



ISHR NEWSLETTER

April / May 2018

IMPORTANT DATES

8 April

ISHR International Council Meeting & Int. Day of the Roma (Romani Day)

3 May

World Press Freedom Day

17 May

International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia & Biphobia

21-25 May

Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories

CONTENTS

A Word from the President	1
From the Sections.....	1
Current Developments	3
ISHR Events	4

FRESH, NEW FACES JOIN ISHR

The International Society for Human Rights welcomed two new member organizations, ISHR Spain and Iraq, during the recent International Council meeting in Bonn. We are very excited to have these motivated professionals joining our ranks in defending human rights worldwide. For more, see 'A Word from the President' and 'ISHR Events' in this issue!

Featured this month:

- *Prof. Dr. T. Schirrmacher*
Welcome to the new member organizations of ISHR
- *ISHR Albania / ISHR Working group Wittlich*
ISHR group in Wittlich visits ISHR Albania in Tirana
- *ISHR Armenia*
Assisting teens with mental disabilities, creating safe playgrounds for children
- *ISHR Germany*
Annual General Meeting of the German Section held in Bonn
- *Armenia*
Velvet Revolution in Armenia: April-May 2018
- *Events*
ISHR International Council Meeting 2018



Members of the International Council of ISHR. Bonn, 2018.

"The truth is valuable and it makes us free"

– Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-Kuin, at the annual meeting of the German section of ISHR in Bonn, Germany - April 7, 2018

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome to the new member organizations of ISHR in Spain and Iraq!



Thomas Schirrmacher welcomes Dr. Krmanj Othman and the new ISHR group in Iraq.

Every second year, the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights meets in Bonn. Thanks to the great preparation of our international office staff, Maya Robinson, Dr. Carmen Krusch-Gruen, Martin Warnecke (who is also our amazing photographer) and our phenomenal translator Dima Rahr, we had a great session and worked through a lot of joyful and difficult topics.

However, the most major events were the votes to accept two new member organizations into the ISHR. After their chairs and her and his team had presented themselves, the International Council voted unanimously to accept ISHR Spain and Iraq as new members. Both organizations have a bright board with a wide representation of ethnic and professional backgrounds, are quite active already and

have been registered and approved by their governments. They will introduce themselves in next month's issue of the ISHR Newsletter. I will visit the Spanish group next week to meet the board and give a guest lecture at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Together with the chair of the Iraqi working group, I soon will visit the Ambassador of Iraq in Berlin, as well as the representative of the Kurdish Autonomous Region. We have several projects in Iraq both from the ISHR and from the German section.

Thomas Schirrmacher



The President of the International Council welcomes Ms. Isuf and Mr. Gutierrez, representing ISHR Spain.

FROM THE SECTIONS

ISHR Albania / ISHR Working group Wittlich

ISHR group in Wittlich visits the Albanian section in Tirana

Katrin Bornmüller and her son Andreas from the Wittlich working group of the International Society for Human Rights in Germany attended the founding assembly of the new ISHR section in Albania. The President of the section, Dr. Margarita Kola (center of photo), performed the re-registration. It marks a promising new beginning with strong plans for the future.

Albania has so many problems to solve, from abolishing corruption, to eliminating horrendous levels of poverty, especially among the Roma, who are often forced to live off of garbage. Banishing the practice of blood-feuds through education is another critical issue; there are families who cannot leave their homes because of the danger of being killed as a result of a blood feud with another family. Lastly, the processing and addressing of the crimes committed under the communist government of Enver Hoxha is crucial. Albania had the most death sentences in relation to the population under his rule and nearly every family was affected. These are all issue areas that the new section plans to address. Overall, Mrs. Bornmüller viewed the trip as a valuable visit with the new section and enjoyed getting to know the lovely and hospitable people of Albania.



Group photo of the new board of the Albanian section and Katrin Bornmüller (right).

ISHR Armenia

Assisting teens with mental disabilities, creating safe playgrounds for children



Seminar as a part of the "Supporting young people with mental disabilities" project.

The ISHR Armenia section expresses regret for not being able to participate in the International Council meeting this year, but we would like to share a summary of our activities for the current period with you. Our organization actively carries out human rights activities as well as public participation in the political processes in the country (see more about current political events in Armenia under 'Current Developments'). We also implement grants in the legal and social areas; for example, with the support of The BEARR Trust Foundation in the UK, we have implemented a program for the 'Care of people with mental disabilities at home', which aims to provide professional and legal support to teenagers and their families in communities in Vardashan in the suburbs of Yerevan.

A mobile group of volunteers and psychologists visited these families over 5 months, providing practical and professional support. They have been introduced to the conditions of adolescents living with mental disabilities at home. In the frame of the project, computer training courses for these teenagers have been organized; we are focusing on finding employment for these young people.

