



FREEDOM NOW

Annual Report 2014

Freedom Now is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to free prisoners of conscience through legal, political and public relations advocacy. Based in Washington D.C., Freedom Now serves 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.

Who We Are

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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: representing prisoners of conscience and addressing international human rights violations. The foundations and individuals who support us share in our success. It is this joint commitment to the mission of helping prisoners of conscience 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 2014!



Freedom Now in 2014

Freedom Now comes to the aid of prisoners of conscience all over the world. We are devoted fully to working on behalf of those crusaders who are detained for peacefully exercising fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of speech, belief, and assembly. It is because of their courage and commitment to human rights in the face of harsh punishment that our clients are imprisoned. Our commitment to human rights and the rule of law inspires our work on their behalf.

During 2014, Freedom Now worked on **27 cases from 12 countries, representing more than 48 individuals.** Freedom Now assisted on more cases in 2014 than in any year since our founding in 2001; a testament to our growing ability to meet the rising need of wrongly imprisoned crusaders.

Where we worked this year



Azerbaijan

Gambia

Uzbekistan

China

Bahrain

Ethiopia

Turkmenistan

Iran

Belarus

Indonesia

Vietnam

Rwanda

Five Clients Released in 2014

Five Freedom Now clients were released in 2014 and acclaimed human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng was released into home detention in China, after years of prison confinement and disappearances.

Rwanda: Agnes Uwimana Nkusi



Agnes Uwimana Nkusi was the editor of the independent newspaper, *Umurabyo*, in Rwanda. Rwandan authorities arrested Ms. Uwimana in July 2010 along with her colleague, Saidati Mukakibibi (released in 2013) because of reporting that was critical of President Kagame. She was sentenced to 17 years in prison. Following a legal challenge submitted by the law firm Hogan Lovells, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued an opinion finding the detention of Ms. Uwimana and her colleague unlawful. In 2012, the Rwandan Supreme Court reduced her sentence to four years, maintaining convictions for defamation and endangering national security. She was released on June 18, 2014. Freedom Now and Hogan Lovells had worked towards her release since 2011, collaborating closely with the organization Media Legal Defence Initiative.

Azerbaijan: Members of N!DA



Bakhtiyar Guliyev, Shahin Novruzlu, and Elsever Mursalli are members of N!DA, a youth activist group formed in 2011 to “defend the constitutional and human rights of the society, and preserve the democratic and republican value” in Azerbaijan. The three activists had been serving sentences between two and seven years on fabricated

charges, including weapons possession, narcotics possession, and organizing mass riots. They applied for and were granted pardon and released in October 2014, following a series of efforts by Freedom Now and others calling for their release.

N!DA successfully organized public protests during 2013 and some of its members were arrested just three days before a demonstration planned to call attention to deaths of military conscripts. Prior to the arrest of some of the N!DA members, government officials harassed and threatened not only the members of the group, but also their families.

Five N!DA members remain wrongfully imprisoned in Azerbaijan, serving sentences between six and eight years. Together with the law firm McKool Smith, which like our other law firm partners provides its services *pro bono*, Freedom Now continues to campaign for their release.

Vietnam: Do Thi Minh Hanh



Do Thi Minh Hanh, a Vietnamese labor rights activist, was released on June 27, almost three years before the end of her seven-year prison sentence on national security charges.

In partnership with the law firm Woodley & McGillivray, Freedom Now pursued both public and private initiatives on behalf of Ms. Do and her two imprisoned colleagues, Mr. Doan Huy Chuong and Mr. Nguyen Hoang Quoc Hung. At the end of last year, *The Diplomat* published an oped by Greg McGillivray and Freedom

Now founder Jared Genser urging US Secretary of State John Kerry to highlight the cases during an upcoming trip to Hanoi. Working with the organization Boat People SoS, Freedom Now facilitated a letter from 11 members of the US Congress that called on the Vietnamese President to facilitate their release. Along with our partners Woodley & McGillivray and Boat People SoS, we continue to advocate on behalf of her imprisoned colleagues.

