

FREEDOM NOW

Annual Report
2017





INTRODUCTION

Freedom Now helps free prisoners of conscience around the world. These courageous individuals speak their minds, engage in independent journalism, organize against corrupt government practices, and seek to practice their religious beliefs independent from government control – but in retaliation for their exercise of these internationally-protected fundamental rights, they are subjected to politically motivated trials where rule of law is ignored and a guilty verdict is predetermined. They are imprisoned in inhumane conditions, mistreated or even tortured, and sentenced to serve many years in jail.

Freedom Now’s legal assistance before international bodies is often a prisoner of conscience’s only chance to hold their government accountable. And the high level attention and advocacy campaigns we mobilize on their behalf get results – their freedom. With each case and country project, we make a substantial impact; our work results not only in the individual’s freedom, but also in publicizing important human rights issues and in helping to root out systemic causes of arbitrary detention.

“My thoughts go to Freedom Now...and all those who have helped me during these times. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of you, and I hope that you will not give up, but that you will persevere in the defense of individual freedoms.”

Lewis Medjo, journalist and former Freedom Now client

My heart broke when I first heard the news in the early morning hours of July 13, 2017. Thousands of miles away, Shenyang's First Hospital of China Medical University released a five sentence statement, unceremoniously announcing that their patient Liu Xiaobo had died after succumbing to terminal liver cancer. This is how the world learned of the passing of the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.

Dr. Liu was not only China's most well-known dissident, but, in life as well as in death, he represented the best of humanity. He embodied the universal values that all democracies embrace and he stood for the unwavering struggle of imprisoned people. It is a tragedy that Dr. Liu was only able to find true freedom in death. His passing is an immeasurable loss, yet we draw inspiration from his resolute commitment to democracy, freedom, and human rights.

Despite my grief, I am heartened to know that Freedom Now will continue to work in the spirit of Dr. Liu's legacy by advocating on behalf of political prisoners. I know this from my own experience. As a young activist, I was forced to flee my native China in 1989 after the Tiananmen Square massacre. When I returned to China in 2002, I was arrested and imprisoned for five years. It was only through the efforts of Freedom Now that international pressure forced the Chinese government to release me and I was able to reunite with my family.

This year alone, Freedom Now's advocacy on behalf of prisoners of conscience helped free eight people who were wrongly imprisoned by repressive governments in Burma, Cameroon, Iran, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam. These individuals were vital voices for democracy and human rights in authoritarian countries. Their work brought to light human rights abuses and government malfeasance. Their imprisonment was designed to extinguish that light and plunge citizens into darkness. Freedom Now's efforts on behalf of these imprisoned leaders not only directed urgent attention to their plight and human rights violations in their countries, but in helping to secure their release from wrongful imprisonment, Freedom Now gave life to this light again.

In this report you will find stories of the individuals Freedom Now helped free in 2017, prisoners of conscience they continue to advocate for, and the new and innovative ways with which they are attacking the insidious practice of arbitrary detention and lack of respect for rule of law.

I hope these stories provide some light in what has been a dark year.

