This report covers the IPHR activities in 2018.
Photo on the cover: #FreeSentsov protest in Brussel, June 2018. © IPHR
Memorable moments in 2018

“NIET! NIET! NIET!” 18
THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN RUSSIA 26
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CELEBRATING 70 YEARS OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS - WITHOUT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS 30
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This report describes the work IPHR carried out in 2018 together with partners in the former Soviet Union, with a focus on Azerbaijan, Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), Russia and Ukraine. It shows how IPHR worked to support and empower local civil society actors in these countries and illustrates our cooperation with them on safeguarding fundamental rights and protecting the most vulnerable by raising awareness, mobilising solidarity, advocating for change and providing emergency assistance.

The report pays tribute to the tireless work of our colleagues on the ground. Throughout 2018, human rights defenders across our target region continued their crucial efforts to challenge impunity and injustice by informing citizens of their rights, drawing attention to violations, helping victims to obtain redress, and using all avenues available to hold national authorities accountable to their international obligations. At the same time, they were subjected to ongoing and increasing pressure, including threats, smear campaigns, physical attacks perpetrated with impunity, politically motivated prosecution and imprisonment, and torture and ill-treatment. In the name of fighting extremism, governments in the region also obstructed the work of human rights NGOs and sought to limit their participation in international fora, for example, by pushing for new arrangements within the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to block access for NGOs deemed “undesirable”.

However, while many human rights defenders in the post-Soviet region paid a high price for their human rights activities and faced the constant risk of reprisals, few, if any gave up the struggle. In spite of all the hardships they faced, our colleagues showed courage and resilience in the face of pressure and remained committed to fighting for justice, equality and the rights of their communities. I believe that, human rights
Defenders have a deep sense of purpose in their work that helps them cope with pressure and carry on, even when pushed to their limits. Defending human rights gives meaning to their lives and they cannot imagine giving it up, even if it requires sacrificing their own comfort, peace of mind and security. Natalia Taubina, prominent Russian human rights defender, who is a member of IPHR’s board, explained why she has never regretted devoting her life to defending human rights: “I do not want to give up or be deprived of this atmosphere, where I am surrounded by like-minded people with eyes burning with passion and hearts beating for justice.” Frequently branded as “enemies of the state” by their governments, human rights defenders are, in fact, driven by love for their countries and the desire to make these countries better places to live for all.

In accordance with its mandate, IPHR continues to support local human rights defenders and civil society in their efforts to make the voices of the oppressed heard, rally support for human rights causes and change their countries, and the world, for the better. Given the challenges and dangers that human rights work entails, as well as the negative stereotypes and perceptions of it portrayed by government propaganda, it is often difficult to attract young people to human rights defence in our target countries. To counter this trend, IPHR is working with partners on capacity building amongst younger people in the region, training them on using videos to document and report about human rights violations. IPHR also recently launched a campaign called #MeetYourDefender, which tells the stories of people who have made protecting rights and fighting injustice the centrepiece of their lives. The purpose of this campaign is to help improve awareness and understanding of the work and role of human rights defenders.

Finally, I wish to thank all our supporters, who believe in our efforts to empower local human rights defenders in their invaluable work for justice and accountability, as well as in our cooperation with local partners in pursuance of a world in which the dignity and human rights of all individuals are respected.

Brigitte Dufour, IPHR Director
**2018 at a glance**

### Capacity building

- People trained in:
  - Central Asia: 41
  - Russia: 12
  - Eastern Partnership Countries: 197
  - Central and Eastern Europe: 29

### Advocacy

- People taking part in advocacy initiatives from different regions:
  - Central Asia: 26
  - Russia: 10
  - Eastern Partnership Countries: 52
  - Turkey: 1

### Emergency assistance

- 101,327 €

### Publications

- Manuals
- Reports
- Advocacy publications
- Civicus Monitor updates

### Networking

- Central Asia: 18
- Russia: 4
- Eastern Partnership Countries: 7
- Western Europe: 4
- Turkey: 1
Partner NGOs in each region

- Central Asia: 18
- Russia: 4
- Eastern Partnership Countries: 7
- Western Europe: 4
- Turkey: 1

IPHR fact finding missions carried out and supported

- Central Asia: 8
- Russia: 37
- Ukraine: 84
- South Caucasus: 21

Networking

- People trained in advocacy:
  - Men: 41
  - Women: 12
  - Total: 53

- Advocacy publications:
  - Central Asia: 3
  - Russia: 35
  - South Caucasus: 15

Reports

- Civicus Monitor updates: 15

Advocacy publications
IPHR is committed to promoting human rights worldwide. It acts to empower local civil society groups who are working to advance the protection of human rights in their respective countries and assists them with raising human rights concerns at the international level. In cooperation with partner organizations, IPHR advocates on behalf of individuals and communities who are among those most vulnerable to discrimination, injustice and human rights violations.

1. Supporting local human rights defenders (HRDs)
   - Capacity building
   - Emergency support
   - Access to funding
   - Legal support and strategic litigation

2. Field work, research and publications
   - Research and publications
   - Fact-finding missions
   - Human rights and trial monitoring
   - Cooperation with local independent media

3. International and national advocacy
   - Advocacy meetings and events with local HRDs
   - International campaigning around specific cases
   - Advocacy towards key international institutions
   - Joint publications, statements and appeals issued with local partners

4. Connecting civil society in the region
   - Network and coalition building
   - Coordination meetings
Ukraine

- Monitoring and documenting war crimes and crimes against humanity in Donbas and Crimea
- Awareness raising of human rights violations against Crimean Tatars
- Legal support and strategic litigation
- Building capacity to collect and identify linkage evidence for international crimes
- Advocating for adoption of Magnitsky-style legislation in Europe, US and the world

Russia

- Protecting human rights defenders and providing emergency support
- Legal support and strategic litigation
- Monitoring of freedom of religion and belief, freedom of expression, association and assembly
- Countering and exposing the misuse of anti-extremist and anti-terrorist legislation
- International advocacy to raise awareness and increase pressure to implement human rights standards

Azerbaijan

- Protecting human rights defenders and providing emergency support
- Legal support and strategic litigation
- Advocating for human rights-linked investment of international financial institutions (IFIs); exploring legal remedies available to challenge IFIs’ financing decisions in Azerbaijan
- Monitoring and documenting human rights violations, including freedom of religion
- Raising awareness about human rights among the general public
- International advocacy to raise awareness and increase pressure to implement human rights standards

