



International Partnership for Human Rights: Report on Activities in 2014

Summary

In the course of 2014, International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) worked closely together with local partner groups from countries of the former Soviet Union to promote international awareness and action on key human rights issues in this region. IPHR supported and strengthened the efforts of local partner groups to document, assess and draw attention to human rights concerns, as well as to communicate such concerns in an effective and timely fashion to international target institutions.

IPHR worked with local partners on the implementation of a number of international-donor funded projects covering Central Asia, Azerbaijan, Russia and Ukraine and other countries of the former Soviet Union. Its activities included monitoring, documentation and reporting activities; targeted advocacy and outreach; networking and coordination activities; and capacity building of partner groups. Priority issues addressed by IPHR and partners included: freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly; equality before the law and access to justice; the prohibition on torture and ill-treatment; protection of minorities and other vulnerable groups; and accountability for gross human rights abuses.

Mission and brief history

IPHR is a non-profit organisation with its seat in Brussels. It was founded in 2008 with a mandate to empower local civil society groups and assist them in making their concerns heard at the international level. IPHR's team members have long-term experience of human rights engagement. Ever since its foundation, IPHR has been working together with human rights groups from different countries on project development and implementation, research, documentation and advocacy on priority human rights issues. The organization's work mainly relates to the region of the former Soviet Union, although its mandate is not geographically limited. The scope of IPHR's activities has gradually increased, with the organization being involved in a growing number of projects and establishing ongoing cooperation with a growing number of partners, including some of the most prominent human rights NGOs in their respective countries.

IPHR also actively participates in the activities of NGO networks, including in particular the Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP). Drawing on the Helsinki movement, the CSP was established in 2011 to unite human rights groups from across Europe, the former Soviet Union and North America for the purpose of providing mutual support and solidarity, speaking with a common voice and carrying out coordinated campaigns.

Governance and management

IPHR was registered as a non-profit organization (*Association sans but lucrative*) in Belgium on 9 April 2008. Its office is based in Brussels, where several staff members work, while other team members work as consultants on a distance from Brussels. The IPHR director leads the organization, in accordance with its statutes and program, and supervises the work of staff and consultants.

As per IPHR's Statutes, Board members are appointed by IPHR's General Meeting for a three-year term, which is renewable. The board meets as often as needed, but at a minimum on a quarterly basis.

The Board's powers and responsibilities include:

- overseeing the day-to-day management of the organization
- strategic planning and development
- financial planning and oversight
- policy development

The current Board of Directors is composed of three members, who also act as officers (president, vice-president, secretary-treasurer).

Projects

In 2014, IPHR worked with partners on the implementation of the following projects:

- ***A European Union and Council of Europe focused advocacy and outreach campaign on human rights in Central Asia and Azerbaijan***, implemented with support of the Open Society Foundations in September 2013-September 2014. The purpose of this IPHR-managed project was to promote international awareness and action on human rights issues in the countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and Azerbaijan, with a particular focus on reaching out to the European Union and the Council of Europe. IPHR has worked with a number of partners, as well as members of the CSP on the implementation of this project.
- ***A Transnational Civil Society Coalition in Support of Fundamental Rights in Central Asia***, a project funded to 95% by the European Union that will be implemented in April 2014-September 2016. In this project, IPHR acts as a partner to Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (lead applicant), Nota Bene and Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights. The project is aimed at promoting

coordinated action i) to pursue the implementation of international standards protecting fundamental rights and to assist victims of violations, ii) to engage with international institutions on priority rights, and iii) to raise awareness and garner support for the struggle to hold the governments of the region accountable to their international human rights obligations.