Sincerely,

Yang Jianli

Advisory Board Member and Former Client
Freedom Now



BY THE NUMBERS: WHO WE'VE HELPED IN 2017



4 individuals jailed for religious beliefs, practices or advocacy



9 journalists imprisoned for reporting



5 human rights defenders jailed for advocacy



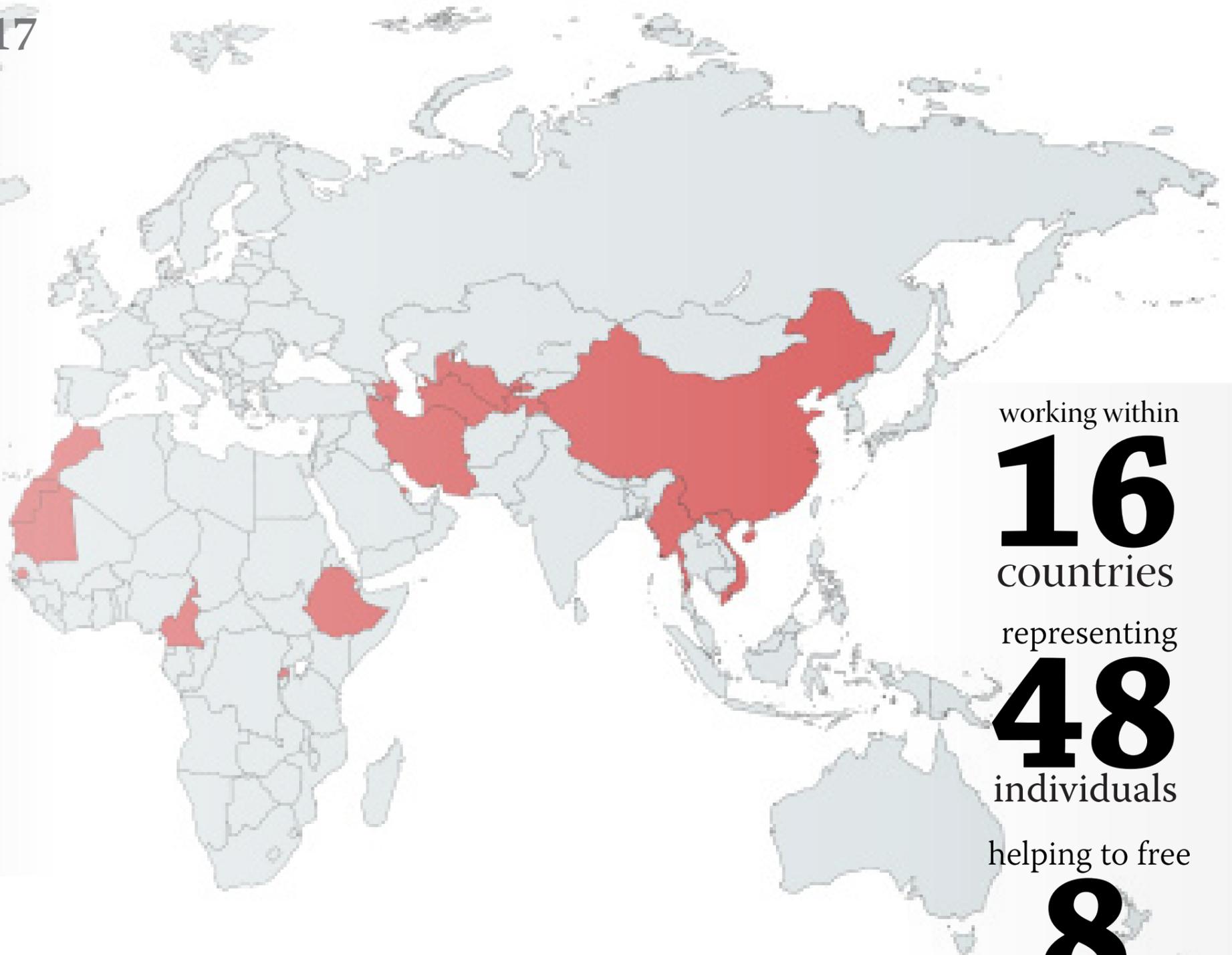
10 politicians jailed for roles in opposition



16 targeted for political beliefs or civil activism



4 lawyers arrested for defending human rights



working within
16
countries

representing
48
individuals

helping to free
8
clients



*The United Nations building
(Photo/John Isaac)*

SECURING JUSTICE FOR THE WRONGLY IMPRISONED

We defend the rule of law and expose unjust persecution by representing prisoners of conscience before international courts and bodies.

Freedom Now, along with our pro bono legal teams, won five cases in 2017 for clients in Ethiopia, Iran, Mauritania, and Uzbekistan. We filed another six cases this year on behalf of clients in Morocco, Rwanda, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam.

Our international pro bono partners contributed approximately \$1.2 million in pro bono hours in 2016.

We expect to receive the same level of support in 2017.



TAKING ACTION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

We stand up to repressive governments, providing support to human rights defenders by mobilizing the full weight of influential officials, decision makers, and key institutions on behalf of our clients.

We bring human rights issues to sympathetic countries, working to elevate individual cases with officials and policymakers. We educate and coordinate bipartisan action from policymakers, such as in the form of group letters, statements, and individual engagement. To heighten attention on a particular issue or case, we hold public events and demonstrations.

In December 2016, the Embassy of Azerbaijan hosted a Hanukkah party at the Trump International Hotel in Washington, DC. The Government of Azerbaijan portrays itself as broadly tolerant of all religious groups in the country, despite the fact that approximately 70 religious activists are currently imprisoned on various charges.

Freedom Now organized a protest at the hotel calling for the release of these prisoners and religious freedom in Azerbaijan.

(Photo/Alex Raufoglu)



UN Secretary-General António Guterres traveled to Tajikistan in June 2017 to meet with President Emomali Rahmon.

Freedom Now coordinated a letter with Civil Rights Defenders and the Norwegian Helsinki Commission calling on the Secretary-General to condemn the government of Tajikistan's unprecedented crackdown on peaceful political opposition parties, which has resulted in the imprisonment of between 100 and 200 individuals since 2014.

(Photo/Asia-Plus)

AMPLIFYING THE VOICE OF THE DETAINED

Authoritarianism thrives in silence. We expose and spread awareness about human rights abuses and repressive actions, telling the stories our clients are unable to from the confines of a prison cell.

By amplifying important human rights issues and our clients in the media, we ensure that dictators and their allies cannot hide under the cover of darkness.



Freedom Now founder Jared Genser and Babak Namazi held a press conference in Vienna, Austria in April 2017. Babak is the brother of Siamak Namazi and son of Baquer Namazi, Iranian-Americans held captive in Iran since October 2015 and February 2016, respectively.