Working to Free the Changemakers

PARTNERING with foundations, such as Open Society Foundations and Oak Foundation, and law firms that provide free legal support, such as Dechert, Woodley & McGillivray and McKool Smith, Freedom Now worked on 27 cases this year. Among them were 15 cases in Eurasia, six in Asia, four in Africa, and two in the Middle East. Thematically, our casework covers individuals imprisoned for exercising a range of fundamental rights, including **seven cases of journalists and bloggers** imprisoned for their reporting, **nine cases of human rights defenders and lawyers** jailed for their advocacy, **eight cases of individuals targeted for their peaceful political beliefs** or civil society activism, and **three cases of individuals jailed for their religious beliefs, practices, or advocacy**.

On behalf of our clients in 2014, Freedom Now:

- 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;
- Transmitted emergency funds to clients and their families in need;
- Spoke publicly and published materials about our clients' cases;
- Highlighted issues related to our clients' wrongful imprisonment, such as controversial legislation;
- Provided briefings to various government officials and international institutions positioned to effectively raise our cases;
- Partnered with local activists and international NGOs to raise awareness about violations of fundamental rights and arbitrary detention; and
- Mobilized influential figures, such as members of the US Congress and Nobel laureates, to engage on our cases – publicly and privately.

In short, 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.

In 2014, Freedom Now observed an alarming crackdown on dissent and civil society in countries throughout the world. Journalists, human rights lawyers, and civil society leaders were harassed, arrested, and wrongfully imprisoned on patently illegal grounds or pursuant to fabricated charges. Innocent activists are being held in deplorable conditions with insufficient medical treatment and being subjected to long periods of pretrial detention and drawn out "trials" by courts that are neither impartial nor independent. Notably, Ethiopia and Azerbaijan were among those governments most ruthless in imprisoning individuals whose calls for democratic change and reform were heard throughout the international community and at home. In 2014, Freedom Now started working on behalf of 26 individuals imprisoned in these two countries, alone.



Clockwise from left: Executive Director Maran Turner speaking at a side event hosted by HRHF at the Council of Europe; Ms. Tran Thi Ngoc Minh, the mother of Freedom Now client Do Thi Minh Hanh, testifying before the US Lantos Commission on Human Rights; Jared Genser speaking at a press conference alongside famed Chinese human rights lawyer Chen Guangcheng, US Representatives Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Chris Smith (D-NJ); Freedom Now addressing human rights in Ethiopia, along with Ethiopian activists and partner organizations PEN International and the Committee to Protect Journalists, at the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review.

Seeking Freedom in Azerbaijan

While the occurrence of political prisoners in Azerbaijan is not a recent development, the number of new arrests, the categorical variety of political detainees, and the severity of the charges and length of prison terms is alarming. This latest trend in the country began around the time of the Arab Spring movements in 2011 and continued through Baku's hosting of the 2012 Eurovision contest, the presidential elections of 2013, and Azerbaijan's leadership of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers just this year.

The government of President Ilham Aliyev has ushered in legislation aimed at closing down civil society in the country; harassed journalists, activists, and opposition leaders; and imprisoned those that call attention to this betrayal of the country's obligations and

responsibilities to its citizens. During 2014, local human rights defenders in Azerbaijan reported that there are now nearly 100 political prisoners.



In July, Freedom Now's Executive Director Maran Turner traveled to Baku, Azerbaijan as part of a mission organized by the Oslo-based organization Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF). While in the country, Ms. Turner and HRHF's Head of Advocacy Florian Irminger met with human rights defenders, journalists, foreign embassies, and family members of activists who were wrongfully imprisoned. In addition to

gathering information needed to more effectively advocate for prisoners of conscience in the country, they provided interviews to local independent media.

Partnering with the law firm McKool Smith, Freedom Now is working on behalf of 14 individuals currently detained in Azerbaijan. As part of our joint efforts, we have prepared submissions to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, assisted in the preparation of legal briefs to the European Court of Human Rights, and mobilized influential policymakers, such as US Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), to help in our advocacy. Freedom Now is working in close collaboration with a number of organizations, including the Human Rights House Foundation, European Human Rights Advocacy Centre, Article 19, and the International Partnership Group for Azerbaijan, a coalition of more than a dozen organizations that includes Freedom Now.

