



ISHR NEWSLETTER

December 2019 & January 2020

IMPORTANT DATES

10 December 2019

International Human
Rights Day

18 December 2019

International
Migrants Day

27 January 2020

International Day of
Commemoration in
Memory of the
Victims of the
Holocaust

*“Information is power.
Disinformation is
the abuse of power”*

– Newton Lee

CONTENTS

From the President

Invitation to the upcoming annual
International Council Meeting of the ISHR 1
2019 ended. Welcome 2020 2

From the Sections

Eastern Europe Special 3

Current Events

Cuba

“I was purposely infected with HIV in Prison” 7

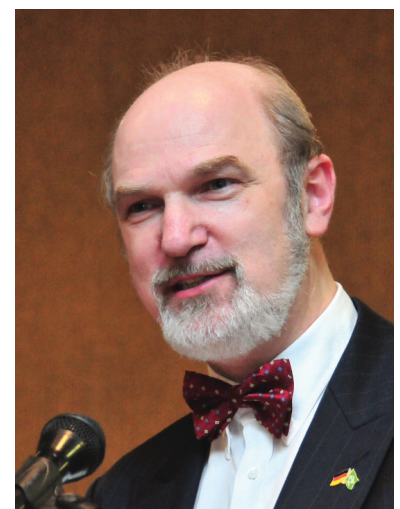
China

Hong Kong is no longer the same Hong Kong 9

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Invitation to the upcoming annual International Council Meeting of the ISHR

*Invitación a la próxima re-
unión anual del Consejo Inter-
nacional de la SIDH ~
Invitation à la prochaine réu-
nion annuelle du Conseil in-
ternational du SIDH ~
Приглашение на предсто-
ящее ежегодное заседание
Международного совета
МОПЧ*



It is my privilege to invite
the leaders of the ISHR
national sections and working groups to the 34rd ISHR
International Council meeting on March, 2020 at the
Gustav-Stresemann-Institute in Bonn, Germany.

Article continues on next page ...

Part of our council meeting will be the elections of the board of the International Council as well as the President of the Council. Beside this country cil meeting will focus on discussing the work of the sections over the past year. We will also gladly accept short reports or greetings (written or as videos) from sections who cannot attend, which we will present at the conference. We ask that only official representatives of the sections attend the International Council meeting on Sunday.

As usual, the council meeting will take place following the 48th Annual Assembly of the German Section of IGFM/ISHR. This assembly is open to our guests from abroad, though please note it will take place primarily in German. It will include reports from national sections and groups, as well as from human rights experts and victims of human rights violations. But it is the German section alone, that decides on the programme and who can or cannot speak.

Please send a confirmation by email til February, who will represent your section in the International Council 2020 to Martin Warnecke: martin.warnecke.ts@iirf.eu

For booking rooms in the Gustav-Stresemann-Institute please write to Valerio Krueger of the German section: IGFM, Edisonstraße 5, 60388 Frankfurt am Main, Germany, E-Mail: info@igfm.de, Fax: +49 69-420 108-33.

We are happy to assist with writing official letters of invitation to those who need it for receiving a visa. I am very much looking forward seeing you in Bonn and wish you a safe trip.

Yours, Thomas Schirrmacher

2019 ended. Welcome 2020

Dear ISHR community,

2019 was an eventful year. We are grateful to all our sections and members, who sustained our newsletter with their reports and articles. We say thank you for all your efforts. 2020 has begun as a year of great promise. Our efforts for human rights are more required now than ever, in a world where everything from politics to society, seems to be swirling in a vortex of disinformation and post-fact or post-truth. To forever keep that before us, we serve you a special report on the conference on disinformation in Eastern Europe, a part of a project financed by the German foreign office, which was designed and anchored by our very own Dr. Carmen Krusch-Grün. The conference took place here in Frankfurt, from the 6th to the 7th of December, 2019. The lessons are still fresh. It is a great achievement and a milestone in the life of the ISHR that we deemed it fit to immortalize that by dedicating a special edition to it. This edition then serves as our December 2019 and January 2020 edition.

You can also read interesting reports on Cuba and Hong Kong in this edition. As the New Year unfolds, we wish you all a year full of life, love and happiness.

Happy reading!

Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher
President of the International Council of the ISHR
Emmanuel Onyemaechi Ogbunwezeh, Ph.D.
Managing Editor

FROM THE SECTIONS

Eastern Europe Special

Eastern Europe conference on disinformation held in Frankfurt am Main

*Under the theme: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
Increasing means of disinformation and manipulation in Eastern Europe*

“Media, opinion making, human rights in the countries of the Eastern Partnership and Russia”, the one-year project, ended on 6–7 December 2019 with a conference in Frankfurt am Main where the headquarter of the International Society for Human Rights/ISHR is located. The representatives of the participating countries Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia came to the conclusion that social networks are playing an increasingly important role in the acquisition of information, thereby replacing the print media and used more than ever by governments as well as for the manipulation of opinions and targeted disinformation. In countries where the media are in the hands of governments or oligarchs, they pose an immediate threat to freedom of expression, democracy and the rule of law.



Invitation to the event in Belarus

The sections of the International Society for Human Rights from the countries of the Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) and Russia/EaPR unanimously decided last autumn to address the issue of disinformation in the media. This is a topical issue that holds a particular importance for power-political steering mechanisms in their countries.

The smartphone has long determined the street scene in Eastern Europe, and some large cities are bursting with Internet modernity and can withstand comparisons with Western IT standards at any time. At first glance, this seems to be a contrast between modern freedom and old borders. However, the coverage of numerous political affairs makes it clear to everyone that the Internet is not only a medium of global freedom, but also a specialized means to influence masses of people. Fake news is not an invention of Western media, but rather in the countries of the Eastern Partnership and Russia's everyday IT life, to which their citizens are exposed on a daily basis.



14 representatives from all countries of the Eastern Partnership/EaP and Russia at the conference table with Frankfurt politicians, as well as RWB, rferl, PRIF and of course ISHR © BQ/Thomas Schirmmacher

For the past four years, the sections of the International Society for Human Rights in these countries have been concerned about the use of the Internet and the possibilities of exchanging information on the human rights situation in their countries. They were able to hold three information events on the subject in each country. The resulting summaries were presented in a joint working weekend in Frankfurt am Main.

Despite the controversial topic and the lectures given by first-class experts of the Eastern European media scene, the conference remained largely unnoticed by the German media, which in addition substantiates the conviction in Western Europe that the interest in Eastern European politics is steadily diminishing and relies rather on sanctions if something went wrong instead of using the chances to exert political influence. Nevertheless, all the guests showed serious interest despite the very specific contents of presentations that were quite challenging.



From right: Martina Feldmayer, MdL, the GREENS; left: Prof. Matthias Zimmer, MdB, CDU, member of the Committee on Human Rights © ISHR

Besides the 14 human rights activists from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia, 11 other participants sat at the conference table, who in concert can best be described as a human rights lawyer well-known in Russia and chairman of the local ISHR section, stated in the opening of his lecture: “I am happy to move in a circle of like-minded people!” The statement is applicable to each of the participants who are committed to human rights, democracy and the rule of law in their countries and who are risking their freedom and more.

Martina Feldmayer, a member of the Greens’ Hessen state parliament, welcomed each individual personally before the start of the conference. The Frankfurt member of the Bundestag and representative of the Human Rights Committee, Prof. Matthias Zimmer of the CDU/CSU took the time to attend the conference despite an important private appointment.



From right: Vera Rogova, Eastern European scientist of the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt/PRIF © ISHR

Vera Rogova from the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt/PRIF, a representative from the Eastern Europe Research Department, was very much welcomed and we hope that synergies could be established through the interface between research and NGO work.

The president of the ISHR, Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirmacher, once again described the civil courage of the EaPR human rights activists in another way: “With a German passport, we can

easily talk about human rights all over the world”. Hardly any other passport is better in this respect, the German Foreign Office does not leave one alone in the case of a problem, reacts quickly and professionally, based on his personal experiences.

Karl Hafen, who is a former managing director of the ISHR and co-founder of the sections Russia and Ukraine and an election observer in countries of the Eastern Partnership, briefly outlined the close and decades-long connection of the ISHR to today’s EaP/R countries and presented an original article from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung of 7 October 1987, which read in large letters: “ISHR working group founded in Moscow”.

Historical similarities also emerged with Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe, where the father of the conference interpreter, the Russian exile journalist and co-founder of the ISHR, worked from 1974–1995. The thoroughbred journalist of the American media giant, Rikard Joswiak, who specialises in reporting on the EU in Brussels and the countries of the Eastern Partnership, showed in his guest article with his vivid description of the activities of the European East StratCom Task Force in Brussels, a special unit for tracking down Russian-language fake news, troll attacks and disinformation activities.