Central Asia

- Monitoring of freedom of expression, association and assembly
- Countering torture
- Protecting human rights defenders and providing emergency support
- Supporting the rights of vulnerable groups, including LGBTI and women
- Women’s rights and prevention of domestic violence
Countries where we work

- Ukraine
- Russia
- Georgia
- Armenia
- Azerbaijan
- Kazakhstan
- Uzbekistan
- Kyrgyzstan
- Tajikistan
- Turkmenistan
Ukraine is experiencing political turmoil in connection with the conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine and Russia-annexed Crimea. At the same time the country has been facing the challenge to act on pressing issues such as democratic reforms, corruption and protection of fundamental rights. Civil society in Ukraine plays an important role in the country’s political life. Despite this, the government demonstrates a lack of political will to move forward with the implementation of commitments in the National Human Rights Action Plan 2015; and legislative initiatives from 2018 could, if adopted by parliament, impose cumbersome reporting requirements on non-governmental organizations. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the Venice Commission and The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR), called on the government to reject the draft law in its current form.

Minority groups, in particular Roma, remain highly vulnerable both due to stigmatization and societal prejudice as well as legal hurdles they face due to the lack of identity documentation. The latter deprives many Roma persons of the right to education, healthcare and employment. Hate crimes continue to rise against minority groups such as Roma and LGBTI; and law-enforcement authorities are failing in their duty to investigate the motifs behind such crimes, encouraging impunity. The year 2018 was marked by a rise in physical attacks on journalists and activists who speak out about high level corruption, resulting in the end of the year in the vicious murder of Kateryna Handziuk, a young activist who died from injuries inflicted after an acid attack.

The ongoing armed conflict in eastern Ukraine lead to civilian deaths and large scale destruction of civilian infrastructure. While grave human rights abuses and international crimes are commonplace, very little is being done to bring perpetrators to justice. Ukraine still has to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and amend its Criminal Code to make ICC crimes punishable under domestic law.

In Crimea individuals and groups of persons opposing Russia’s annexation of the peninsula face systematic and widespread persecution, with Crimean Tatars being particularly targeted. Members of the Crimean Tatar community are regularly searched, arrested and charged with, among others, violating Russia’s anti-extremism legislation. Independent civil society groups and media outlets are not able to openly operate.

The authorities in Russia are implementing a series of severely repressive measures on civil society, including by curbing, criminalizing and stigmatizing access to foreign funding and by unduly interfering in their daily activities. The year 2018 began with the arbitrary arrest of 60-year-old Oyub Titiev, human rights defender and head of the Grozny office of the Human Rights Center “Memorial” in Chechnya. Oyub Titiev’s detention sent the chilling message that anyone can be subjected to politically-motivated persecution.

State control of the media has reached new levels following the adoption of the “Law on Media Foreign Agents”, according to which media outlets with the stigmatizing status of “foreign agent” will be bound by the same requirements as NGOs that are labelled “foreign agents”.

The government has upped its game in using vaguely defined anti-extremist and anti-terrorist laws to silence critics, including those who spoke out about the annexation of Crimea and Russian military operations in Syria.

Despite these severe abuses of fundamental rights, civil society in Russia has shown grist and resilience: many courageous individuals and organizations continue to speak out against human rights violations, protect the rights of the most vulnerable, and reach out to the international community in the absence of a reliable justice system at home.
Azerbaijan is one of the most hostile countries in the South Caucasus region for human rights defenders and civil society organizations. The government does not spare efforts to intimidate, persecute and silence critics. NiDA youth movement members Giyas Ibrahimov and Bayram Mammadov are serving a 10-year prison sentence for posting photos on Facebook of a graffiti message they sprayed on a statue of Heydar Aliyev, the late president of Azerbaijan. Local observers estimate that there are some 160 political prisoners in Azerbaijan, 10 of which are journalists. The year 2018 was also marked by a severe crack-down on the legal profession in Azerbaijan, which saw a dozen independent lawyers, predominantly representing cases of politically-motivated prosecution disbarred.

The authorities continue to rule based on a system of patronage and oppression, unfair elections, and high-level corruption meaning that Azerbaijan is moving unswervingly towards a consolidated autocracy. The crackdown on civil society and free speech continues. The authorities are not yet beyond influence of the international community however: in a positive and unexpected development in August 2018 the prison sentence on Ilgar Mammadov, political prisoner and leader of the REAL political movement was changed to a suspended one, after he had spent five years in prison. In two separate rulings the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) had found his imprisonment was illegal and politically-motivated. Mammadov remains banned from travelling abroad until August 2020 and his charges still stand. Overall, however, the authorities appear bent on pursuing the path of continued pervasive violations of fundamental freedoms of association, expression and assembly and persecution of critics or perceived critics.

The authorities in Tajikistan impose wide-ranging restrictions on fundamental freedoms, limiting civil society space. Independent media, journalists and others who criticise government policies face growing pressure, including arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. NGOs are subjected to excessive state oversight, checks and harassment and human rights groups and those working on the protection of vulnerable groups such as sexual and other minorities come under special scrutiny.

The independence of the legal profession is threatened as lawyers working on politically-sensitive cases are criminally prosecuted and imprisoned. For example Buzurgmehr Yorov and Nuriddin Mahkamov, who represented members of the opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan in court, remain behind bars serving long prison sentences linked with allegations of extremism. They were sentenced in unfair, closed trials and subjected to torture and ill-treatment in detention.

In July independent journalist Khayrullo Mirsaidov was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment on false charges of embezzlement, in what is seen as retaliation by the authorities for him having drawn attention to government corruption. Following an international outcry, Mirsaidov's sentence was commuted and he was released. In October Mirsaidov travelled to Georgia for medical treatment, for which Soghd Court sentenced him in absentia to eight months' imprisonment for violating travel restrictions imposed on his release.

Journalists have difficulties accessing information of public interest and the authorities unduly limit the use of online resources, blocking them totally in situations of crisis. For example, protests against police violence towards residents in Khorog city, Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO), in early November led to blocking of internet access in the entire region and certain online publications being blocked nationally. The authorities claimed that restrictions were caused by technical problems. Internet was also blocked after a prison riot broke out at a high-security prison in the northern city of Khujand, which led to the deaths of two security officers and dozens of inmates.
In Uzbekistan, since President Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power in 2016 he and his government have taken pains to improve Uzbekistan’s image in the eyes of the international community. They announced a programme of judicial reform, strengthened some legislation against torture and released over two dozen activists, journalists and human rights defenders. The authorities have also demonstrated greater openness towards international human rights mechanisms and and have invited the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and international human rights NGOs including IPHR to the country.