Currently, our organization, together with a partner organization, has begun implementing a project for "Improving Children's Playground Equipment in Kotayk Province and Lori Province", as a result of which secure children's playgrounds will be placed in four kindergartens and one city park, benefiting approximately 40,000 children and parents. The project was funded by the Japanese government through the Japanese Embassy in Armenia.

Additionally, our organization has been involved in the anti-corruption Republican Board, within which it is engaged in the development of new legislative proposals and the implementation of anti-corruption monitoring.

ISHR Germany

Annual General Meeting of the German Section held in Bonn



Mr. Cahit Basar (left), General Secretary of the Kurdische Gemeinde Deutschland (Kurdish Community in Germany), speaking at the annual meeting.

The 46th annual general meeting of the German Section of the International Society for Human Rights (IGFM) took place on 6-7 April 2018 at the Gustav Stresemann Institute in Bonn, Germany. Participants from over 20 countries attended and discussed current issues in human rights work.

The focal points of the annual IGFM meeting were the humanitarian situation in the Middle East and religious freedom. The German Section provides frequent humanitarian aid to refugees in the region, especially in northern Iraq.



Grant ceremony for the 'Safe Playgrounds for Children' - Japanese Ambassador to Armenia and project partners (left: Bela Shikaryan, President of ISHR Armenia)

Members of the ISHR and officials from health agencies and refugee/IDP camps in northern Iraq reported on this during the plenary session and during the in-depth working group sessions. The IGFM invited not only experts but also eyewitnesses from the region.

Furthermore, the IGFM was pleased to welcome the emeritus Bishop of Hong Kong, Cardinal Zen Ze-kui, who was an inspiration to the audience. During the plenary session, he described the difficulties currently facing Christians in the People's Republic of China. During the working group on religious freedom, further witnesses reported on the persecution of religious minorities in various states such as Pakistan and Egypt.

The annual meeting also provided space to deepen cooperation between the various sections of the ISHR, especially during the International Council meeting, which took place the following day (see 'ISHR Events').

The German Section of the International Society for Human Rights (IGFM) would like to sincerely thank all the friends and members who attended and participated in the 46th Annual General Meeting in Bonn, as well as all the speakers, witnesses and experts who made this event possible with their contributions!



Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-Kuin, emeritus bishop of Hong Kong, (left) with Martin Lessenthin, spokesman of IGFM.

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Velvet Revolution in Armenia: April-May 2018

A historic sudden shift in the politics of Armenia took place through a non-violent, so-called 'Velvet (or Love) Revolution' over April and May this year. The leader of the revolution, Nikol Pashinyan, was elected Prime Minister in snap elections on May 8 following mass protests that began in mid-April.



Demonstrators protesting in front of a public radio station in Yerevan on April 14, 2018.

Photo credit: Ավետիսյան91 via Wikimedia Commons

Mr. Pashinyan enjoys public confidence of around 90% in Armenia and among the Armenian Diaspora. During the historic gathering on April 23, 2018, he announced "...in our revolutionary political movement, there is no geopolitical context, no conspiracy; this is a clean Armenian velvet revolution". This event was the result of mass protest rallies, which were exclusively peaceful and involved all layers of society, especially youth. At their highest points, these demonstrations reached 200,000 people or more at once.

The movement is often referred to as a youth movement, due in large part to self-organized youth and student groups who marched through towns and villages in Armenia chanting, "Take a step" (referring to Pashinyan's 'My Step' protest, starting on March 31 from the Armenian city of Gyumri to the capital of Yerevan on April 13). During one of the

demonstrations, Mr. Pashinyan announced, "This movement has one leader, and that leader is you, you, you", pointing to each of the gathered people. Indeed, the struggle through national disobedience has featured the motto of being a leader through not responding violently to violence, but with hands raised.

Background to the protests

The primary spark for the protests was related directly to the attempt of former president Serzh Sargsyan to remain in power by adopting the role of Prime Minister. As reported by Rayhan Demytrie of BBC News, Serzh Sargsyan became president in 2008 during deadly suppression of protests. Ten years later, at the end of his second presidential term, he was to become Prime Minister via constitutional changes created through a referendum in 2015. Many Armenians interpreted this as his attempt to remain in power for a third term.

Thus, thousands entered the streets as Nikol Pashinyan's 14-day protest march arrived in Yerevan on April 13, with daily protests occurring as Serzh Sargsyan is elected Armenian prime minister (April 17) barely a week after the end of his second presidential term. Nikol Pashinyan is detained five days later and is then released the following day on April 23, as military members join the protests and PM Serzh Sargsyan resigns. On May 8, on the second attempt, the National Assembly elected Pashinyan as the new Prime Minister.