Guest speaker Jens-Uwe Thomas from Reporters Without Borders/RWB brought the freshly printed new RWB report “Taking control? Internet censorship and surveillance in Russia” from the German capital with him. The report documents how reporting and commitment to the truth inherently involve taking a personal risk and presents imprisoned journalists and bloggers. The RWB representative classified Russia and Azerbaijan as countries with a particularly high risk within the EaP/R area.

All conference contributions were recorded in full length by audio recording and can be made available to interested parties.

First joint results of the project can already be recorded here:

Typical for the countries of the Eastern Partnership and Russia/EaP/R:



From left to right: Karl Hafen, formerly 1st chairman and managing director of the ISHR, German section e.V., Prof. Dr. mult. Thomas Schirmmayer, President of ISHR international, Dr. phil. Carmen Krusch-Grün, Eastern Europe Department ISHR, German Section, Dimitrij Rahr, Interpreter, Dr. Saadat Benanyarly, 1st Chairman, ISHR-Azerbaijan, Vice-President of the International Council, – in her speech © ISHR



Original article from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung of 7 October 1987, which read in large letters: “ISHR working group founded in Moscow” © ISHR

The concentration of the media under state and/or oligarchic structures.

State structures in the media world can influence many areas of society in autocratic, repressive state structures. For instance, they can permanently influence citizens' opinions in a targeted manner by controlling and prosecuting private media and even small bloggers, and weakening civil society through a policy of fear.

In Russia today, for example, there is an enormous, confusing number of restrictions that lead to repressive policies; the last example is the tightening of the paragraph on foreign agents, whereby private individuals who are only accused of contact with such accused persons can be sentenced to up to three years in prison. For example, § 288 of the Criminal Code-Russia about the activity as an extremist: Originally created only for the contact with terrorists, it does not delimit the terrorism, so that this law can be applied against unpopular organizations as well.



From right: Rikard Joswiak, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty / rferl, Prague / Brussels, center: Dimitrij Rahr, interpreter, son of ISHR co-founder Gleb Rahr © ISHR

Furthermore, less concentrated concentration of power can stand against pluralism and media diversity. Armenia, for example, states: “We basically enjoy absolute freedom of expression after the Velvet Revolution, but our journalists are simply dependent on their employers, and these are oligarchs of the old authoritarian regime”.

The historically weak role of civil society in the former Soviet countries is not prepared for this modern strategy game. The members of the ISHR Belarus Section reports that within this project they were the first in their country to make disinformation the topic of discussion in the media. Strengthening civil society holds a high priority because only a strong civil society can counteract disinformation.

Due to the deficient pluralistic media landscape, the importance of social networks in these countries is increasing. Azerbaijan stated: “Social networks have become the most important source of information, and they are also used as a source by the media and the press”. But in this “open and closed” media world, it is hardly possible to verify what information or disinformation is.

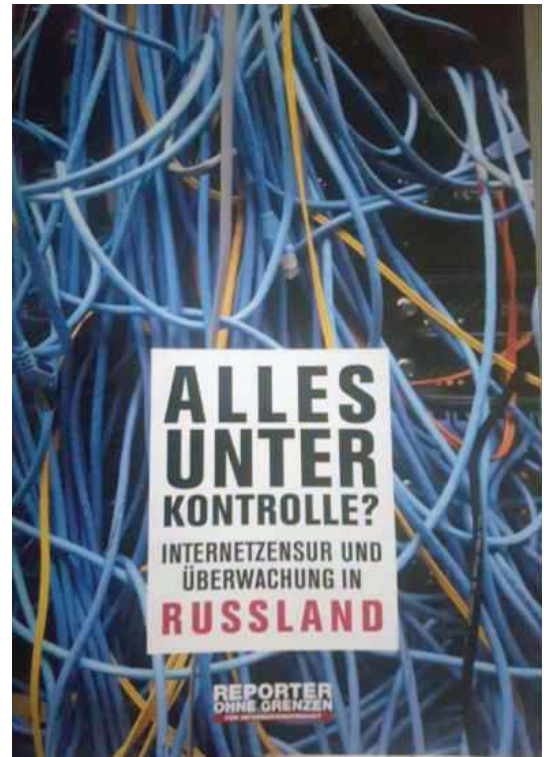


From right: Jens-Uwe Thomas, Reporters Without Borders / RWB, Berlin © ISHR

All representatives of the EaP/R countries thanked the ISHR section Germany and the German Foreign Office for the promotion of this project. Through this annual project, they were able to successfully engage the local audience with disinformation and their works on this topic. On the one hand, the EaP/R countries have already become part of the ultramodern, fascinating, free world of the World Wide Web. On the other hand, they are still under the shadow of the Iron Curtain.