However, it remains to be seen whether the authorities are committed to fundamentally improving the country’s human rights record and implementing much needed systemic reforms. The independence of the judiciary continues to be routinely undermined by the executive branch of power. Ongoing state controls on NGO registration, funding and activities continue, which, coupled with restrictions on freedom of expression, prevent independent media outlets and human rights NGOs from operating effectively and safely in Uzbekistan. Some of those journalists and civil society activists who were released from prison report that they are kept under strict state surveillance, including Agzam Turgunov and Bobomurod Abdullayev. At least six human rights defenders and political activists remain behind bars after being convicted in unfair trials, among them independent journalist Aziz Yusufov, academic Andrei  Kubatin, producer Mirsobir Khamidkoriev; author Akrom Malikov and political scientist Rustam Abdumanopov. In August 2018 several people who posted comments on their Facebook accounts about cultural and religious issues were detained and questioned without a lawyer being present. Although many people that the state accused of being Islamic fundamentalists were released from detention in 2016, thousands more are believed to continue serving prison terms which were handed down in unfair trials marred by allegations of torture at the hands of the State Security Services.

In Kyrgyzstan, President Sooronbay Jeenbekov gave public reassurances about respecting human rights, and improving cooperation with civil society, raising hopes that he may break with the troubling legacy of his predecessor, former President Atambayev. However, progress in practice has been limited. In early 2018 some libel lawsuits against journalists were dropped by both former President Atambayev and President Jeenbekov, but legislation needs amending to ensure that such cases will not be repeated in the future and some human rights activists and journalist still face significant fines for alleged libel. Civil society representatives report that they are under state surveillance, and that their conversations are bugged.

In 2017, the security services used the country’s court system to secretly “ban” two important reports on the human rights situation in the country: a report to the United Nations on the situation for Kyrgyz migrants (by Bir Duino and ADC Memorial, Belgium) and a major report on the 2010 tragedy in Osh (by HRC Memorial in Moscow, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee and Freedom House). The Supreme Court annulled the ruling of the original hearing in 2018, but a new process is ongoing after the Prosecutor General withdrew its claim for reconsideration in January 2019.

Human rights activist Azimjon Askarov, sentenced to life imprisonment on politically-motivated charges, remains behind bars, despite the UN Human Rights Committee concluding in 2016 that he was arbitrarily detained and ill-treated, and recommending his immediate and unconditional release.
The Kazakhstani authorities restrict freedom of expression and information through the systematic surveillance and blocking of information, including on the internet. In addition, they maintain pressure on the few remaining independent media outlets. They also persecute, detain and imprison journalists, social media users, civil society activists and other government critics for alleged offences including inciting discord, spreading false information, defamation, participating in or funding extremist activities. New legislation on the media significantly hampers journalists’ ability to work freely: one provision requires journalists to obtain consent to publish reports considered to contain private information - vaguely defined terms, which risk being used to obstruct investigative reporting. Over 2018 the state brought several lawsuits against journalists, and ordered the closure of several independent media.

Government officials and public figures use lawsuits as a means of retaliation against critics. Trials continue to be flawed, and the number of politically-motivated convictions is rising. The authorities frequently use Article 174 of the Criminal Code to prosecute critics, which punishes incitement to discord and contains an overbroad description of offences meaning it can be easily manipulated.

The authorities interfere with the rights of residents to peacefully assemble and have introduced new restrictions on trade union activity, legal defence and religious practice. In September 2018, officials prevented peaceful demonstrators from meeting with a delegation of foreign parliamentarians.

Freedom of association is also under attack: trade union employees have been subject to flawed court cases and sometimes physical violence. In March 2018, the government banned the peaceful opposition movement Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DVK after the Russian acronym) after ruling it was an extremist organization. Subsequently, distributing material about the DVK in the media and on social networks became a criminal offence, and by the end of the year dozens of individual citizens, activists and bloggers had faced criminal and administrative charges, and some were subjected to forced psychiatric treatment.

A law on lawyers and legal assistance that came into force in July threatens the independence of the legal profession.

The human rights situation in Turkmenistan remains fundamentally repressive. The serious economic crisis has resulted in dramatically increasing prices on consumer goods, the lack of basic foodstuffs, as well as long lines and rationing in state-owned stores where prices are still state-regulated. In spite of this, government propaganda continues to focus on the supposed well-being and prosperity of the nation and the authorities continue to mobilize citizens en mass for regime-praising events, including holiday parades, welcoming ceremonies and days of free labour. At the same time, the authorities suppress the dissemination of information about the real state of affairs in the country through strict state media control and censorship, as well as intimidation and pressure on government critics. Journalist Saparmed Nepeskuliev was finally released in May 2018 after spending three years behind bars, but only after serving out his sentence and in ill health. The authorities also continue their arbitrary campaign against satellite dishes, used by citizens to watch and listen to foreign TV and radio channels, and limit internet access. Dozens of people imprisoned following politically-motivated and unfair trials remain disappeared within Turkmenistan’s prison system and torture and ill-treatment are widespread. Thousands of people are believed to have been blacklisted for travel abroad.
Supporting local human rights defenders
IPHR provides direct support to human rights defenders working in the countries of the former Soviet Union. By responding to the diverse needs of the human rights communities in different countries ranging from closed regimes to struggling democracies, over 2018 IPHR helped local partners strengthen their work on human rights monitoring, strategic litigation, financial management, fundraising, and innovative outreach. During the year IPHR provided training for 279 human rights defenders in the region, over 100,000 EUR in emergency support to 12 human rights defenders and their families suffering from politically-motivated persecution, and directly supported over 30 civil society projects. In addition, IPHR assisted human rights defenders from the region to take forward dozens of national and international strategic litigation cases.

Below, IPHR staff and local partners share some of their most memorable experiences of our joint work in 2018: IPHR Director Brigitte Dufour describes her heartbreaking prison visit to Azimjan Askarov – an ethnic Uzbek unjustly imprisoned by the Kyrgyzstani authorities after the ethnic clashes in the south of the country in 2010; beneficiaries of emergency support talk about their experiences; and IPHR Programme Director Simon Papuashvili, member of Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union Vitalia Lebid and human rights lawyer Alex Prezanti describe their joint efforts to fight impunity for war crimes committed in Donbas.