(Photo/Freedom Now)



Photo: Larry Lauer

A security guard stands outside the Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku, Azerbaijan, the site of the 2013 "US-Azerbaijan Vision for the Future" convention organized by Houston businessman Kemal Okuz. (The Washington Diplomat)

Since 2011, a wide-scale crackdown on human rights and civil society has taken place in the country of Azerbaijan. The government has silenced independent voices, arresting journalists, lawyers and activists and sentencing them to long prison terms on fabricated charges.

Why should the repressive actions of a government thousands of miles away matter to the citizens of Houston? Because Houston and Azerbaijan's capital city of Baku are sister cities and have been for nearly 40 years. Though authoritarianism has been a mainstay in Azerbaijan since the Soviet era, the escalation under Azerbaijani president Ilham Aliyev compels Houstonians to take a closer look at this relationship. Put simply, is Baku what we really want in a sister city?



Sister city relationships are created to promote cross-cultural understanding and appreciation between citizens as well as foster cultural and scientific

Tajikistan: Authorities Skip Warsaw Meeting, Tighten Screws on Opposition Activists

September 14, 2017 - 1:12pm, by Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska | European Union | Poland | Tajikistan

International groups are taking steps to highlight the situation in Tajikistan. For example, Freedom Now, a US-based group that advocates for the release of political prisoners around the world, has filed a petition with the Human Rights Council of the United Nations over the case of Mahmatali Hayit, the deputy leader of the IRPT. Hayit was detained in September 2015 and then later convicted on coup charges. Case materials connected with Hayit's trial remain unavailable to this day.



Trump must keep China honest on human rights, starting with Nobel laureate

BY JARED GENSER, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 02/17/17 04:30 PM EST

126 SHARES

SHARE

TWEET

PLUS ONE



© Getty Images

With China's economic and political rise, the United States has abandoned serious efforts to press President Xi Jinping to relent on the widespread human rights abuses of his citizens. This is a dramatic strategic error that should be reversed by President Trump.

The Chinese Communist Party, which comprises some 90 million members, maintains an iron grip on power, ruling a country with a population of more than 1.4 billion. The government lives in profound fear of its own population spending well over \$120 billion annually on domestic security.

Those who dare to speak out face imprisonment, disappearance, torture, and even death. The Chinese people, however, are desperate for a voice in their own future. Their resilience is remarkable. Despite the risks, there are more than 150,000 protests annually.

It is only by the world strongly confronting China on rights abuses and changing the government's behavior, however, that more people will have the courage to speak out. As a start, it is crucial to secure the release of the world's only imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Liu Xiaobo and his wife, Liu Xia. Today, a group of 10 of his fellow Peace Laureates, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Jody Williams have urged Xi to release them, but much more is needed.

Liu Xiaobo is a Chinese scholar and dissident who was sentenced to 11 years in prison for "inciting subversion of state power" in December 2009 for his role in drafting Charter 08, a manifesto for transforming China to a multi-party democracy. Shortly after being announced as a recipient of the 2010 Peace Prize, Liu's wife was placed under house arrest, where she has been held without charge or trial ever since. China has brazenly claimed she is under "no legal restriction."

In 2011, the United Nations found both Lius were being detained in violation of international law and urged their immediate release. But they

The Boston Globe

US won't participate in UN Human Rights Council without reforms, Tillerson says

By Edith M. Lederer | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS MARCH 15, 2017

UNITED NATIONS — Secretary of State Rex Tillerson says the United States will not continue participating in the Human Rights Council unless the UN rights agency undergoes "considerable reform."

He gave no time frame for reforms to take place, saying in a letter to eight non-governmental organizations obtained Wednesday by The Associated Press that the US will continue to participate in the council's current session in Geneva.

The eight organizations, which focus on human rights and support for the United Nations, had written to Tillerson asking the United States to maintain its engagement with the rights council. He urged them to encourage reforms in the council, saying that "would be most helpful."

The eight organizations that sent the letter were the Better World Campaign, Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, Freedom House, Freedom Now, Human Rights First, Human Rights Campaign, Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights and the United Nations Association of the United States of America.



Liu Xiaobo (right) with his wife Liu Xia. Liu Xia remains under house arrest in China.

(Photo/Reuters)

THE PASSING OF LIU XIAOBO

Together with people from all over the world, we mourned the passing of 2010 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Liu Xiaobo in July. Dr. Liu was a courageous champion of human rights and his dedication – at great personal cost – to democratic ideals cannot be overstated. His perseverance and determination in the face of great suffering, not the least of which was constant harassment and imprisonment, was an inspiration to millions.

Freedom Now began representing Dr. Liu in 2010. Our Executive Director Maran Turner was fortunate enough to attend the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Oslo that December and vividly remembers the empty chair on stage, a symbol of the disgraceful treatment by the Chinese government of someone who deserved to be celebrated.

Dr. Liu's heroism and the terrible price he paid will not be forgotten. His wife, Liu Xia, remains under the tight control of security services in China and Freedom Now continues to fight for her freedom.



Freedom Now joined other organizations, including English Pen, Human Rights Watch, and Reporters Without Borders, for a vigil in London shortly after Dr. Liu's passing.