Together, they found out that this project and its three information events about disinformation in the media in their respective countries were significant and that it will continue to be an important issue even after the completion of the project. On the contrary, this work should definitely be continued and expanded. Especially in their countries, there is an immense need for discussion and information on the topic. Since the problems in the EaP/R countries share many similarities, and their works on human rights often involve serious personal risks, cooperation and solidarity are crucial.

Solidarity is not only needed among the EaP/R countries but also internationally!



Still fresh from the press, the documentation of RWB – a “MUST” on the subject.

CURRENT EVENTS

Cuba

“I was purposely infected with HIV in prison by Agents of the Cuban State”

Dr. Ariel Ruiz Urquiola, Cuban environmental activist and political prisoner accuses the Cuban government/ ISHR: International relations should focus more on human rights situation in Cuba

Against the backdrop of the International Human Rights Day on December 10th, 2019, the international community is urged to take a closer look at Cuba again. Civil rights activists and dissidents as well as their families are being harassed, arrested arbitrarily and have to fear for their lives. This can be seen very clearly in the case of the Cuban biologist and environmental activist Dr. Ariel Ruiz Urquiola, who will return to his home country on December 10th. The political prisoner has been invited by the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) in Frankfurt am Main/Germany, where he talked about his hunger strike and his infection with HIV by agents of the State.

When Dr. Ariel Ruiz Urquiola accused the Cuban government in his research projects of destroying the environment, he was harassed in several ways. The authorities tried to withdraw his teaching license and to end his academic career. “When I was arrested, I was demonstrably still healthy, but I have been infected with HIV in prison on purpose”, says Dr. Ariel Ruiz Urquiola.

Repression because of research projects

Dr. Ariel Ruiz Urquiola had criticized the Cuban system already as a student. He attracted attention nationally and internationally with his research about environmental damage in Cuba. Amongst others he demonstrated that the Cuban department of fishery destroyed wild turtle populations in the Caribbean. The result was threats to withdraw his doctoral degree and to end his employment contract. Due to his lawyer he was still allowed to continue his research – except about maritime topics. He was also allowed to teach, but not at his original school. After he had been expelled from university due to trumped up reasons and the hospital didn't want to give his sister necessary cancer medicine, he embarked on a hunger strike in protest, for the first time.

Serious illness after imprisonment

After that he decided to live at an organic farm in the region Vinales and wanted to build a research institute there. His goal was to keep records of the condition of the forest and of endangered animals and plants. But this project was forbidden by local authorities. The secret police was also responsible for killing animals of the farm and for poisoning the water in the well. After a staged assault of two policemen Ariel Ruiz Urquiola was arrested on May 3rd, 2018 and sentenced to prison for twelve months by a kangaroo tribunal. He was remanded in jail on May 8th, 2018 and protested from June 16th to July 2nd with a successful hunger strike which led to an early release from prison on July 3rd, 2018. On June 16th, 2019 he got informed that he is HIV positive. He eliminates a natural infection strictly. He believes that he had been infected with the HI virus on purpose in prison.

According to a statement of Dr. Ruiz Urquiola the doctor's reports show that he got infected during his imprisonment. The lab results also confirm an infection on purpose. That's how the short time between hospitalization and illness with a high inoculum (infective material or one as an antigen acting part of a germ), e.g. from a lab virus, can be explained.



Dr. Ariel Ruiz Urquiola © ISHR

There is a system behind the harassment of civil rights activists

The Cuban authorities' didn't even stop in regard of Ariel's family. After his sister Omara, who has breast cancer, had been treated haphazardly, Ariel found out that the department of health was responsible for the mistakes that had been made during her treatment. Moreover Omara Ruiz Urquiola had been disinvited from academic events and in the end lost her job as a professor for design and arts at the University of Havana.

This is line with the recent reports of the ISHR in the case of the internationally known Cuban leader of the opposition José Daniel Ferrer, Head of the democracy movement UNPACU, who protested from the beginning of mid-November with a hunger strike against torture and his

arbitrary arrest from October 1st, 2019. José Daniel Ferrer has been imprisoned for more as 56 days now. His health condition is bad and he said in a recent talk with the archbishop of Santiago de Cuba that he has not been getting any medical treatment.