People trained in

- Central Asia: 41
- Russia: 12
- Eastern Partnership Countries: 197
- Central and Eastern Europe: 29

Emergency assistance

€ 101,327
“Niet! Niet! Niet!”,

the expressionless guards at Bishkek’s pre-trial detention facility No. 1 repeated endlessly... No phone, no camera, no Belgian chocolates, no drawing materials, no brushes nor watercolour paints allowed. My presents for Azimjon Askarov, human rights defender serving life imprisonment, were strictly prohibited. Eventually the prison director caved in to my insistent requests and made an exception for some pencils and a block of paper, but insisted I sign a form recording exactly how many sheets were contained in the block of paper I was so audaciously bringing into the prison! I complied with the absurd request, happy to save these items but disappointed that I had to leave the paintbrushes behind as I knew they would have made Azimjon happy given his passion for painting which has developed during his nine years behind bars.

In the freezing cold meeting room I was shocked to discover that Azimjon was standing behind bars, in a cage. An impressive deployment of prison guards surrounded me and two colleagues from Paris – we had received unexpected permission to visit the famous human rights activist thanks to the incessant efforts of our Kyrgyzstani colleague. Standing in front of the cage, I insisted that we did not require protection and were not afraid of Azimjan but the prison director kept up the pretence that the prison rules only allow visits under such conditions. This was extremely humiliating for Azimjan, who also protested about the arbitrariness and illegality of such rules. Finally, after we again complained about such close surveillance, half the prison guards went out leaving “only” four including the Director.

Despite the cold and damp conditions, we had a long and fascinating discussion with Azimjan. We had to stand alongside the bars as there was nowhere to sit. He jokingly regretted he couldn’t offer us tea and receive us in his office, he’s not lost his sense of humour. Azimjan recalled with energy, conviction and anger the injustice to which he has been subjected. He has not lost hope of release, and he was grateful that we have not forgotten him.

I held Azimjon’s hands through the bars, reiterating that we use every possible occasion to raise his case and call for his freedom, in line with the 2016 UN Human Rights Committee recommendation that he should be released immediately. The HRC found that he had been arbitrarily detained, held in inhumane conditions, tortured and mistreated, and prevented from adequately preparing his trial defence. Instead of releasing Azimjon, the Kyrgyzstani authorities changed the constitution to ensure that international law does not prevail over national law, as part of a set of reforms adopted by referendum.

Until we find ways to ensure justice for Azimjon and make sure he is released and reunited with his wife, children and grandchildren, we encourage everyone to write to him. He told us that reading messages from people around the world is “food for his soul” keeping him alive and hopeful for better days to come. Please write to him in Russian, English (which he is learning) Uzbek or Kyrgyz at the:

KYRGYZSTAN / 720000, Бишкек / Пер. Геологический 2 / СИЗО 1

Thank you!

Brigitte Dufour
Greeting cards for Azimjon from participants of the Civil Society Parallel Conference 2019 in Milano
“After [my husband’s] release from prison, it was with your help that we were able to get back on our feet as a family. We were able to cover food expenses, take care of our health and make the necessary arrangements with doctors. We were also able to cover our children’s school costs, and housing expenses. It was a tremendous help!”

- Political prisoner’s wife

“I would like to express my gratitude for the assistance we received. Azerbaijan is expensive, with rampant unemployment. The assistance allowed us to cover our taxi costs each time we traveled to visit [my son]. We were also able to provide for his basic needs. We truly are grateful for all that you have done for us”.

- Political prisoner’s mother

“As a ‘coach’ on the linkage evidence project, I have been encouraged by the enthusiasm with which trainees have taken on my advice and recommendations, and the speed with which seasoned human rights defenders have transformed into competent criminal investigators. Most of all, I enjoyed mentoring the trainees through their first attempt at a real criminal investigation - applying lessons learned in the course of the webinar to a real situation that may lead to concrete results. “Given the short life expectancy of Donbas separatist leaders, the biggest obstacle to justice may be that they might not live long enough to see their day in court. But if they do, I am confident that justice will catch up with them eventually. The important thing for now is for civil society and government authorities to continue to collect and preserve credible evidence of individual responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine. No situation remains static forever. So, when an opportunity for his prosecution presents itself in the future, all the evidence will be there to secure a conviction.”

- Alex Prezanti, human rights and international criminal law lawyer and trainer

“This grant provided huge support for me and my family at a difficult time. I had to flee my country fast and obviously couldn’t take any money with me or sell anything to provide for my family and myself. I couldn’t have bought the plane tickets to allow my family to join me. This grant was a lifeline which allowed me to bring my whole family to safety. In our new location we had nothing to live on, we had no contacts or friends to whom we could turn for help. This grant allowed us to buy the basic essentials such as clothing, school materials etc. This timely support helped us to avoid further stress and worry”

- Central Asian journalist in exile

“Partnership with IPHR first and foremost meant that the profile of our new organization was raised in the eyes of international human rights organizations, as IPHR showed trust in us. Thanks to the help of IPHR staff, I personally was able to receive both moral and material assistance. And with the support of IPHR, I was able to establish my human rights activities and my writing.”

- Human rights defender, Uzbekistan.

“Thanks to the help of IPHR staff, I personally was able to receive both moral and material assistance. And with the support of IPHR, I was able to establish my human rights activities and my writing.”

- Human rights defender, Uzbekistan.
“Taking part in the project was very helpful and contributed to deepening my knowledge of documenting and analyzing evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The organization, in which I work, deals with the documentation of war crimes and crimes against humanity in eastern Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict. The evidence obtained is used to bring criminals to justice, both at the national and international levels. Thus, the purpose of the project and the results obtained after the project are fully in line with the strategy of the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union.”

- Vitalia Lebid, lawyer at strategic litigation center at Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Association

“We have been working with IPHR for several years. In 2018 the EU advocacy that we carried out with IPHR was very helpful. We visited Brussels in October, 2018, and met with several EU officials, with whom we continue to be in touch. Before the visit we also developed a briefing paper with the help of IPHR. All these efforts helped us to bring the key messages on human rights to the attention of the international community and to draw attention to human rights violations in Azerbaijan.”

- Fuad Hasanov, Democracy Monitor, Azerbaijan

“After safely returning home, I am writing to thank you for your invaluable assistance with planning our advocacy visit to Brussels. We really appreciate your help and advice. Indeed, the “before-trip” hard-work preparations and training work-outs played a key role in us successfully carrying out this visit. All these were great learning experiences for the Kyrgyz delegation. We hope that the visit was fruitful and its seeds will be seen during the Kyrgyzstan-EU Human Rights dialogue. 12 June 2018.”