Who we are helping in Azerbaijan

Human Rights Defenders: Between July 30 and August 8, 2014, the Azerbaijani government arrested a number of prominent human rights defenders, including **Rasul Jafarov** of the Human Rights Club, **Intigam Aliyev** of the Legal Education Center, and **Leyla and Arif Yunus** of the Institute of Peace and Democracy.



The primary charges lodged against them, in separate cases – tax evasion, illegal business activities, and abuse of authority – are related to their activities promoting respect for fundamental human rights in Azerbaijan and documenting rights violations, including the widespread use of arbitrary detention. Mr. and Mrs. Yunus also face

charges of treason, fraud, and forgery for their work promoting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan; the couple suffers from serious life-threatening medical ailments.

As a human rights defender, Mr. Jafarov worked extensively to raise international awareness about rights abuses in Azerbaijan – regularly engaging with the Council of Europe and the United Nations. A highly regarded human rights lawyer, Mr. Aliyev was a central figure engaging with the Council of Europe and preparing cases for the European Court of Human Rights. At the time of their arrests, Mr. Jafarov and Ms. Yunus had each compiled lists of political prisoners and were monitoring such cases; Mr. Aliyev was filing cases of politically motivated arrests with the European Court. It is because of the work of all four of these human rights defenders in publicizing and seeking international assistance for political prisoners in Azerbaijan that they are now themselves in prison, facing trial on erroneous charges.



Protestors calling for new government at a demonstration organized by an opposition political party in Azerbaijan.

Journalists: On June 21, 2012, police arrested **Hilal Mammadov**, a prominent minority rights activist and editor of the *Talyshi Sado* newspaper, on charges of drug possession, treason, and inciting ethnic hatred. Mr. Mammadov had been highly critical of government policies that discriminated against Azerbaijan's Talysh minority and just days before his arrest had publicly criticized the country's leadership and its handling of the 2012 Eurovision contest. Plain-clothed police officers detained Mr. Mammadov without a warrant, beat and threatened him, and insulted his ethnic identity. On September 27, 2013, the government sentenced him to five years in prison after proceedings that failed to meet international standards, according to an opinion issued by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.





Bloggers: On January 24, 2013, police arrested **Omar Mammadov**, a blogger and social media activist, charging him with drug trafficking. In the months before Mr. Mammadov’s arrest, authorities ordered him to take down his popular political satire page on Facebook, called “Selections from AzTV.” Held without access to an attorney for over 20 hours, Mr. Mammadov reported that police repeatedly punched him in the ribs and threatened his family in order to obtain a confession. Omar was sentenced to five years in prison on July 4, 2014. Freedom Now was present in the courtroom for the conclusion of his trial.

Opposition Leaders: On February 4, 2013, police arrested **Ilgar Mammadov**, an opposition leader and co-founder of the independent political party REAL (Republican Alternative), charging him with organizing mass disorder and resisting arrest. He was also the director of the Baku School of Political Studies, which is part of a network of schools affiliated with the Council of Europe. Before his detention, Mr. Mammadov and a colleague traveled to the Ismayilli District to obtain a first-hand account of events that led to violent demonstrations. After speaking with residents in Ismayilli and criticizing the government’s response on social media, Mr. Mammadov was arrested and held in pretrial detention for 10 months – a violation of his rights according to the European Court of Human Rights. After a trial fraught with procedural irregularities he was sentenced to seven years in prison.