The ISHR notes that the Cuban regime harasses and bullies systematically highly qualified dissidents, who could advance the country with their knowledge and reputation. When the environmental activist Dr. Ariel Ruiz Urquiola returns to Havana on the International Day of Human Rights, he – as well as other Cuban dissidents – urgently needs the protection of the international community.

More information about the human rights situation in Cuba at www.igfm.de/kuba

Martin Lessenthin, ISHR Germany

China

*Hong Kong is no longer the same Hong Kong
Two million peaceful demonstrators and record high police brutality*

Hong Kong used to be called the shining pearl of the East. The combination of Chinese traditional culture and the British rule of law made Hong Kong the world's third biggest financial center. During a period of 156 years the British colonialists and the Chinese people in Hong Kong peacefully learned how to co-exist, cooperate and finally co-manage this mega city. Parallel to the introduction of the rule of law and the absence of communist destruction of the Chinese culture, universal values imbedded in the culture such as humanity and compassion were kept vibrant. Both Hong Kong residents and international visitors have always felt safe and happy in Hong Kong.

Good time doesn't last forever, it seems. In the space of six months, a city known for being safe and peaceful, with an efficient police force known for restrictive use of force, became a city charged with tension, police violence, massive protest and civil disobedience. 22 years after the handover of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China, many places where people demonstrated turned into a battle field. More than 5,000 people were arrested by police. But only 6 percent were prosecuted. Many were brutally beaten, some reported tortured and raped in police custody. More than 10,000 teargas shots were fired since June. But it all started with totally peaceful demonstrations against an extradition bill which would enable Hong Kong government extradite any person from Hong Kong to mainland China, if so requested by Beijing. There were one million people on the street, on the 9th of June and a two million on 16th of June; all very peaceful. The unjustifiable use of force from the police escalated the violence. The way Hong Kong police behaved, reminds much of the behavior of the communist police in mainland China. All these showed that the human rights situation in Hong Kong has seriously deteriorated. The invisible hand directing the whole process behind the scenes is the Chinese Communist Party, CCP.

The CCP propaganda justified the police brutality by claiming a minority of Hong Kong "rioters" were disrupting social order, as if the majority of Hong-kongers stand with the party. On November 24 a district parliament election took place and this can be seen as a referendum on CCP and its puppet; the Hong Kong government. The result was a tremendous slam on the

communist leadership. The anti-communist and democratic parties won 18 of total 19 districts, a record landslide victory. “A small number of rioters”?

Why were the people of Hong Kong so determined and courageous in saying no to the party? One single reason explained it all. The party promised no change of political system in Hong Kong after handover and that the autonomy of Hong Kong called “one country two systems” will continue 50 years till 2047. We are now in the year of 2019; CCP has tried again and again to change the system. A few milestone attempts: year 2003, four years after the start of the brutal persecution of Falun Gong, CCP leaders got really upset when Falun Gong practitioners in Hong Kong were enjoying their human rights and freedom so that they could do their exercises publicly in many Hong Kong parks. The Falun Gong practitioners could freely hand out flyers to millions of mainland Chinese visitors. CCP then forced Hong Kong to introduce a new law, the article 23, which basically say all organizations in mainland defined as illegal by CCP are automatically illegal in Hong Kong. No change for fifty years? 550,000 Hong Kong citizens took to the Streets and protested. It was a huge surprise for the dictators and they withdrew the bill. Now, this year CCP instructed the Hong Kong government to introduce an extradition bill. This time 2 million took to the street. All the police brutality marshalled against that protest, could not stop people protesting.

After three months of protests, Hong Kong government withdrew the bill and thereby fulfilled one of the five demands, which were:

- To withdraw the bill
- To start an independent investigation on police brutality
- To cease naming protesters as rioters
- To release all arrested demonstrators
- To conduct a full democratic election, not just the parliament but also the election of the governor.



Police brutality against protesters. Source © Epoch Times

The majority of the people of Hong Kong insist that all of the five demands must be met. The people of Hong Kong are fighting for their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is my humble opinion that the German government should take a clear stand in support of the people of Hong Kong; not just the moral equivocations resident in such slogans like: “we ask both sides to eschew violence”.

Between good and evil, neutrality is not an option. Fight for freedom, stand with Hong Kong!

Manyan Ng, ISHR Germany

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