In total, behind the nearly 25-day peaceful national display of disobedience are 25 years of corruption and social injustice, resulting in unemployment and inequality in the application of the law under criminal-oligarchic rule. Corruption, a high level of poverty, rising prices and the outflow of the able-bodied population along with Sargsyan's "third term" were the main points of contention of Pashinyan's supporters. During his pre-election speech, the new Prime Minister of Armenia said that it is time to stop terrorizing the population with fines and bribes, and business should be allowed to breathe.

Who is Nikol Pashinyan?

Nikol Pashinyan emerged as a talent in the field of journalism in Armenia in the 1990s. He was dismissed from university before he could take his graduation exams and receive his diploma due to the nature of his political publications. He later became the editor of the prominent newspaper Haykakan Zhamanak (The Armenian Times), which was critical of the Serzh Sargsyan's presidency. He has faced numerous politically motivated criminal charges, including a conviction with a prison sentence by the ruling party in the past.

Today, it can be said that this is a very rare and perhaps even a unique case in which a nation has overturned a dictatorial government through an exclusively peaceful and bloodless process, without the involvement of external influences.

The ISHR Armenian section welcomes this as a victory of the democratic forces in Armenia, and recognizes the ongoing need for deep participation in the social, political, and human rights protection processes in its own country. It is prepared to support the new government in establishing human rights and democratic values in Armenia.



Nikol Pashinyan as Prime Minister of Armenia; May 12, 2018. Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

*Bela Shikaryan
President of ISHR Armenia*

ISHR EVENTS

International Council meeting 2018



The International Council gathered for the morning session.

On April 8, 2018, the 33rd meeting of the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) took place at the Gustav Stresemann Institut in Bonn, Germany.

Over 35 representatives from 17 national sections and groups were in attendance this year. The meeting was led by representatives of the board of the International Council, Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirmacher (President), and Mr. Karl Hafen, (Treasurer). Prof. Marat Zachidov (General Secretary) was unable to attend this year; he sent four representatives of the board of ISHR Uzbekistan in his stead.

This year, the International Council was very pleased to welcome two new member organizations, ISHR Spain, represented by Ms. Enerida Isuf and Mr. Ricardo Gutierrez, and ISHR Iraq, represented by Dr. Krmanj Othman. The International Council voted unanimously to approve their status as member organizations, which means they are officially part of the ISHR community. We look forward to a future of successful cooperation!

In addition to the new members from Spain and Iraq, the representatives of the following working groups and sections delivered reports or presentations on their current focus areas and activities (in chronological order):

- Albania – Report by Dr. Margarita Kola, President of ISHR Albania
- Kosovo – Report by Halit Gashi, President of the ISHR working group in Kosovo
- Azerbaijan – Report by Dr. Saadat Benanyarli, President of ISHR Azerbaijan
- Bosnia & Herzegovina – Report by Mirsad Duratovic
- Latvia – Report by Roberts Lazda, President of ISHR Latvia
- Lithuania – Report by Jurgita Samoskiene, Chairwoman of ISHR Lithuania
- Moldova – Report by Dr. Luibov Nemcinova, President of ISHR Moldova
- Uzbekistan – Report by Odil Hikmatov, Board member of ISHR Uzbekistan
- Russia – Report by Vladimir Novitski, President of ISHR Russia
- Ukraine – Report by Anton Alekseyev, Executive Director of ISHR Ukraine

Reports were also submitted by ISHR Armenia, ISHR Australia, and ISHR Montenegro, who were unable to present their reports in person. Thank you to each and every participating section for sharing your activities and goals with the International Council, and for all of your hard work in the area of human rights.

Following the reports of the sections, Anton Alekseyev presented the new blog website, Human Rights Online, initiated by Dr. Carmen Krusch-Grün of the German section for the ISHR sections in the Eastern Partnership & Russia and funded by the German Foreign Office, which was designed to exchange information between human rights organizations & activists in the region. He explained that the Ukrainian section uses the site to publish their ongoing reports on monitoring of the right to a fair trial in Ukraine. This has drawn the attention and support of members of the Ukrainian legal community, as well as interest from the European Parliament; the section has reported to the EU Parliament twice in the last year regarding their findings.



Thomas Schirmmacher, President (left) & Karl Hafen, Treasurer (right).

Maya Robinson discussed the use of the site to increase information exchange between the sections and in creating a united image of the ISHR. She also encouraged sections who are not yet involved to send material on the current issues and activities of their sections to be posted on the site in the future, as well as continuing to submit information for this newsletter, to help keep the sections connected.

The session was closed by the President of the International Council, Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirmmacher, who notified the attendees that next year's annual meeting of the German section (2019) would be taking place in Frankfurt instead of Bonn and invited all the guests to attend the next International Council meeting in 2020.



Ms. Enerida Isuf presents on the activities of the new member organization, ISHR Spain.

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