Youth Activists: In March and April 2013, Azerbaijani authorities arrested seven activists with the **NIDA** youth organization and charged them under a variety of Criminal Code violations, including organizing a riot and possessing drugs and weapons. The arrests stemmed from the group’s activities online and its organizing of public demonstrations to protest the death of military conscripts, including a peaceful protest on March 10, 2013 that police violently dispersed with tear gas, rubber bullets, and water cannons. Three of the activists, **Bakhtiyar Guliyev**, **Shahin Novruzov**, and **Mahamad Azizov**, were arrested three days before the protest and held without access to a lawyer of their choosing. The government broadcast a “confession” by the three detainees on national television and then arrested four more activists: **Rashad Hassanov**,

Uzeyir Mammadli, Rashadat Akhundov and Zaur Gurbanli. The activists have reported threats and severe beatings at the hands of guards – in particular for the purposes of extracting confessions and statements about other activists. An eighth N!DA activist, **Elsever Mursalli**, was arrested in October 2013 and ultimately sentenced to two years in prison in separate proceedings. After over eight months of pretrial detention, the remaining activists were tried and ultimately sentenced on May 12, 2014 to between six and eight years in prison.

Civil Society: Police arrested Anar Mammadli, the chairman of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center in Baku, on December 16, 2013 and accused him of tax evasion, illegal business activities, and abuse of authority. Police arrested Mr. Mammadli after his organization issued a report critical of the Azerbaijani presidential election held two months before. The election observation was conducted in partnership with the registered Volunteers International Cooperation Public Union, an organization headed by Bashir Sulemanli, who was also detained. Although the government’s own expert witness was unable to describe the legal provisions or explain the charges against the defendants, Messrs. Mammadli and Sulemanli were convicted on May 21, 2014 and sentenced to six and one-half years and three and one-half years in prison, respectively.



In September, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe awarded Mr. Mammadli the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize – which honors outstanding civil society action in defense of human rights. His father accepted the award on behalf of his son.



Imprisoned Voices in Ethiopia



The Ethiopian government employs arbitrary detention to silence critical voices in the country, a clear violation of the right to freedom of expression, religion, and association. Authorities arrest journalists and bloggers who cover sensitive issues like separatist insurgencies or domestic protests as well as others who investigate corruption or call for political reform. The government also targets opposition politicians and religious leaders that condemn restrictions on the right to freedom of association. Today, 17 journalists and an untold numbers of religious and political leaders remain imprisoned.

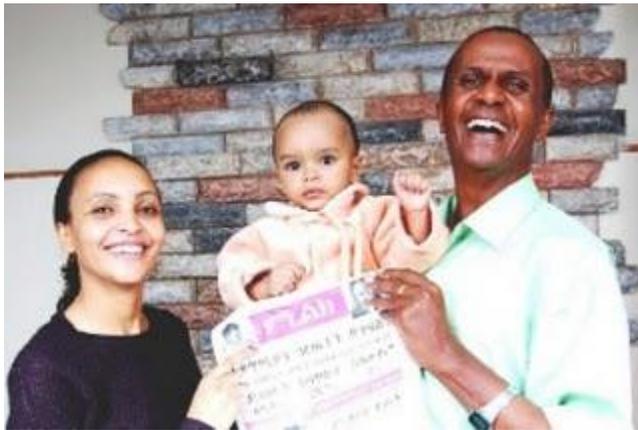
Ethiopian dissidents are frequently charged with security-related offenses under the country's overly broad 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation. Under this widely criticized law, even peaceful expression can be mischaracterized as "encouraging terrorism" and lead to long prison sentences for those convicted.



During such prosecutions, authorities routinely violate international due process standards, denying detainees access to their families and legal counsel. Dissidents are then subjected to politically-motivated trials without even the pretense of judicial impartiality. For example, during its prosecution of journalist Eskinder Nega, government officials repeatedly made public statements casting him as a terrorist but presented no evidence linking him to any terrorist activities—instead, it relied on his writings and speeches that called for non-violent democratic reform.