- ***Action for Freedom from Torture in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan***, a project funded to 80% by the European Union that will be implemented in December 2013-May 2015. In this project, IPHR is a partner to the Polish Helsinki Foundation (lead applicant), Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law and Nota Bene. The purpose of the project is to contribute to the eradication of torture and other forms of ill-treatment in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan through strengthening of the work of the national coalitions against torture in these two Central Asian countries.
- ***Addressing repression of NGOs in Russia through Trial Observation and Advocacy***, a project funded by the Open Society Foundations and implemented in the framework of the CSP in July 2013-May 2014. IPHR coordinated this action aimed at providing independent assessment of the legal proceedings and court hearings against non-governmental organizations operating in the Russian Federation through targeted trial monitoring, documentation and reporting, complemented by national and international advocacy and targeted media outreach to support the unhampered functioning of independent human rights organizations.
- ***SOVA and ADC-Memorial International Representation***, a project funded by the Open Society Foundations implemented in June 2012-May 2014. The objectives of the project was to increase international attention to issues of racism, xenophobia and intolerance in Russia and to garner support from inter-governmental organizations to activities directed towards them. The project was implemented by IPHR to assist the Russian organizations SOVA and ADC-Memorial with international advocacy based on the monitoring and reporting activities they carry out.
- ***A Coordinated Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP) Action to Promote Human Rights in the OSCE Region***, a project implemented with support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) in July-December 2014. This IPHR-managed project was carried out in the CSP context with a view to ameliorate human rights crises as they arise in the OSCE space; to further develop and refine rapid response mechanisms to mobilize civil society groups from throughout Europe and Eurasia to support human rights defenders working in these countries; and to ensure that civil society groups in the target countries have an influential voice in the international arena.
- ***International Scrutiny of Human Rights Protection in Times of Upheaval – A Civic Solidarity Platform Initiative***, a project implemented with support of the Open Society Foundations in June 2013-September 2014. The objective of this IPHR-coordinated project was to support Ukrainian civil society organizations in their work to document human rights violations, fight impunity and advocate for respect for human rights during the current period of upheaval. The project was designed as a CSP initiative and was specifically aimed at providing expert, technical and logistical support to Ukrainian CSP member organizations and to conduct a comprehensive advocacy campaign to draw attention to human rights issues in Ukraine.

Activities

In the framework of the projects implemented in 2014, IPHR carried out the following major categories of activities:

Monitoring and documentation activities

The starting point of IPHR's cooperation with its partners is on-going monitoring conducted by these organizations on the ground in their respective countries. During the year, IPHR supported partners in their monitoring work and worked with them on processing the information obtained for communication to the international community and use in international-level advocacy. As part of the new EU-funded project "A Transnational Civil Society Coalition in Support of Fundamental Rights in Central Asia", Central Asian partners prepared quarterly reports on their monitoring findings regarding the protection of fundamental rights in their respective countries, which IPHR helped develop into reports for publication. IPHR carried out additional research as needed and also coordinated fact-finding missions aimed at supporting the work of local partners and documenting alarming trends. This included expert missions to monitor trials in cases initiated against NGOs under the problematic "foreign agents" law in Russia.

Advocacy and reporting activities

Drawing on monitoring findings of local partner groups, IPHR implemented advocacy and reporting activities in cooperation with them with a view to mobilizing attention and action on issues affecting the protection of human rights in their respective countries. These activities provided international actors with timely, relevant and useful information guiding human rights policies toward post-Soviet countries

Being based in Brussels, IPHR's engaged closely with EU institutions and representatives. It cooperated with partners on the preparation of briefing material highlighting major concerns and recommendations for the EU's Human Rights Dialogues with target countries, as well as on other relevant occasions such as visits by target country officials to Brussels, and undertook follow-up advocacy, thereby helping to ensure that civil society concerns were reflected in the discussions with target governments. IPHR was in regular contact with Members of the European Parliament and the secretariat of the Parliament, the External Action Service and its desk officers working on target countries, EU member state delegations, and other EU institutions to raise their attention to human rights issues in the post-Soviet region. IPHR also organized advocacy visits for partners to Brussels on relevant occasions, facilitating opportunities for them to directly share information with EU interlocutors. For example, IPHR facilitated advocacy visits of Kazakhstani, Tajikistani and Kyrgyzstani human rights defenders to Brussels in April and November 2014, as well as briefing for EEAS officials with exiled Turkmen human rights defenders in September 2014.