- Sardorbek Abdukhalilov, NGO Spravidlivost (Justice), Jalal-Abad, Kyrgyzstan

“In 2018 we cooperated closely with IPHR on EU advocacy. Oleg Orlov and I visited Brussels in March and met with several high level EU officials, including MEP Rebecca Harms, the Greens/European Free Alliance group in the European Parliament. Following our meeting Rebecca Harms and I launched an Interactive Map of Political Prisoners in Russia – FIFA: Fair Play... Fight For the Forgotten on 5 June 2018. Without the support of IPHR to organise this visit to Brussels and provide us with the opportunity to meet with Rebecca Harms, we would not have been able bring the issue of the political prisoners in Russia to the attention of the international community on such a wide scale. Also in 2018 the Political Prisoners Support Programme of Memorial participated for the first time in the pre-session of the UN’s Universal Periodic Review focusing on Russia, in Geneva, thanks to IPHR’s support and efforts.”

- Sergei Davidis, Memorial Human Rights Cerner, Russia (Political Prisoners’ Support Programme)

“I’d like to take this opportunity to thank IPHR, especially Rachel Gasowski and Anne Sunder-Plassmann, for their invaluable contribution on collecting information and preparing the shadow report about the rights of women with disabilities, and for responsiveness and cooperation in advancing the rights of women with disabilities in Tajikistan.”

- Saida Inoyatova, Chairperson of the League of Women with Disabilities “Ishtirok”
Ensuring accountability for grave crimes in Ukraine

When IPHR began documenting grave human rights abuses and international crimes in Ukraine in 2014 it was immediately clear that the road to bringing perpetrators to justice and to ensuring reparations for victims would be long and full of potholes. Indeed, four years on, these important objectives are still to be realized. Like many other conflicts the war in Ukraine is highly politicized and marrying politics with justice is not an easy task.

The remarkable team of Truth Hounds monitors have now spent months in the conflict zone recording hundreds of testimonies from victims and witnesses and collecting physical and documentary evidence that proves beyond reasonable doubt that civilians in Donbas and Crimea have been subjected to some of the most heinous acts including war crimes and crimes against humanity. This evidence has been passed to both national investigative bodies in Ukraine and Russia and the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC. Unfortunately, national proceedings are ineffective and politicized and the ICC is also failing to show signs of moving forward actively with the investigation. So we ask ourselves what else can we do to help victims and stop the violence by bringing perpetrators to justice?

Given the difficulties with national prosecutions and the exceptional slowness of the ICC, the only viable option left seems to be using domestic prosecutorial mechanisms in third countries. These proceedings could be opened based on laws that permit the extraterritorial application of justice mechanisms. Challenges remain. Many countries require that the victim and the perpetrators reside on their territory, but we believe they can be overcome through the cross-border collaboration of civil society groups.

This summer IPHR launched a pilot initiative to help Ukrainian civil society leaders to develop skills in linkage evidence collection. We chose 15 participants from our partner organizations: Crimea SOS, Truth Hounds and Ukraine Helsinki Human Rights Union and asked international criminal law expert Alexandre Prezanti to facilitate the webinar. Linkage evidence is information which demonstrates the link between an individual’s conduct and the commission of a crime. It is an essential element of all criminal cases and must be documented from the earliest opportunity. Yet, it is an aspect of documentation which is often overlooked, notably because it is much easier to establish the existence of crimes than to link them to specific individuals through credible evidence. Civil society plays an increasingly crucial role in supporting national and international prosecuting authorities in evidence-gathering and influencing prosecutorial strategy. Boosting civil society’s capacity to document linkage evidence will improve the likelihood of successful outcomes in domestic and international prosecutions of perpetrators of international crimes.

The four-week webinar was followed by a research project whereby webinar participants were tasked to develop a perpetrator dossier with linkage evidence on various crimes committed by individuals including willful killing, torture and illegal deprivation of liberty. The dossiers will be shared with prosecutorial offices across Europe and over the next year we will be working hard to kick-start criminal proceedings.
IPHR aims to empower civil society partners to raise their concerns effectively at the international level. IPHR has a strong track record of working with key European and global institutions safeguarding and promoting human rights in the region, including the UN and relevant treaty bodies, the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe (CoE) and OSCE. Over the past 10 years, IPHR has built strong working relations with the officials and agencies within these institutions, which has resulted in IPHR’s and partners’ joint recommendations being incorporated into the official recommendations of the target institutions.

In 2018, IPHR assisted 89 local human rights defenders from the Eurasia region to take part in meetings with representatives of key international institutions and diplomats in Brussels, Geneva, Warsaw, and other European capitals as well as in Washington D.C. In September, IPHR and local partners drew attention to key human rights problems by holding six thematic side events at the OSCE annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw, during PACE meetings in Strasbourgh and at the UN in Geneva. In addition to international advocacy work, IPHR engaged in advocacy with the Uzbekistani authorities during two field missions.

In this chapter, IPHR staff and partners reflect on their experience and achievements related to raising issues affecting Russian and Azerbaijani civil society with the EU and IPHR’s participation in the Asian Human Rights Forum, hosted by the Uzbekistani authorities in Samarkand.

People taking part in advocacy initiatives from different regions

- Central Asia: 26
- Russia: 10
- Eastern Partnership Countries: 52
- Turkey: 1

Total: 92

- Men: 52%
- Women: 48%
The human rights movement in Russia

In March, Oleg Orlov and Sergei Davidis from the Russian NGO Memorial Human Rights Centre and IPHR held meetings in Brussels with EU officials, including with EU High Representative Federica Mogherini’s cabinet and EU member states. Oleg is one of the older generation of human rights defenders from Memorial and has dedicated his life to protecting fundamental rights. He started working on human rights protection during Soviet times and it is reassuring, that people like him remain active participants of the human rights movements in Russia today.

Conditions for civil society, be it human rights or environmental are appalling in Russia. The Russian authorities “championed” the adoption of the “Foreign Agents” law in 2012 – requiring organizations receiving funding from foreign donors to adopt the stigmatising “Foreign Agents” label; and legislation on undesirable organizations criminalised receiving funding from certain donors, forcing several donors to suspend their operations in Russia.

These laws have had a chilling effect on many civil society groups; some have suspended their activities, others have taken their cases to court. The persistent repression means that civil society and human rights movements remain under enormous pressure on a day-to-day basis.