(Photo/Rebecca Vincent)

A LIFE SAVED

In late December 2013, Mohammed Shaikh Ould Mohammed Ould Mkhaitir published his first blog post. It did not occur to him that such an action could lead to his death.

Mohammed's blog spoke to one of the most pernicious problems in his home country of Mauritania - ethnic and caste discrimination. Specifically, he challenged the use of religion to legitimize widespread discrimination against members of certain castes. Within weeks Mohammed was arrested and charged with apostasy. After a speedy trial, he was sentenced to death by firing squad.

After nearly three years of delays, the Court of Appeals overturned Mohammed's death sentence in November. They reduced his sentence to two years and a small fine. Immediately after the decision was read in court protests broke out, with hundreds of people calling for Mohammed's death.

Freedom Now has been involved in Mohammed's case since early 2015. We submitted a legal petition to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and in June it issued an opinion finding Mohammed's detention to be in violation of international law and calling for his immediate release. In November 2016, we joined the Committee to Protect Journalists, Reporters without Borders, and PEN America in appealing directly to President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz to intervene in the case.

We are greatly relieved that Mohammed is no longer facing a firing squad for merely expressing an opinion. We continue to work with government officials to ensure he can live the rest of his life without worrying about retribution.



(Photo/Mohammed Shaikh Ould Mohammed Ould Mkhaitir)

A LABOR ACTIVIST FREED IN VIETNAM BUT MORE REMAIN

It took only 10 days for the Vietnamese government to decide that Doan Huy Chuong, Nguyen Hoang Quoc Hung, and Do Thi Minh Hanh were a threat to national security. The three were arrested in February 2010 after providing assistance to striking workers at a garment factory. The government decided this action was so frightening that it sentenced the activists to up to nine years in prison. During their imprisonment, the trio was repeatedly beaten, subjected to solitary confinement, and suffered from ill-health.

After more than three years of imprisonment, Do was released early in June 2014. Doan was released in February 2017, but Nguyen remains in prison. Over the past five years we have repeatedly engaged Vietnamese and U.S. policymakers on this case, compelling both the U.K. Parliament and the U.S. House of Representatives to call for the release of the activists. Our efforts at the UN resulted in the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention finding Vietnam to be in violation of international law.

We will continue to work with our law firm partner Woodley & McGillivray to pressure the Vietnamese government to release Nguyen and respect the right of its citizens to organize.



Doan Huy Chuong



**Nguyen Hoang
Quoc Hung**



Do Thi Minh Hanh

(Photo/Baovelaodong.com)

© baovelaodong.com (UBBV)

SEVEN YEARS IN PRISON FOR A LETTER

Behnam Ebrahimzadeh had already been in prison for four years when he decided to write a letter to the UN Special Rapporteur on Iran. The labor and child rights activist was arrested in June 2010, accused of participating in a protest for which he was sentenced to five years in prison. Just a few months away from release, he bravely wrote a letter to the UN representative, detailing the suspicious death of an inmate at the notorious Evin prison.

He provided shocking accounts of guards beating inmates and placing them in solitary confinement as punishment to those who protested the death of their fellow prisoner. Shortly afterwards, Behnam was charged with new offenses, including “propaganda against the state,” “assembly and collusion against national security,” “using satellite equipment,” and “keeping a deck of cards.” He was ultimately sentenced to an additional seven years and ten months in prison.

To help free Behnam, Freedom Now worked as part of a team of UK-based pro bono lawyers and human rights activists, including Hardwicke Chambers, Lambeth Law Centre, and the Campaign to Free Political Prisoners in Iran.



Since his release, Behnam has returned to advocating for the human rights of children in Iran.

(Photo/Behnam Ebrahimzadeh)



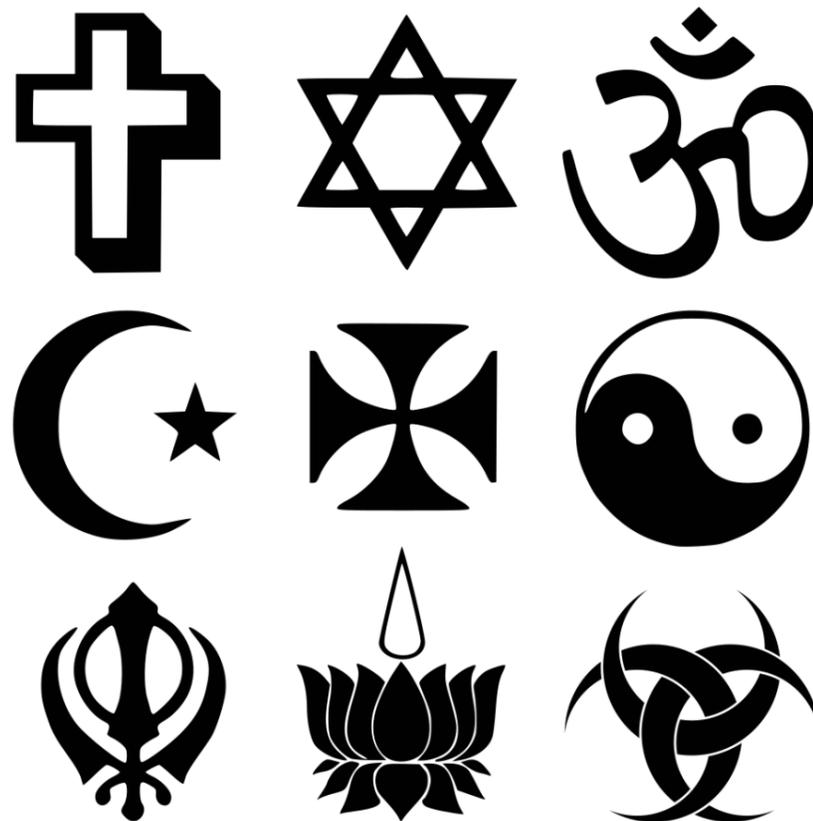
As part of our advocacy, in March 2017 our law firm partner Shazia Akhtar of Hardwicke Chambers delivered remarks at the UN Human Rights Council on Behnam's case before representatives of the High Commissioner of Human Rights and the Secretary General.

