” He was sentenced to three years in prison.

Duy was released on November 21, 2018 after serving his sentence. He has since been reunited with his family.

In September 2017, Freedom Now and King & Spalding submitted a petition to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on behalf of Duy. A decision from the Working Group is forthcoming.
REPRESSION IN RWANDA

Rwanda has undergone a miraculous transformation in the past quarter century and much of the credit goes to President Paul Kagame. Yet, what often goes unnoticed is the extent to which President Kagame has stamped out dissent and imprisoned many of his critics, leaving behind a legacy of authoritarianism.

The prolonged incarceration of former military officers, Frank Rusagara, Tom Byabagamba, and Francois Kabayiza is illustrative of the government’s intolerance of criticism, no matter how benign it might be.

Exiled to Uganda at a young age, Frank returned to Rwanda in 1994 when he joined the Rwandan Patriotic Front during the conflict in Rwanda. He remained in the military and reached the rank of brigadier general. Frank’s brother-in-law, Tom, is a decorated military officer who served as personal bodyguard of President Kagame from 1990 to 2010. François is a retired sergeant who worked as Frank’s driver.

After retirement, Frank frequented several popular social gathering spots in Kigali. He met with other military colleagues and over meals would occasionally make comments that were critical of the government. Tom made similar comments to military colleagues. He had a text exchange with another military officer in which he commented about an online article that was critical of the Rwandan government. In this text he reportedly suggested to a colleague that Rwanda was “not well governed.”

Frank and Tom were arrested in August 2014 on charges of “spreading rumours” and “tarnishing the image of the country and government.” François was arrested shortly thereafter and charged with possession of an illegal firearm and concealing evidence. After a trial before a military tribunal, they received sentences of 20, 21, and five years, respectively.
In January 2018, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found their imprisonment to be in violation of international law, the result of a petition filed by Freedom Now. We have been working with government officials in the U.S. and Europe to bring greater attention to this injustice. Our Legal Director Kate Barth was featured on a Rwandan radio station discussing the facts of the case.

One positive development in Rwanda is the case of former presidential candidate Diane Rwigara. In May 2017, Diane announced that she would run in the upcoming presidential election against President Kagame. Within 72 hours of this announcement doctored nude photos of her were leaked on social media.

The government subsequently barred her from running, claiming she did not gather enough signatures. Soon after she was disqualified, Diane began speaking out against the various human rights abuses perpetrated by the Rwandan government.

In August 2017, Diane and her mother were arrested on charges of tax evasion and forgery. They were released, but arrested a couple weeks later when Diane was charged with offenses against state security.

Freedom Now and Dechert LLP filed a petition with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on behalf of Diane and her mother in September 2018. Days later, the two women were released on bail. However, they still faced up to 22 years in prison.

In order to keep pressure on the Rwandan government, Freedom Now engaged in a broad range of advocacy activities. These included recruiting Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) to act as Diane's congressional advocate through the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's Defending Freedoms Project; convening a virtual press conference with activists in the U.S., UK, Rwanda, and Kenya; and organizing a Congressional briefing on human rights in Rwanda.

On December 6, 2018, two days after the Congressional briefing and a flurry of press coverage, the Rwandan High Court acquitted Diane and Adeline of all charges.
LEGAL PERSECUTION: VIETNAM’S USE OF LAW AS A WEAPON AGAINST CIVIL SOCIETY

Twenty-one year old journalist Nguyen Van Hoa disappeared in January 2017. It was two weeks before the government notified his family that he had been arrested and eight more months before he would be sentenced to seven years in prison during a secret trial.

Hoa is one of dozens of Vietnamese citizens imprisoned under a network of laws aimed at closing civil society space, curtailing religious freedoms, and criminalizing dissent.

In November 2018 Freedom Now and American University’s Washington College of Law published a report entitled “Legal Persecution: Vietnam’s Use of Law as a Weapon Against Civil Society”, which examines how the government of Vietnam has created a legal regime in direct opposition to human rights and one that relies on systemic arbitrary detention.