At the level of the Council of Europe, IPHR was involved in broader NGO advocacy efforts on Russia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan, using in particular sessions of the Parliamentary Assembly of this organization to draw attention to concerns. As the crackdown on civil society escalated in Azerbaijan in the course of 2014, including through the arrest of leading human rights advocates, IPHR and partners stepped up advocacy efforts in this regard – using both public and non-public means. This included the production of a video calling for more

effective measures in support of civil society in this country (the video is available at: <http://iphronline.org/no-more-business-as-usual-for-azerbaijan.html>)

As regard the United Nations, IPHR provided support to partners on advocacy targeting human rights body reviews. This included assistance with editing and revising alternative reports, drafting summaries highlighting key concerns in such reports, as well as organizing meetings in Geneva. Reviews for which IPHR provided such assistance included the pre-session review of Tajikistan by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in May 2014; the pre-session session review of Turkmenistan by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in June 2014; the Universal Periodic Review of Kazakhstan in October 2014; and the full session review of Kazakhstan by the UN Committee against Torture in November 2014. KIBHR and IPHR also submitted a briefing note on freedom of association and assembly to the office of the UN Rapporteur on these issues in November 2014, in response to a request for information as his January 2015 visit to Kazakhstan was being prepared.

In the context of the OSCE, IPHR and partners used the 2014 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw as an important venue for raising concerns about problematic human rights trends in post-Soviet countries, including Central Asian countries, Azerbaijan, Russia and Ukraine. This included the preparation of a series of joint written statements, oral interventions at official working sessions, the organization of side events with speakers from the region and informal meetings held on the sidelines of the conference. IPHR and its partners also used the Supplementary Human Dimension Implementation Meetings on issues concerning freedom of expression (July 2014) and prevention of torture (April 2014) to prepare statements and raise concerns. Moreover, IPHR and partners took an active part in regional OSCE workshops held during the year, including a workshop for Central Asian and Mongolian civil society representatives in Dushanbe in May 2014, and carried out advocacy in connection with the OSCE ministerial meeting in Basel, Switzerland, in December 2014.

Networking and coordination activities

IPHR coordinated and participated in activities in the framework of NGO networks.

As described above, IPHR was in charge of several projects implemented in the framework of the CSP, a network of over 60 human rights NGOs from Europe, the former Soviet Union and North America. It took the initiative to a number of joint CSP statements and advocacy campaigns on human rights in the post-Soviet region. It had a leading role in coordinating the organization of the annual meeting of CSP members in Warsaw in September 2014 and a parallel civil society conference organized by the CSP in connection with the OSCE ministerial meeting in Basel in December 2014, which resulted in the adoption of joint conclusions and recommendations to OSCE participating States and OSCE institutions.

IPHR was also involved in the Brussels-based Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) and engaged in information exchange, strategic planning and joint advocacy initiatives with members of this network. Other networks in whose activities IPHR was involved during the year included the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum.

In March 2014, IPHR organized a Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan Conference in Brussels to consider opportunities, challenges and strategies for human rights work on these two countries. The conference was attended by representatives of Turkmenistani and Uzbekistani NGOs based in exile, NGOs from other countries and international NGOs working on Central Asia, media covering this region, as well as funding agencies. The conference supported networking, coordination and brainstorming among civil society actors working to promote human rights in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Capacity building and support

Through its ongoing information exchange and cooperation with local partner groups on documentation, reporting and advocacy, IPHR has provided important support to them in their work and ensured that they have had access to avenues, resources and assistance for reaching out to international target institutions that they otherwise would not have had. IPHR's cooperation with partners has also provided for opportunities for them to improve their knowledge, skills and insights on human rights reporting and advocacy in relation to international target institutions.

Moreover, projects implemented by IPHR and partners featured trainings for local activists. In particular, IPHR organized several trainings as part of the OSF-funded project on Ukraine that it implemented. In July 2014, IPHR held a two-day workshop in Kiev entitled "Fighting against Impunity during Times of Upheaval: Practical Workshop for Ukrainian Civil Society Representatives". The workshop provided practical information and useful tools to civil society actors on strategies for combating impunity in Ukraine in the wake of the Maidan events and further unrest throughout the country. In September 2014, IPHR organized a training for Ukrainian lawyers and activists on war crimes documentation. The purpose of the training was to reinforce the capacity of Ukrainian civil society to conduct investigations on crimes of an international character (crimes against humanity and war crimes) and thereby to contribute to the quality documentation of abuses committed as part of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. It was led by an expert who previously worked with the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court.

IPHR also provided support with fundraising to partners, helping to identify funding opportunities and working with them on the development of proposals for submission to international funding agencies.