(Photo/Freedom Now)



Behnam (center) shortly after his release from prison.

(Photo/ Shiva Mahbobi)



BRIDGING RELIGIOUS DIVIDES IN BURMA

Zaw Zaw Latt and Pwint Phyu Latt are two Muslim activists that strived to bring peace to different religious groups in Burma. The two embarked on a peace delegation to the fractious Kachin state in June 2013, meeting with Buddhists and Christians. A year later, they traveled to Chin state on the border with India to deliver humanitarian aid.

These trips were viewed with suspicion by a Buddhist nationalist group, which dug up the pictures on Zaw Zaw Latt's Facebook page documenting these missions of peace and called on the government to prosecute the activists. In 2016 the government convicted Zaw Zaw and Pwint Phyu of violations of the Immigration (Emergency Provisions) Act and the Unlawful Association Act and sentenced them to four years of hard labor for their efforts to bridge religious divides.

They were released in May 2017 along with 259 prisoners under an amnesty by President Htin Kyaw's in advance of the Union Peace Conference. That same week Burma's highest Buddhist authority, the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee, banned the nationalist group that had targeted Zaw Zaw and Pwint Phyu, designating it an illegitimate organization.

Remaining steadfast activists, upon their release Zaw Zaw and Pwint Phyu spoke out about inhumane conditions in the prison where they had been held and about the plight of those still wrongly imprisoned there.



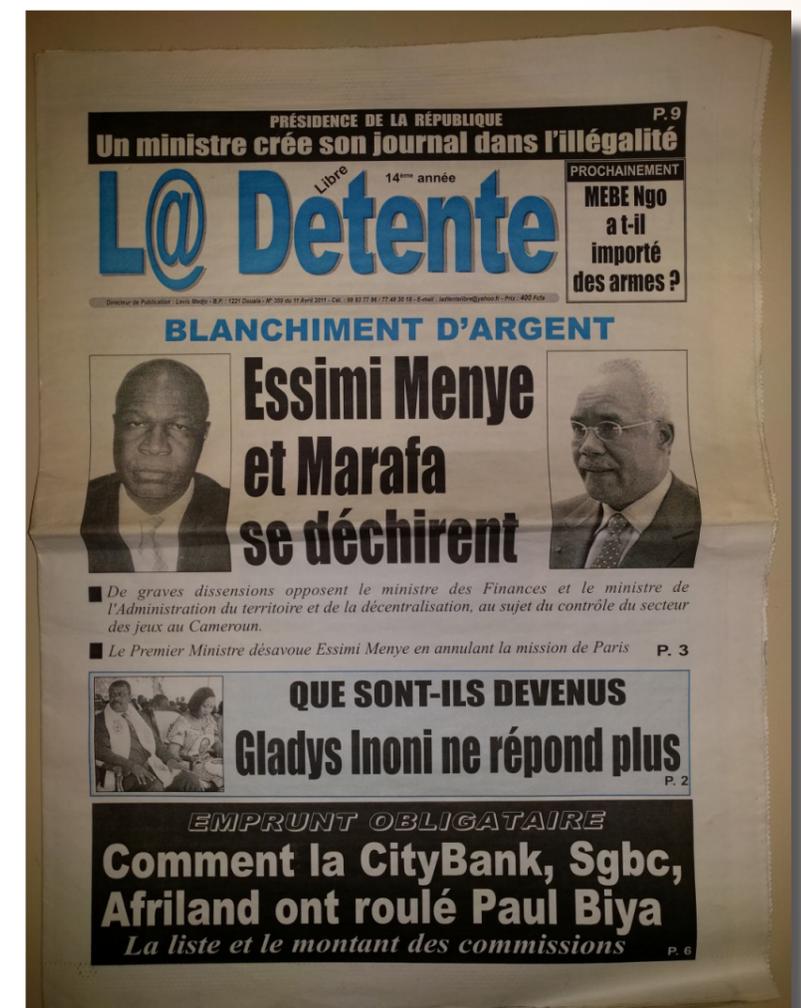
*Journalist Lewis Medjo
(Photo/ Le Scoops du Camer)*

INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM IN CAMEROON

Lewis Medjo is a fearless and dedicated Cameroonian journalist who has reported for years about the corruption of President Paul Biya and his government; a dedication that he has paid for through repeated periods of imprisonment. Freedom Now first helped Lewis when he was imprisoned in 2008 after he published an article about President Biya compromising the independence of the Supreme Court. Lewis spent two years in prison before private initiatives helped secure his release.