The report was launched on Capitol Hill at an event sponsored by Rep. Alan Lowenthal, co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on Vietnam.

We will use this report to advocate for the repeal of problematic laws in Vietnam and to give both domestic Vietnamese attorneys and other international organizations the legal tools necessary to challenge Vietnam’s repression.
HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CORRIDORS OF POWER

Throughout the year, Freedom Now met with government officials, decision makers, and their staff to educate them on individual cases of prisoners of conscience and the pernicious conditions that result in disrespect for human rights and the breakdown in rule of law.

In February 2018, our DC Director and Head of Advocacy Melina Milazzo testified before the U.S. House of Representatives' Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission regarding the Defending Freedoms Project and the invaluable assistance the members of Congress provide when they lend their voice to individuals who are arbitrarily detained.

In May 2018, Executive Director Maran Turner participated in a briefing organized by the Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe. “Democracy Deferred: The State of Elections and Fundamental Freedoms in Azerbaijan” provided Ms. Turner an opportunity to brief key congressional staff on the extent of arbitrary detention in Azerbaijan and the ways in which the ruling elite misuse government institutions to maintain power.
Legal Director Kate Barth addressed members of Congress and activists at the annual Vietnam Human Rights Day in June 2018. She highlighted the cases we are working on in the country and the continued crackdown on religious followers and online activists that have resulted in dozens of arrests and lengthy convictions over the last year.

Freedom Now partnered with Global Advocates Foundation, the University of Exeter, Fair Trials International, and Human Rights Watch in September 2018 to convene a panel at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's annual Human Dimensions Implementation Meeting in Warsaw, Poland.

The event, entitled “Tajikistan 2018 - No Freedom Beyond This Point”, gave panelists the opportunity to engage with European decision makers on the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation in Tajikistan and the lack of an adequate international response.

Executive Director Maran Turner discussed the continued imprisonment of our clients in the country, including opposition politicians Mahmadali Hayit and Zayd Saidov and human rights lawyer Buzurgmehr Yorov.
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 rights.

Staff
Maran Turner, Executive Director
Melina Milazzo, DC Director & Head of Advocacy
Kate Barth, Legal Director
Karl Horberg, Senior Program Officer

Board of Directors
Jeremy Zucker, Chair
Dechert LLP

Peter Magyar
Magyar & Co. UK

Thomas Dohrmann
McKinsey & Company

Greg McGillivary
Woodley & McGillivary

Joshua Newcomer
McKool Smith

Peter Choharis
Choharis Global Solutions

Our Supporters
Freedom Now extends our profound gratitude to the individuals, law firms, and foundations whose generosity makes it possible for us to perform our critical work. We consider all of our donors essential partners in our mission. This list includes donors who made substantial gifts between October 1, 2017 and November 1, 2018.

Open Society Foundations
Rob Granieri
Greg McGillivary
Joshua Newcomer
Jeremy and Gretchen Zucker
Dechert LLP

Thomas Dohrmann
Peter Choharis
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Morgan Barth

Peter and Hillary Hatch
Michael Wolkowitz
James Larkins
David Newcomer
Joseph McCarthy
AnnMaura Connolly
Our NGO Partners
We are proud to have collaborated with many human rights organizations throughout 2018 that share our commitment to ending arbitrary detention and restoring the rule of law. We are especially proud of collaborations with the following organizations:

Our Law Firm Partners
Freedom Now is grateful for the support we receive from our law firm partners and individual attorneys. It is because of this generous pro bono assistance we are able to provide individualized case assistance to so many prisoners of conscience.
### Revenue November 2017 - October 2018

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<th>Source</th>
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### Expenses November 2017 - October 2018

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*This includes the 4,463 hours of *pro bono* time provided by law firm volunteers only and obtained during the 2017 calendar year. Pro bono rates are calculated at $565/hour, which is an average of rates charged by the law firms which provide us with services.