IPHR persistently advocates and calls on the EU to put human rights at the centre of EU foreign policy, be that in political, security or human rights dialogues. We want the EU to raise human rights issues with the Russian authorities at the highest levels possible, and speak out about them both publicly and privately. The political dialogue between the EU and Russia has currently reached the lowest point since the 1990s; due to EU sanctions on Russia the bilateral political dialogue and the bi-annual human rights dialogue have been suspended since 2014 and 2013 respectively.

On 16 April, a month after Oleg and Sergei’s visit to Brussels, the EU Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) reviewed the Five Guiding Principles of EU-Russia relations. In a speech to the European Parliament (EP) on 17 April, EU High Representative Mogherini reported that Ministers “discussed ways to make our support for civil society and human rights in Russia even more effective”. In a press statement from 16 April she said that there was a need to increase support “for Russian citizens, civil society, human rights defenders.”

This kind of language provides support and encouragement to those working to protect human rights in spite of the numerous and daunting legislative, political and moral obstacles put in their paths. In 2019 our job will be to remain vigilant and ensure that the EU speaks out against human rights violations in Russia and supports those in need.

Photo on the right: © Коля Санич/ Sunny sunday/ CC BY-ND 2.0/ https://flic.kr/p/ZpF6k3
Azerbaijan: Voices of Courage

Currently, many courageous colleagues in Azerbaijan are subject to travel bans, for instance investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova and human rights lawyer Intigam Aliyev, both of whom recently spent time behind bars on politically-motivated grounds. Others, including young activists Ilkin Rustamzada, Giyas Ibrahimov, and Beyram Mammadov are still serving long prison sentences in harsh conditions purely because they spoke truth to power. The Azerbaijani authorities interfere in the daily work of civil society in an undue and arbitrary manner, and censor and control media outlets. This provides just a snapshot of the extent of human rights violations in Azerbaijan, violations which have been carefully documented by IPHR and partners throughout the year.

The courage and determination of human rights defenders inspire and guide the advocacy work I carry out towards the EU. In my work, the bottom line is to make sure that the EU and its institutions stand by and promote the core values which the EU was created to defend. This might sound an easy task but these days it is far from straightforward - not least because of the widespread backlash inside and outside of the EU against these founding principles. Working in the human rights field makes one realise that you can never take things for granted – and that principles such as “nobody is above the law” and “everybody is equal before the law” require an ongoing robust defence.

On 4 July 2018, the EP adopted a recommendation to other EU institutions in charge of negotiating the EU-Azerbaijan Comprehensive Agreement. The EP recommendations highlighted all the key asks presented by IPHR and partners during advocacy work. The recommendation makes the ratification of the agreement conditional on the release of dozen of individuals unjustly sentenced to lengthy prison sentences; reminds the authorities of the importance of pluralistic and independent media, and demands to ease restrictions on civil society. It also asks the Azerbaijani authorities to lift travel bans imposed on Khadija Ismayilova and Intigam Aliyev. IPHR and partners achieved this positive result through consistent and regular engagement with a range of EP bodies and political groups as well as coalition-building with likeminded stakeholders.

In practice this recommendation is supported by all political groups inside the EP and represents the official position of one of the EU institutions which will ratify the agreement once negotiations are concluded. In the ratification report, the EP will have to be guided by the provisions in the above-mentioned recommendation.

Of course, these kinds of recommendations do not work wonders immediately. We should not expect immediate and unconditional changes overnight. However, such recommendations do call out a country publicly on its human rights violations and send a clear signal that “upgrading” of bilateral relations with the EU entails respecting the basic human rights standards and international obligations to which the country signed-up.

This kind of advocacy is becoming increasingly important on issues and countries where national human rights protection mechanisms are failing, where the judiciary is under the thumb of the executive; and where individuals who dare to speak-up about human rights violations or corruption face harassment, intimidation and incarceration.

In the short-term I hope that this kind of work encourages the many courageous voices inside Azerbaijan not to stay silent in the face of the worst crack-down on dissent since independence. In the long term, I hope that these courageous individuals will have the opportunity to live and work in a free country, without fear of reprisals and persecution.

Tinatin Tsertsvadze

Photo on the right: © Aziz Karimov/ CC BY-SA 4.0/
Samarkand: The Silk Road, Timur, the impressive madrasa, stunning turquoise tiles and intricate patterns... It was not easy to convince my family and friends that I was going to Samarkand for work! Since IPHR was set up 10 years ago it had been impossible for us to travel to Uzbekistan, but President Mirziyoyev’s recent reforms and re-opening of the country to international NGOs meant that IPHR could finally visit. On 22-23 November 2018, many representatives of international NGOs were invited to take part in the “Asian Human Rights Forum”, organized by the Presidential Human Rights Center in Samarkand with the support of the UN and the OSCE. Until recently, the idea of holding a human rights conference in Uzbekistan would have been unthinkable! But the new platform for dialogue between the government, local civil society and international organizations appeared to provide a unique opportunity to discuss ongoing challenges and ways forward in this area.

When arriving in Tashkent, I was puzzled by the official welcome I received. A public official called my name out as I came down the steps from the plane and directed me to a private minivan with window curtains. We drove to a VIP lounge with private passport controls and access to comfortable sofas. In a short while my suitcase, identified with VIP stickers, arrived on a separate conveyor belt. This was just the start, as the rest of our stay confirmed that international participants of the “Asian Forum for Human Rights” were no ordinary guests! There was a clear misunderstanding as international NGOs neither expect nor wish to be treated as officials. To the contrary, the treatment we received made us feel uncomfortable, and it was in blatant contrast to the treatment this country reserves for its own civil society.

My unease persisted as unwelcome attention and supervision continued from Tashkent to Samarkand. In spite of the VIP treatment I received, the government made no exception regarding internet censorship: thus, my attempts to access IPHR’s website were unsuccessful, as our website is blocked in Uzbekistan! This was quite telling of the government’s continued lack of openness to scrutiny of its human rights record.

The conference took place in an impressive, recently built modern palace surrounded by walls and heavily guarded. My attention was drawn to the fact that a few hundred meters from the conference venue, the authorities were about to forcefully evict and demolish houses of thousands of residents without obtaining their permission or paying an adequate compensation. Tourism is a lucrative business in Samarkand, and lots of renovations are going on in this beautiful city with
unique UNESCO-protected areas, but this is not happening without violations of the housing and social rights of the population.