Within six months of his release, and despite significant medical ailments, Lewis' newspaper Le Détente Messenger, was being published once again. Unfortunately, Lewis was arrested again in February 2017 and learned that in 2015 he had been convicted of defamation in absentia for a 2012 article he had published about a prominent politician accused of car theft. He served six months in prison before he was released in August 2017.

*The first issue of Le Détente Messenger after Lewis' release from prison in 2010
(Photo/Freedom Now)*





Azamjon (right) after his release from prison.

(Photo/Vasila Inoyatova)



Salijon (left) after his release from prison.

(Photo/ Abdurakhman Tashanov)



Akzam after his release from prison

(Photo/ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty)

UZBEK SPRING

The death of President Islam Karimov in September 2016 seemed to be the dawn of a new era for Uzbekistan. For the first time in 25 years, the country would have a new ruler, one who it was hoped would abandon the authoritarian policies of his predecessor. When Shavkat Mirziyoyev was elected president in December 2016, many observers approached the event with cautious optimism. After all, he had served as prime minister for over a decade, a position squarely within Karimov's inner circle.

The release of human rights defender Azamjon Farmonov, journalist Salijon Abdurakhmanov, and activist Akzam Turgunov all within the first week of October 2017 was a very welcome event.

Azamjon spent more than one-fourth of his life in prison. An advocate for farmer's rights, he was arrested in April 2006 during a raid on his apartment in which police struck his pregnant wife, knocking her unconscious. He was sentenced to nine years in prison on extortion charges, but just as his sentence was about to end in April 2015, authorities added an additional five years for allegedly violating minor prison rules.

Salijon is an outspoken journalist who wrote an article criticizing the traffic police in northwestern Uzbekistan. In June 2008, the traffic police stopped Salijon's car and planted drugs in the trunk. He was charged with distribution and sentenced him to 10 years.

Akzam is one of Uzbekistan's most prominent human rights activists. He was the founder of the NGO Mazlum (The Oppressed), a human rights organization that advocates on behalf of prisoners of conscience and protests against the use of torture. He was arrested in July 2008 on extortion charges and sentenced to 10 years in prison after being subjected to torture.

Despite the release of these three men, hundreds of political prisoners are still detained in Uzbekistan. Freedom Now continues to advocate for the release of Aramais Avakyan, Gaybullo Jalilov, Dilmurod Saidov, and all prisoners of conscience in the country.

A CRUSADING JOURNALIST

Since her release from unlawful detention in 2016, Khadija Ismayilova continues to be a champion of human rights and investigative reporting. One of Azerbaijan's most prominent journalists, she is still subject to a travel ban that was imposed when she was released. Despite the government's attempts to interfere with her journalism, she persists. Over the last year, she has helped uncover corruption at the heart of President Ilham Aliyev's regime, and for her efforts she has won international accolades.

In collaboration with the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, Khadija exposed a massive government money-laundering scheme nicknamed the "Azerbaijani Laundromat" where three billion dollars was laundered through UK registered shell companies. These revelations sent shock waves through Europe, where an investigation was already being conducted into Azerbaijan's alleged campaign to bribe members of the Council of Europe.

The international community continues to recognize Khadija for her unparalleled contributions to journalism and human rights. This year she was awarded both the Allard Prize for International Integrity and the Right Livelihood Award, which is widely referred to as the "Alternative Nobel Prize."



(Photo/Aziz Karimov)

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM UNDER THREAT

Since its independence from the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan has promoted itself as a tolerant country, a land where many religious groups, including Muslims and Jews, can peacefully co-exist. In reality, however, the practice of religion is tightly controlled by the state. Observers believe this pressure by the government makes religious groups more likely to be influenced by outside forces.

Since 2007, Azerbaijan has imprisoned more than 100 individuals for exercising their religious freedom. More than half of these arrests have occurred since 2015 as the scope of repression rapidly increased. One example is the imprisonment of Taleh Bagirov, leader of the Muslim Unity Movement (MUM), a religious organization. Taleh is a prominent imam and a vocal critic of the Azerbaijani government's religious policies and crackdown on civil society. As a result of his activism, he has been arrested and imprisoned several times. He was most recently imprisoned in November 2015 along with more than a dozen of his colleagues in a security raid after the government accused Taleh and his fellow MUM activists of being terrorists.