Freedom Now has consistently called for reform to the law in Ethiopia and for journalists convicted or held under such problematic legislation to be released. As part of our

efforts to support journalists and media freedom, Freedom Now works on two important cases, that of prominent journalist Eskinder Nega and a group of young bloggers and journalists arrested just last Spring. We have not only been advocating on their behalf before the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Africa Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, we participated in the Human Rights Council's periodic review and led a letter of 41 international and regional human rights organizations to the Ethiopian Prime Minister calling for an end to the use of terrorism laws against independent journalists and bloggers. For our work in Ethiopia, we have combined our efforts with many organizations, including Media Legal Defence Initiative, PEN International, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and the Ethiopian Human Rights Project.



Journalists: **Eskinder Nega** is a prominent journalist and blogger who has been detained in Ethiopia since September 2011 because of his critical online articles. Mr. Nega was charged under the widely criticized 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation and sentenced to 18 years in prison. In response to a legal petition submitted by Freedom Now, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued an opinion holding that his continued imprisonment

violates international law. Mr. Nega's case has been raised at the highest levels by governments, including the United States and the European Union. Mr. Nega is the 2012 recipient of the PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award.

The Zone 9 Bloggers are bloggers who were arrested in April 2014, along with three independent journalists – including the highly respected Tesfalem Waldyes – and subsequently charged with violations of the country's anti-terror law. The bloggers were associated with the "Zone 9" website, which called for democratic reform in Ethiopia. They were arrested soon after announcing on Facebook that they would relaunch the Zone 9 blog that had been previously suspended following government harassment. All nine of the individuals are being held in pre-trial detention, with any meaningful hearings yet to take place.



Arbitrary Detention in Central Asia: Enhancing Local Advocacy



This year, Freedom Now concluded a two-year project addressing large-scale arbitrary detention in Central Asia. Helping us represent individual clients were Dechert LLP and Covington & Burling LLP, both of which provided *pro bono* legal assistance. As part of our core work on behalf of ten individuals, we submitted case briefs to the United Nations and mounted a sustained political advocacy campaign, which started with our first case adopted in 2009. This year we went further to highlight the particularly pervasive problem of arbitrary detention in Uzbekistan by creating a website that catalogs the cases of people believed to be prisoners of conscience and an instructional manual on how local activists can better engage in international legal advocacy.

Freedom Now initiated this website project to present a more complete picture of arbitrary detention in Uzbekistan. The website hosts the most comprehensive database of individuals detained in Uzbekistan, either as alleged prisoners of conscience or those who have been charged with crimes that indicated political motives and whose prosecution reportedly fell short of international due process standards. Already, there are more than 100 individuals in the database, with more names and information being added. We hope that by providing this information and demonstrating the breadth of this particular human rights crisis, more individuals and organizations will be inspired to advocate for the release of these individuals believed to be wrongly imprisoned in Uzbekistan. You can access the website at <http://www.uzbekpoliticalprisoners.org>.

In an effort to boost the efficacy of advocacy undertaken by human rights defenders and lawyers in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, we produced a manual that provides guidance about strategies for international advocacy, information on available international mechanisms where redress for human rights violations can be sought, and detailed instruction on how to investigate abuses and prepare legal submissions to UN bodies.

View this in-depth manual at: <http://uzbekpoliticalprisoners.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/UN-Advocacy-Guide.pdf>

Who we are helping in Central Asia



Gulgeldy Annaniyazov is a Turkmen human rights activist who returned to Turkmenistan in 2008 after living in Norway and was arrested for illegal entry and sentenced to 11 years in prison following a closed trial.



Salijon Abdurakhmanov is an independent journalist in Uzbekistan who was convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2008 on fabricated drug charges.



Bobomurod Razzakov is a human rights activist and farmer who coordinated with international news agencies and was arrested in July 2013 on fabricated charges of human trafficking. Mr. Razzakov has nearly three more years in prison.



Azam Farmonov is a prominent human rights defender in Uzbekistan who was arrested in 2006 on trumped-up extortion charges and is currently serving a nine-year prison sentence.



Gaybullo Jalilov is a prominent human rights defender in Uzbekistan who has been wrongfully detained since 2009 on security charges and is currently serving an 11-year prison sentence.



Dilmurod Saidov is a prominent Uzbek human rights activist and journalist who was convicted on fabricated extortion charges and sentenced to 12 and one-half years in prison in 2009.