During the conference itself, the most ominous indication that reforms have a long way to go in Uzbekistan was the exclusion of local civil society. Sadly, human rights defenders from Uzbekistan were conspicuous by their absence. Most had not even been informed that this unprecedented international conference to discuss human rights in the whole region would take place in their country. In total, some 400 representatives from government, international governmental organizations, international and Central Asian NGOs were all duly invited and present. But only at the last minute were the organizers persuaded to invite selected representatives of Uzbekistani civil society, and as the authorities issued the invitations on the eve of the conference, it was virtually impossible for people to organize the funding and reach Samarkand in time. The conference centered on discussions of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, with entire sessions dedicated to the important role that civil society plays in reaching them, and yet genuinely independent Uzbekistani civil society representatives were absent. I made an intervention in plenary to draw attention to this anomaly (the intervention can be seen on the photo on the right - click the photo to see the post).

In short, this conference showed that the Uzbekistani government has learned much about public relations exercises, but that it is not yet prepared to accept and welcome genuine critical debate and equal partnership with civil society. The government expressed its wish to organize such an event every second year. IPHR would be happy to attend again, but only on condition that Uzbekistani human rights defenders are invited to contribute to the planning of the event, have a say in developing the agenda and are given an equal role on the conference panels.

Too few Uzbek civil society representatives could join #Samarkand Human Rights Forum. We hope they will be fully able to join when we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of HumanRights, says @IPHR’s @BriDufour. @HRW warmly supports that call! pic.twitter.com/1dTH5a4E19
research & publications
To support our international advocacy work and strengthen our efforts to amplify local voices at international fora, IPHR and partners regularly publish joint publications. What makes IPHR’s work stand out is our commitment to giving credit to all local contributors, who share the findings of their human rights monitoring work and research on the ground. Together with local human rights defenders and civil society organizations, IPHR published three in-depth thematic reports and over 50 human rights monitoring and advocacy publications, including 15 joint country updates to the CIVICUS Monitor, nine statements, six briefing papers, eight open letters to leading politicians, six submissions to international bodies and six updates, press releases and papers of concern.

IPHR sometimes assists local partners with research and fact-finding upon request. Over the past 10 years IPHR has deployed over a dozen international fact-finding missions to investigate large-scale or highly sensitive human rights violations in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus. In 2018, IPHR staff undertook a field mission to Uzbekistan, where they met local human rights defenders and government officials, and IPHR also supported fact-finding missions in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea.

Below are accounts of our fact-finding and field work done in 2018, including our cooperation with human rights defenders in documenting the rights of the persons with disabilities in Tajikistan and the field mission to Uzbekistan, which IPHR and other international human rights organizations had not been able to visit for well over a decade.
Tajikistan: outreach and advocacy for equal rights for all

IPHR worked with partners in Tajikistan to research obstacles to the enjoyment of rights by different groups of vulnerable persons in Tajikistan, particularly persons with disabilities and victims of domestic violence, and advocate for change.

Domestic violence against women

Stigma and lack of awareness about domestic violence amongst the general public remain widespread and society often blames the victim of violence rather than the perpetrator. Despite efforts, government representatives have failed to communicate a consistent public message of zero tolerance of domestic violence and state media continues to perpetuate gender disparity and stereotypes. There has been an alarming rise in the suicide rate among women and girls in recent years which seems closely linked to domestic violence.

In March 2017, IPHR published the joint report “He left his footprint on my life’ - Domestic violence in Tajikistan: Time to right the wrongs” with Nota Bene and Polish Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights. The report was based on the findings of a research trip IPHR conducted with local partners in 2016.

In April 2018, IPHR Director Brigitte Dufour returned to Tajikistan to present the conclusions and recommendations from the report at a civil society seminar organized by the EU on the theme of “Practical Implementation of the Gender Equality Principles in Tajikistan”. Representatives from government bodies attended the event as well as civil society representatives.

Brigitte Dufour also visited Southern Tajikistan, to see the work of IPHR partner Najoti-Kudakon which works to combat domestic violence in the Khatlon region through outreach programmes in rural areas where they provide services to victims of violence, and raise awareness on womens’ rights.

The NGO Najoti-Kudakon conducts sewing classes in Southern Tajikistan to help women have their own income.

Drawing attention to the plight of persons with disabilities in Tajikistan

In June 2018, IPHR and the Tajikistani partner NGO Ishtirok visited several towns and cities in Tajikistan to study the human rights situation of persons with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities in Tajikistan are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations such as discrimination – especially when trying to access education, the labour market, health care and social security – as well as abuse in semi-closed institutions such as residential care facilities and special boarding schools. Human rights monitors have very limited access to residential care facilities for persons with disabilities, despite allegations of human rights violations such as forced abortions, forced administration of drugs, indiscriminate and inappropriate use of measures of restraint and denial of the right to family life by staff at the facilities. Women and girls with disabilities often face multiple forms of discrimination due to their gender and poverty. Persistent societal stigma, physical barriers as well as the current system of special schooling and institutionalization, a legacy from the Soviet past, prevent persons with disabilities from fully participating in society and realizing their potential.
Working for Change

On 1 October 2018 Tajikistani NGOs Najoti-Kudakon, Vash Vybor (Your Choice), Nota Bene and IPHR sent a joint submission on domestic violence against women in Tajikistan to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). On the same day the Tajikistani NGOs Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, Ishtirok, Nota Bene, and IPHR sent another joint submission to CEDAW to highlight the plight of women and girls with disabilities.

In the last week of October Tajikistani civil society representatives and IPHR briefed CEDAW experts in Geneva on key issues and on 31 October CEDAW held discussions with the Tajikistani government delegation led by the Prosecutor General, and reviewed Tajikistan’s compliance with its obligations under the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

NGOs push for implementation of CEDAW recommendations

On 9 November 2018 CEDAW issued its concluding observations to Tajikistan and urged the authorities to strengthen protection from domestic violence and improve the situation for persons with disabilities particularly women and girls, including by criminalizing all forms of domestic violence and ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Through media work and advocacy IPHR and partners will continue pushing for the implementation of these recommendations from CEDAW. On 3 December, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, together with our Tajikistani partners we issued a joint press release and comprehensive report on the situation of men, women and children with disabilities in Tajikistan which called on the authorities to implement the CEDAW recommendations as a matter of urgency.
Uzbekistan: two sides of the same coin

The three of us sat in The Book Café in Tashkent, on Saturday afternoon, after an intense day spent with human rights defender Agzam Turgunov and other civil society representatives. We were pretty drained from stress of the day’s events. We sat in a corner of the cafe and tried to work a bit before our flight back to Brussels at midnight.

