



Internationale Gesellschaft  
für Menschenrechte (IGFM)

## ABOUT US



### At a glance

The International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) and its national branches are independent non-governmental human rights organisations (NGOs) which base their work on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations on December 10, 1948. The ISHR seeks to promote international understanding and tolerance in all areas of culture and society. It is a non-profit organisation, independent of all political parties, governments or religious groups. The ISHR acts on the philosophy that the realization of human rights and the improvement of social conditions cannot be pursued through use of force. ISHR was founded in order to support individuals who share this principle and, consequently, seek to claim their rights in a non-violent manner.

ISHR operates as a membership organisation with approximately 30.000 members in 38 countries worldwide. ISHR has Consultative Status (Roster) with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations, Associated Status with the Department of Public Information (DPI) of the United Nations and Participative Status with the European Council. ISHR is primarily financed through membership fees and private donations, and frequently cooperates with other human rights organisations.

### The main areas of the work of the ISHR are:

1. Support of individuals or groups who are persecuted, imprisoned, and/or discriminated against because of their religious and/ or political affiliation



2. Public relations in regards to human rights issues
3. Education on human rights issues for people who live in states that are presently in a phase of transformation towards democracy
4. Humanitarian aid

ISHR has monitored and criticised the human rights situation in many countries since its foundation in 1972. The ISHR has monitored many countries with a record of severe human rights violations, including the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, Vietnam, and North Korea for decades. Cuba has been under observation since 1977. Unfortunately, there has been ample reason to criticize their human rights record.

## **Finances**

ISHR is a non-profit NGO. Its work is primarily carried out by volunteers. ISHR does not receive any state or municipal subsidies; however, the ISHR does seek appropriated subsidies from Phare and TACIS programmes developed by the European Commission for projects that support the establishment of civil society in Eastern European countries.

## **Case work**

ISHR supports people, who promote the realisation of the basic human rights in their countries through non-violent means or who exert these rights and are prosecuted for this. The means to this are amongst others, appeals, petitions and remonstrative letters.

## **Public Relations**

ISHR informs about human rights abuses, because the attention of the public is a critical prerequisite to sparing individual lives and to solving structural problems. However, public relations extends beyond informing the press and lobbying into informing and educating the general public about the meaning of human rights, their importance, and how they can implemented. The ISHR arranges seminars about democracy and human rights. One of the long-term campaigns of the ISHR is an effort to eliminate barbaric punishments such as stoning and amputations.

## **Humanitarian Aid**

ISHR carries out humanitarian aid in the form of care packages and aid transports because it believes that addressing humanitarian challenges helps to support the realisation of human rights. Since 1980, ISHR has provided assistance to those who could not expect adequate government aid for political reasons, by sending thousands of tons of "aid from



one human being to another”.

## Projects

ISHR has carried out many projects with financial support from the European Commission, including the search for witnesses and victims of war crimes in former Yugoslavia, the enforcement of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the humanisation of the military system in the Ukraine and the improvement of the standard of living for street and orphan asylum children in Eastern Europe.

## ISHR history in brief

ISHR was founded on April 8th in 1972 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, as the “Gesellschaft für Menschenrechte” (Society for Human Rights) by 13 people committed to human rights. It was at a time when Vladimir Bukovsky had just been sentenced to 12 years in a labour camp and exile in Siberia, because he had courageously demanded his right to freedom of expression. Aleksander Solzhenitsyn had completed his famous book, “Gulag Archipelago”, yet he was almost completely unknown in the West. In those days, many people were demonstrating for Vietnam, but no one demonstrated for the thousands of political prisoners in Soviet labour camps, dying fugitives at the German-German border, persecuted people in Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia and other states on the European continent. The ISHR took up the cause of these people and spread awareness of the fates of those innumerable individuals in the West.

ISHR became known to the public in Germany due to its work with political dissidents such as Bukowsky, Sacharow, Solchenizyn and Schtaransky in the former Soviet Union, Vaclav Havel in the former Socialist Czechoslovakia, Lech Walesa and the union movement Solidarnosc in the former People’s Republic of Poland, and with the civil rights activists such as Vitautas Landsbergis in the Baltic States Lithuania, Estonia and Lithuania. Additional dissidents of importance which the ISHR focused on were Rainer Bäurich, Nico Hübner, Dr. Dr. Karl Heinz Nitschke and others in the former German Democratic Republic.

Since 1977, the ISHR has greatly influenced the process of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, CSCE, (today Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE), particularly in the areas of freedom of movement and freedom of the press.

In 1981, the “Society for Human Rights” was renamed the “International Society for Human Rights”. Over the years, both the membership and the tasks of ISHR grew steadily. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ISHR’s tasks became even more diverse. It became an



important matter for ISHR to support the new Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in their endeavour to build a democratic and just society. New sections were founded in the CIS, the first being working groups in Russia in 1989. At the same time, groups and sections formed in Africa and Latin and South America.