Akzam Turgunov is a longtime human rights leader sentenced to 10 years in prison in Uzbekistan as a result of his political and human rights activities, including anti-corruption advocacy.

Representing Prisoners of Conscience in China

China's government is among the most politically repressive in the world with widespread, documented human rights violations. With the endemic use of arbitrary detention by the government, it is one of the most dangerous places in which a human rights defender can try to work. It is not known just how many prisoners of conscience there are detained in the country or just how extensive is the network of "black jails" into which dissidents and activists disappear every day.

Freedom Now has worked on cases in China for more than ten years, including that of highly respected Tiananmen Square activist, Dr. Yang Jianli, who was released in 2007 after five years. Dr. Yang now leads the US-based Initiatives for China and serves on Freedom Now's Board of Advisors. Together, we pursue extensive public and private advocacy on three of the most important cases in China. Through our collective efforts, we hope not only to secure the release of our clients but to bring attention to the scores of others who remain imprisoned for peacefully exercising basic rights like freedom of expression.



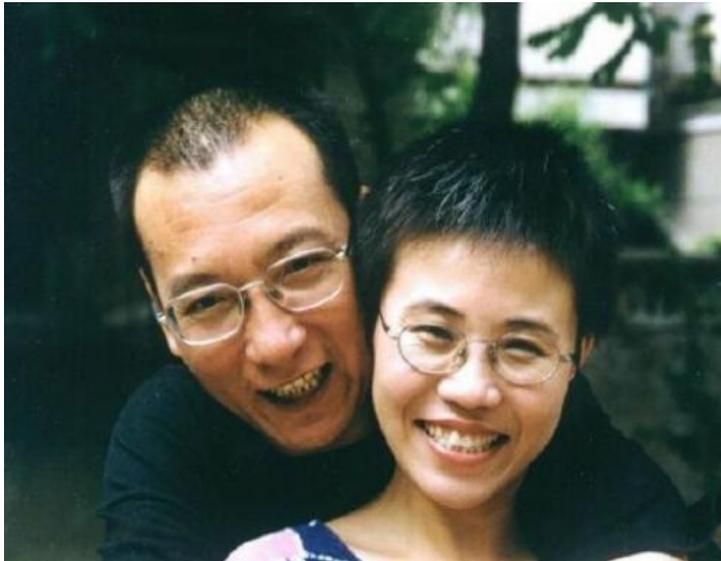
Geng He, wife of Mr. Gao, speaks about her husband's plight at the National Press Club.

wife, Geng He, Freedom Now's founder Jared Genser has made a number of public addresses, including testifying before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and an event at the National Press Club.

Gao Zhisheng is a human rights lawyer who has been repeatedly detained and brutally tortured by government officials because of his outspoken advocacy on behalf of his clients. His most recent imprisonment, which lasted three years and followed 20 months of *incommunicado* detention, ended in August. However, authorities immediately placed him under strict house arrest without any legal justification. As a result of his mistreatment he is critically ill.

In addition to extensive private engagement aimed at obtaining more high level influential assistance on the case of Gao Zhisheng, Freedom Now engaged in a number of public activities to press for his release, including facilitating letters from members of the US Senate and publishing opeds. Working alongside Mr. Gao's courageously outspoken

After years of imprisonment in black jails and harsh prison facilities, Freedom Now was happy to celebrate Mr. Gao's official release from prison in August. However, Mr. Gao remains under house arrest in China, where his freedom is completely restricted and he remains in peril. Freedom Now continues to advocate for his full rights and liberty to be restored.



Dr. Liu Xiaobo is a renowned intellectual and pro-democracy activist who has been detained since 2008 on charges of “inciting subversion” for his activities promoting peaceful democratic reform in China. Dr. Liu was a principal promoter of the “Charter 08” democracy manifesto signed by Chinese intellectuals and human rights activists, and published on December 10, 2008, the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In addition to imposing an 11-year sentence on Dr. Liu, Chinese authorities placed his wife, **Liu Xia**, under house arrest in 2010. Dr. Liu is the 2010 recipient of the **Nobel Peace Prize**. This year, Freedom Now pushed to rename the street in front of the Chinese embassy after Dr. Liu – an initiative that resulted in considerable media attention, a resolution from the Washington, D.C. City Council, and an amendment from the US House of Representatives Appropriations Committee.