In January 2017, Taleh and his deputy Abbas Huseynov were sentenced to 20 years in prison. Since that time they have been transferred to a high security prison and subjected to brutal torture.

Freedom Now has sought to elevate the issue of religious prisoners in Azerbaijan over the past year. In an effort to educate U.S. policymakers, we raised our concerns with more than 30 U.S. congressional offices and organized briefings for Azerbaijani civil society representatives and lawyers visiting Washington.

Freedom Now also addressed members of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe at their annual Human Dimensions Implementation meeting in Warsaw, Poland in September 2017. During Europe's largest human rights conference, Executive Director Maran Turner made a statement detailing Azerbaijan's continued restrictions on religious freedoms and imprisonment of critics.



*Abbas Huseynov
(Photo/Azadliq)*



*Taleh Bagirov
(Photo/Abzas)*



*Elchin Sadigov (center)
briefs Congressional
staffers on religious
prisoners in Azerbaijan.
(Photo/Freedom Now)*



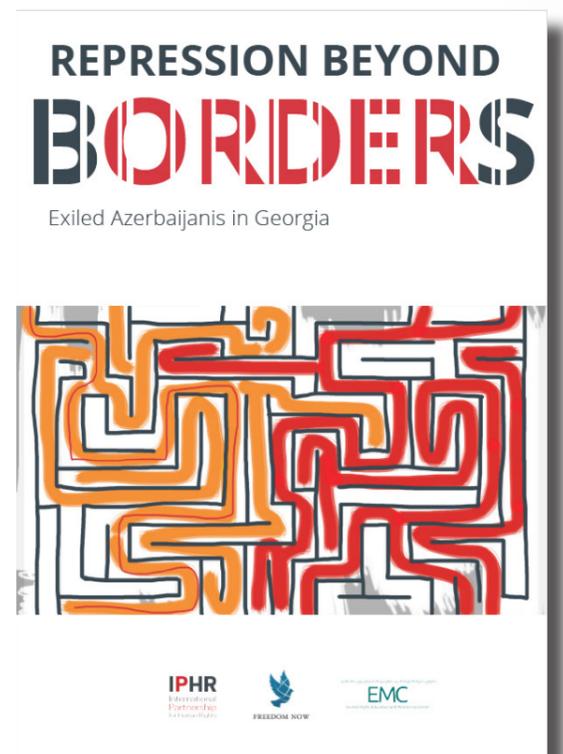
REPRESSION BEYOND BORDERS

On May 30, 2017, Leyla Mustafayeva awoke alone. Her husband, Afgan Mukhtarli, had been with friends the night before and never came home. She called his friends, who said that Afgan had left them around 7pm the night before. Leyla started to “fear the worst.”

Afgan Mukhtarli and Leyla Mustafayeva, both working as journalists, spent four years reporting on the Azerbaijan government’s rampant corruption and human rights abuses. A shared fear of harassment and imprisonment compelled them to flee to Georgia in 2015, but the respite proved all too brief.

Two days after he first went missing, Afgan was in front of a court in Baku charged on spurious charges of illegally crossing the border, using force against border guards, and smuggling money into the country. He alleges that Georgian-speaking men in police uniforms kidnapped him, beat him, and handed him off at the border to Azerbaijani officials. He remains in pre-trial detention in Azerbaijan.

In July 2017, Freedom Now and the International Partnership for Human Rights travelled to Tbilisi to document the harassment of Azerbaijani exiles living in Georgia. Together with the Tbilisi-based Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center, the three organizations issued a report with their analysis, findings, and recommendations. Taken altogether, the report documents the lengths the government of Azerbaijan will go to silence dissent and serves as a sobering reminder that the international community must take bolder action in addressing Azerbaijan’s human rights abuses.



TURMOIL IN TAJIKISTAN

The mountainous, landlocked nation of Tajikistan is distinguishing itself as one of the most alarming human rights situations. Since 2015, the government has initiated a large-scale crackdown focused largely on discrediting and dismantling any viable political opposition. More than 200 political opposition members are currently in prison on spurious charges.

We are representing two such individuals - Mahmatali Hayit and Zayd Saidov. Mahmatali is the chairman of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan which was the only officially-registered opposition group in the country until the government accused its members of participating in a failed coup, banned the party, and arrested its leadership. He is currently serving a life sentence.

Zayd is a former businessman who attempted to start his own political party. Before the party was able to get off the ground, Zayd was arrested and charged with bigamy, “illegal deprivation of an individual’s freedom,” rape, fraud, and bribery. He is serving a 29-year sentence.

Not content with merely arresting political activists, Tajikistan turned its attention to the numerous attorneys who dared to take on these cases.

The environment in the country has become so hostile that lawyers are fleeing Tajikistan to seek asylum elsewhere. We have adopted the cases of Shukhrat Kudratov and Buzurgmehr Yorov, two lawyers serving lengthy sentences for defending their clients from unjust prosecution.