Just then we got a call from Laziz, Agzam’s son, sounding worried and saying that he could not reach his father. All three of us stayed silent but shared the same dreadful thought: had they arrested him? Ten minutes later Laziz called again to say he had reached his father who had been travelling on the underground metro, explaining why he was not reachable. This incident illustrates the effect of prevalent but subtle repression. It leaves you always thinking about the worst case scenario.

Earlier that day we had witnessed open and shameless surveillance in relation to Agzam, a man in his late 60s, who has spent 10 years of his life in prison simply because he tried to defend the rights of others. That morning, after meeting civil society representatives on issues ranging from forced evictions to torture in prisons, we accompanied Agzam back to his flat. As we got out of the car, we saw a young man, dressed in black and speaking on his phone. As we moved towards the house, he followed. We made eye contact and he crossed the street, still clutching the phone to his ear.

The strain this renewed surveillance caused for Agzam’s family was clear – as was the risk of re-traumatisation of those whose loved ones have previously spent time in prison on politically-motivated grounds. As we left Agzam’s house, the young man in black with his phone was still standing in the vicinity of the house.

This mission was the first time that IPHR had been allowed to visit Uzbekistan. When preparing for this mission, it was hard to imagine what to expect from a “post reform” Uzbekistan. For the first two days of our visit, different government ministries tried to convince us of their determination to depart from the ways of “old Uzbekistan”, to a new system with an improved international reputation and guaranteed protection of human rights. Undeniably, we could not have dared even to attempt to go to Uzbekistan a year or two ago. The government openness to meet with international human rights organizations is a step in the right direction.
But there was a stark contrast between the government’s narrative, public relations attempts and hospitality and the reality of a country where civil society has been all but crushed underfoot. The repressive policies of the last 25 years have been dramatically felt in this sector. Individual human rights defenders, many in their late 50s and 60s, and many of whom have served politically-motivated prison sentences are trying to rebuild this movement, but are confronted by obstacles at every step. Some are still portrayed as “enemies of the nation”, and public distrust of the work of human rights movements and civil society persists.

Clearly, the authorities have to do more to convince the citizens of Uzbekistan, local human rights groups and the international community that they are serious about making a break with the repressive politics and policies of the past.

Agzam is a proud and courageous man, who, despite his bitter experience in prison, has resolved not to become bitter himself and who continues to believe that the fight for justice always makes sense.

Together with other former political prisoners, Dilmurod Sayidov and Agzam Farmonov, Agzam Turgunov is setting up a new NGO “Restoration of Justice” which will be dedicated to securing redress for past human rights violations. We are proud to work in partnership with them.

Shaking hands with one’s torturer

In Tashkent we met with Bobomurod Abdullayev, independent journalist who was released from prison last May after spending eight months in pre-trial detention of the State Security Services, where officials subjected him to severe torture and ill-treatment including beatings and sleep deprivation.

He told us how he was tortured in SSS pre-trial detention: that his mattress and bedclothes were confiscated and he was made to pace his cell all night: “In prison I learned to sleepwalk. I was made to walk back and forth all night long. If the guard saw me closing my eyes he would come in and beat me. I worked out I could snatch a few seconds of sleep while I paced the eight or 10 paces across the cell with my back to the hatch. When I turned round to walk back, I had to force my eyes open. Eventually I couldn't keep awake and collapsed. And then the beatings began again”.

Later the same day Bobomurod called us again and asked us to go to his flat. We took a taxi and spent some time sitting in his simply-furnished living room, his mother-in-law watching television loudly in the corner of the room.

Bobomurod told us that as he ate lunch with other human rights defenders after our meeting in a Chaihana, (tea house), a man had come up to his table and said “Hi friend, remember me?” Bobomurod told us that he automatically held out his hand and then looked up from his table into the eyes of one of the Secret Service officers who had tortured him in detention. “It was as if he was sending a clear message to me: you see, I'm still around, I was not punished.” This incident underlined the importance of redress and rehabilitation for victims of human rights violations in Uzbekistan.

Brigitte Dufour, Tinatin Tsertsadze and Rachel Bugler visited Tashkent, Uzbekistan on 16-20 October 2018 on invitation of the government of Uzbekistan.
connecting civil society in the region
As an international human rights organization, IPHR strives to connect partners working in different countries of the region and strengthen ties, experience sharing and coordination between human rights defenders, European and US organizations engaging in international advocacy, media outlets and journalists, as well as human rights lawyers litigating cases before national and international courts.

In 2018, IPHR was one of the principal coordinators of the Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP) – an OSCE-wide network of over 80 civil society organizations – and also co-managed the Brussels-based Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN). Within the CSP, IPHR headed the international advocacy group, and was actively supporting the working group for Global Magnitsky. Moreover, IPHR supported the establishment of an international lawyers’ network working to bring justice to activists and citizens persecuted in Crimea, continued cooperating with the Coalition against Torture and Impunity in Tajikistan as well as Coalitions against Torture and expert human rights organizations in other Central Asian countries.

IPHR’s network of partners includes over 30 organizations working in Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, the EU and the US.

IPHR partner NGOs in each region

- Central Asia: 18
- Russia: 4
- Eastern Partnership Countries: 7
- Western Europe: 4
- Turkey: 1
Our partners
Our team

DIRECTOR

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Simon Papuashvili

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Jacqueline Hale

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Mushegh Yekmalyan

MEMBER
Krassimir Kanev

MEMBER
Vefa Fati-Zade
Advisory board

Manfred Nowak

Yevgeniy Zhovtis

Veronika Szente-Goldston

Nigina Bakhrieva
IPHR co-hosted a hearing in the EU parliament about the human rights situation in Crimea featuring Mustafa Dzhemilev

IPHR and partners issued a report highlighting the danger of standing up for justice and rights in Central Asia

IPHR organized an advocacy visit to Washington DC with Mustafa Dzhemilev and Tamila Tasheva to provide information to DC decision makers on recent developments in Crimea

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Our team members went on a research mission to Tajikistan to find out more about the problems faced by women with disabilities

Some of the icons contain hyperlinks. Please click on the image to open it.
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IPHR supported a fact-finding mission to Crimea to document destruction of Crimean Tatar cultural heritage.

IPHR team members went on a mission to Uzbekistan.

IPHR co-organized Parallel Civil Society Conference in Milano.

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