“*Guaranteeing human rights is both the most important objective of a government and the foundation of the legitimacy of its public authority; it is also the intrinsic requirement of the policy of “putting people first.”*”

- Charter 08

Gambia: Accountability for Disappearances and Media Repression

Freedom Now began representing Gambian journalist **Ebrima Manneh** in 2008 after he was taken from his office at the *Daily Observer* by officers with the National Intelligence Agency. His crime: attempting to republish a BBC article that was critical of Gambia's president.



Mr. Manneh has been missing since he was taken into custody, and he is not the only one to be disappeared by government authorities. Other journalists, political activists, and even businessmen have gone missing. Freedom Now has sought to obtain accountability for Mr. Manneh's disappearance and presumed murder, calling for independent investigations to be carried out by the United Nations.

To that end, we presented materials to more than six UN offices, including the Political Affairs Division, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Human Rights Council divisions of the Special Procedures, about Mr. Manneh's case and others who disappeared under similar circumstances.

After our efforts and those of US Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), we are thrilled to report that two separate human rights mandate holders with the United Nations – the Special Rapporteur on Torture and the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions – undertook a country visit to Gambia in October of this year. Their mandate, in part, was to investigate the disappearance of Mr. Manneh and others as well as to look into allegations of torture and mistreatment. A report of their findings will be issued in the Spring of 2015.





Lapiro de Mbanga: Mourning the Passing of a Musical Legend and Hero of Human Rights

Lapiro de Mbanga (born Pierre Roger Lambo Sandjo) was a beloved singer-songwriter from Cameroon who was wrongly imprisoned by the Cameroonian government for three years as punishment for his outspoken musical advocacy against corruption and injustice. Denied adequate medical treatment in prison, Lapiro was diagnosed with cancer one month after his release in 2011. The cancer had already spread from his prostate to his bones and eventually spread to his brain. He passed away in Buffalo, New York on March 16, 2014.

Lapiro was known for using satirical lyrics in his music to address social and economic inequality in Cameroon and the government's failures to meet the needs of the people. He was a member of the Social Democratic Front, the primary opposition party in Cameroon. As an outspoken critic of longtime Cameroonian President Paul Biya, Lapiro wrote and recorded the song "Constitution Constipée" in response to the President's successful bid to eliminate presidential term limits. Authorities banned the song and Lapiro was arrested on charges related to the mass demonstrations that engulfed Cameroon in 2008.

Lapiro served three years in New Bell prison, known locally as "hell on earth," due to its horrific conditions and use as a detention center for the country's most hardened criminals. While in detention, his health deteriorated significantly.

Freedom Now partnered with the law firm Wilmer Hale and together we mounted a legal and advocacy campaign on Lapiro's behalf. We submitted the case to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which found his detention arbitrary and called on the Government of Cameroon to release him and pay compensation for the violation of his fundamental rights under international law.

Lapiro had many people supporting him, including the Copenhagen-based organization Freemuse, his sponsoring guitar company Vigier, and the Lantos Foundation. Among his biggest campaigners was US Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL). Lapiro was released from prison on April 8, 2011.



In September 2012 and resulting from the year-long efforts of Wilmer Hale, the United States granted Lapiro and his family asylum. Along with his wife, Louissette, and three children, Lapiro settled in Buffalo, New York.

Lapiro left behind four children (one of whom is still in Cameroon) and his wife who was at his bedside much the same way she stood by his side throughout his imprisonment.

Freedom Now mourns Lapiro's passing along with the people of Cameroon for whom he had pledged his life's work. His was a life of great impact. His activism and his music lives on in Cameroon and around the world among all who celebrate his life.