In June 2017, we coordinated a letter to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres shortly before he visited Tajikistan, urging him to raise the issue of political prisoners.

Executive Director Maran Turner travelled to Geneva in June 2017 to participate in an interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers and to Warsaw, Poland in September 2017 for the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe’s annual Human Dimensions Implementation meeting. In both instances, she raised the repeated harassment and detention of Tajik lawyers. Freedom Now has petitioned the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on Mahmatali’s behalf and is preparing legal petitions for the other cases highlighted here.



*Mahmatali Hayit
(Photo/REF/RL)*



*Shukhrat Kudratov
(Photo/REF/RL)*



*Zayd Saidov
(Photo/REF/RL)*



*Buzurgmehr Yorov
(Photo/REF/RL)*

A FATHER AND SON SEPARATED BY PRISON

Imagine that your son is arrested and imprisoned for an unknown crime. You trek to the prison repeatedly, you make a formal request to officials asking for the visit, but still you are turned away each time. Four months pass and finally, one day, you are granted permission to see your son, and so you come, and are yourself arrested. This is the story of Siamak and Baquer Namazi, Iranian-Americans who have been imprisoned in Iran since October 2015 and February 2016, respectively. The two men were sentenced to 10 years for “collusion with an enemy state [the United States].”

Sadly, despite being held in the same prison ward for over a year, Baquer and Siamak were only allowed to see each other for the first time on February 28, 2017, the day before their appeal hearing, and only for about 20 minutes. Both men continue to be held in Evin Prison, notorious for the widespread use of torture and overcrowding, where prisoners have reported being beaten for up to 16 hours a day and 200 men only have five toilets among them.

We are working with the highest levels of the U.S. government to ensure that father and son can make their way home. Our founder, Jared Genser, held a press conference in Vienna, Austria with Babak Namazi, Baquer’s son, in April 2017 to draw attention to the case.



*Baquer and Siamak Namazi
(Photo/ Namazi family)*



(Photo/Freedom Now)

SEEKING REFORM AND ENGAGEMENT AT THE UN

The Committee on NGOs is one of the UN's most obscure bodies, but it plays a crucial role as the gatekeeper for NGO access to the UN. Unfortunately, the body is populated by some of the world's worst human rights violators, including China, Russia, Venezuela, and Iran. These countries have politicized the application process, using the Committee as a weapon to silence independent voices and legitimate organizations that may shine a light on their dismal human rights records.

More than 200 organizations from countries all over the world remain blocked from entry into the UN, stuck in a perpetual bureaucratic limbo. Earlier this year we partnered with the International Service for Human Rights to put forth a reform agenda to increase transparency and civil society participation at the UN.

After dozens of bilateral meetings with UN country missions, we held a public event in June 2017 with UN member states and NGOs at UN Headquarters. The event was co-sponsored by states and NGOs, including France, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay. Organizations from South Africa, India, and Brazil shared their experiences with the Committee and called for reform of the system.

In a separate initiative, we partnered with other organizations to encourage the U.S. to continue its engagement with the Human Rights Council. We issued a public letter to Ambassador Nikki Haley urging her to continue pursuing reform, but cautioning that U.S. withdrawal from the Council will ultimately do more harm than good.

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.

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Former prisoner of conscience in China

Our Supporters

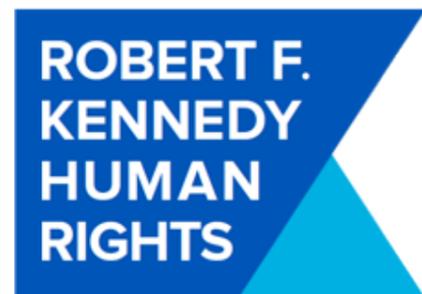
Freedom Now extends our profound gratitude to the individuals, law firms, and foundations whose generosity makes it possible for us to perform our critical work. We consider all of our donors essential partners in our mission. This list includes donors who made substantial gifts between October 1, 2016 and November 1, 2017.

Open Society Foundations

Oak Foundation
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William Fagan

Our NGO Partners

We are proud to have collaborated with many human rights organizations throughout 2017 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.



Woodley & McGillivray



McKool Smith



| Revenue | November 2016 - October 2017 |
|---|------------------------------|
| Foundation Grants | \$87,650 |
| Individual Contributions | \$306,494 |
| Pro Bono Support (2016)* | \$1,249,463 |
| Total Public Support and Revenue | \$1,643,607 |

| Expenses | November 2016 - October 2017 |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Salaries and Benefits | \$258,250 |
| Legal Services | \$1,249,463 |
| Office rent | \$17,983 |
| Travel and Meetings | \$16,745 |
| Consulting Fees | \$3,500 |
| Telecommunications | \$3,297 |
| Admin Fees | \$626 |
| Printing, Postage, and Supplies | \$721 |
| Other Indirect Costs | \$3,573 |
| Total | \$1,554,158 |

Expenses by category



*Includes the 2,211 hours of pro bono time provided by law firm volunteers only and obtained during the 2016 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.