An excerpt from "Constitution Constipée":

What is the urgency and why this fierce tenacity to absolutely change Article 6 paragraph 2 of a constitution whose gradual implementation has never even started ?

10 years have passed, the Senate and the regions are still waited for ...10 years have passed and the people are still waiting for the declaration of the assets of individuals involved in managing public funds, which in this period of struggle against endemic corruption is a priority!

10 years have passed, the people are still waiting to have an independent structure to manage free and transparent elections so that the vast majority of citizens have the right to vote.

For that, the marathonians of the trough have no interest, except to eliminate the Presidential term limits of the Constitution.

In the United States of America, France, the Soviet Union and in true democracies, presidential terms are limited, in Cameroon, the country of my ancestors, the cradle of advanced democracy, there is appeasement, electoral fraud and a paradise of corruption.

No-one cares. No-one cares. After all, Cameroon is Cameroon.

Partnerships toward Better Advocacy



Over the last year, Freedom Now partnered with Central European University on a student-led project analyzing European activism on human rights, both at the EU institutional level and from individual member states. The school is especially proud of its collaboration with us and the team presented their work with Freedom Now personally to George Soros when he toured the school in November. The University is excited to renew this partnership and we are preparing a new project for 2015.



Program Attorney Patrick Griffith (far left) joins domestic and international lawyers discussing litigation strategies for protecting the right to free assembly and association.

In October, Freedom Now was asked to join the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association in Naivasha, Kenya for a high level workshop. The meeting, which brought together international and domestic lawyers, focused on legal strategies to reverse the threats to free association and assembly throughout the world. In contributing to the discussion, Freedom Now's senior program attorney Patrick Griffith highlighted worrying new tactics employed by the governments in Azerbaijan and Ethiopia and shared Freedom Now's model of combined legal and public engagement as a way to push back on attempts to limit space for activists.

How You Can Help in 2015

Learn more about Freedom Now and our clients at <http://www.freedom-now.org> and follow us on Twitter @freedomnoworg.

Consider giving a [donation](#) to support our work and to the prisoners of conscience we help. 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 Freedom Now with invaluable case assistance.

We accept monetary donations by check, wire transfer, and credit card. We also accept gifts of stock and donated office equipment.

Please click here to make a tax deductible donation: <http://www.freedom-now.org/donate/>



Former Freedom Now client Nyi Nyi Aung coming home to Maryland following his release from unlawful imprisonment in Burma in 2010.

Financial Report 2013/2014

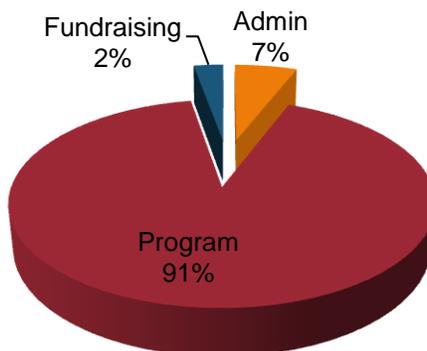
Public Support and Revenue

	November 2013–October 2014		
	Unrestricted	Restricted	Total
Foundation Grants	\$125,000	\$37,918	\$162,918
Individual contributions	\$162,360	-	\$162,360
Pro Bono Support (2013) ¹	\$508,500	-	\$508,500-
Total Public Support and Revenue	\$795,860	\$37,918	\$833,778

Expenses

	November 2013–October 2014
Salaries and Benefits	\$212,387
Legal Service	\$508,500
Office rent	\$13,192
Travel and Meetings	\$11,205
Consulting Fees	\$8,750
Direct Support Sub-grants	\$4,023
Telecommunications	\$3,594
Admin Fees	\$2,123
Printing, Postage, Supplies	\$554
Total	\$764,328

Expenses by Category



¹ Includes the 900 hours of *pro bono* time provided by law firm volunteers only and obtained during the 2013 calendar year. *Pro bono* rates are calculated at \$565/hr, which is an average of rates charged by the law firms that provide services to Freedom Now.



FREEDOM NOW

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