



FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
STIFTUNG Für die Freiheit.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS 2022





FOREWORD

SABINE LEUTHEUSSER-SCHNARRENBERGER

“YOU INSPIRE US WITH YOUR BRAVERY”

Pitting yourself against a state apparatus that suppresses freedom and fundamental rights is an incredibly courageous thing to do – especially in states that are in the process of dismantling or are already utterly disregarding any adherence to the principles of the rule of law. All over the world, courageous lawyers are facing the choice between their own well-being, professional integrity and commitment to their clients. “If that decision has already been made, you can’t be afraid and just give up,” says Natalia Matskevich, a lawyer from Belarus who has been disbarred.

Lawyers are the most important professionals for denouncing human rights violations and defending human rights. In doing so, they encounter

enormous challenges. They stand up to judicial delaying tactics and harassment while representing their clients in court and demanding equal rights. They themselves become the focus of persecution and attacks. Lawyers are threatened, are forced to surrender their licences, are interrogated on flimsy grounds or even arbitrarily arrested; they can end up in prison for a long time or seek refuge in exile. Lawyers are among the most persecuted of professions.

A fight to uphold the rule of law

It becomes particularly dangerous for lawyers when judicial independence has been abolished. This was experienced by the Turkish lawyer Can Atalay and his co-defendants during the Gezi trials. Recently, the well-known Russian opposition politician and human rights defender Vladimir Kara-Murza was arrested for speaking out against Putin's war of aggression in Ukraine. The start of his trial has been repeatedly postponed; he and his lawyers cannot expect a fair trial.

Autocratic regimes deliberately seek to prevent lawyers from acting in accordance with the rule of law, but they also seek to destroy the trusting relationship they have with their clients, especially if the latter are themselves persecuted opposition politicians, journalists or activists. What is worrying is the trend towards initiating legal proceedings against lawyers even on account of their defence work.

The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders is a ground-breaking milestone for the protection of lawyers.

For lawyers, too, the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders marks an achievement for the human rights protection system. Like other professional human rights defenders, lawyers have the right to lodge complaints and petitions against individuals and state bodies before national and international judicial authorities and institutions.

The Declaration grants human rights lawyers the right to participate in public hearings and to form an opinion about compliance with national law and applicable obligations under international law. It is intended to grant lawyers not the privilege, but rather the right to provide professionally qualified legal assistance to their clients.

Human rights lawyers will always be at the forefront of the struggle for fundamental and human rights under the rule of law. This makes it all more important to consider them as human rights defenders and to support them in their work against governments that are hostile to freedom and have contempt for human rights. They are very often the last hope for persecuted opposition activists, journalists and cultural workers.

UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders

– AN EXCERPT –



Article 1

Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels.

Article 2

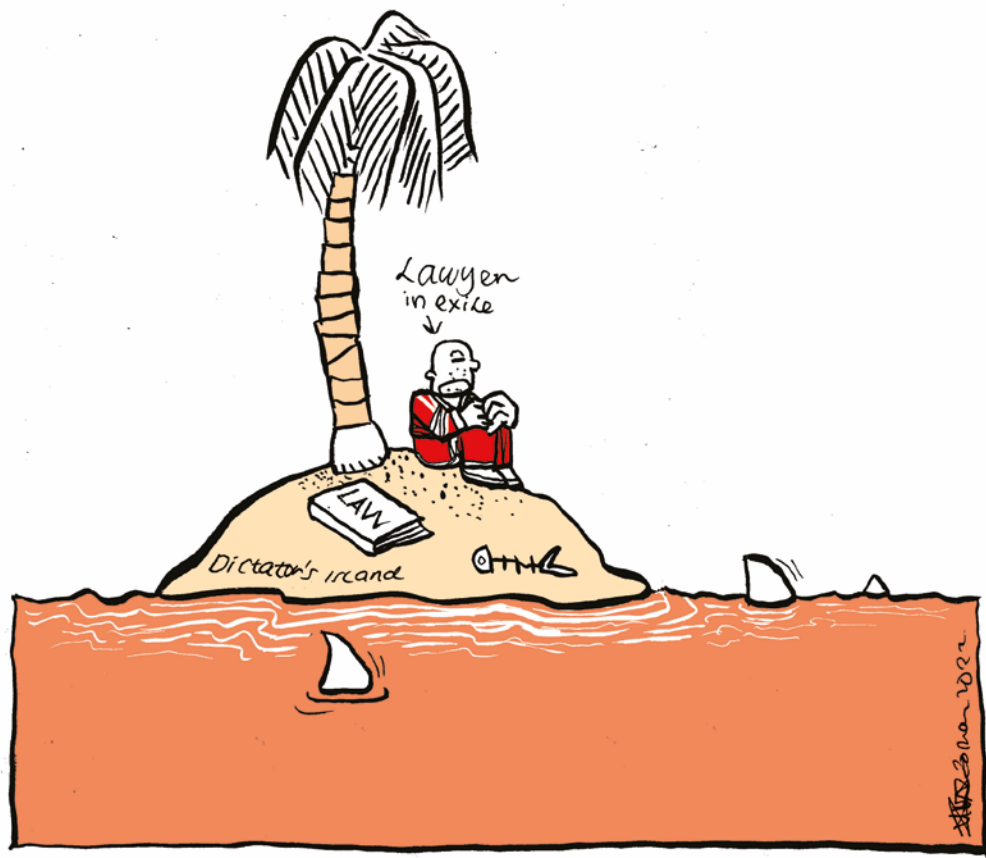
Each State has a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms [...].

Article 8

Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to have effective access, on a non-discriminatory basis, to participation in the government of his or her country and in the conduct of public affairs.

Article 9

3. To the same end, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, inter alia:
 - (a) To complain about the policies and actions of individual officials and governmental bodies with regard to violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, by petition or other appropriate means, to competent domestic judicial, administrative or legislative authorities or any other competent authority provided for by the legal system of the State, which should render their decision on the complaint without undue delay;
 - (b) To attend public hearings, proceedings and trials so as to form an opinion on their compliance with national law and applicable international obligations and commitments;
 - (c) To offer and provide professionally qualified legal assistance or other relevant advice and assistance in defending human rights and fundamental freedoms.



Article 12

Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Article 18

1. Everyone has duties towards and within the community, in which alone the free and full development of his or her personality is possible.
2. Individuals, groups, institutions and non-governmental organizations have an important role to play and a responsibility in safeguarding democracy, promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms and contributing to the promotion and advancement of democratic societies, institutions and processes.



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BELARUS

NATALIA MATSKEVICH

“Even if there is no legal success, the society and clients see the decent and courageous work of a lawyer, and the work and voice of a lawyer establish support and faith towards future changes.”

Natalia Matskevich had been working as a practicing lawyer in Minsk, Belarus, since 1994 until 12 October 2021, when the Minister of Justice of Belarus suspended her license following disciplinary proceedings against her. As a practicing lawyer, she provides legal aid and defends human rights defenders, public activists, politicians, etc. Her field of expertise includes constitutional law, criminal law, and international human rights law. Natalia Matskevich has an LL.M. and lectures at the European Humanities University (Vilnius, Lithuania) since 2009. She also provides informal education and expertise on human rights for lawyers and human rights defenders. She is particularly specialized in international standards of the bar, national legislation, fair trial, role of prosecutors and judges, and counter terrorism in compliance with principles of rule of law.



**Interview
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**Interview
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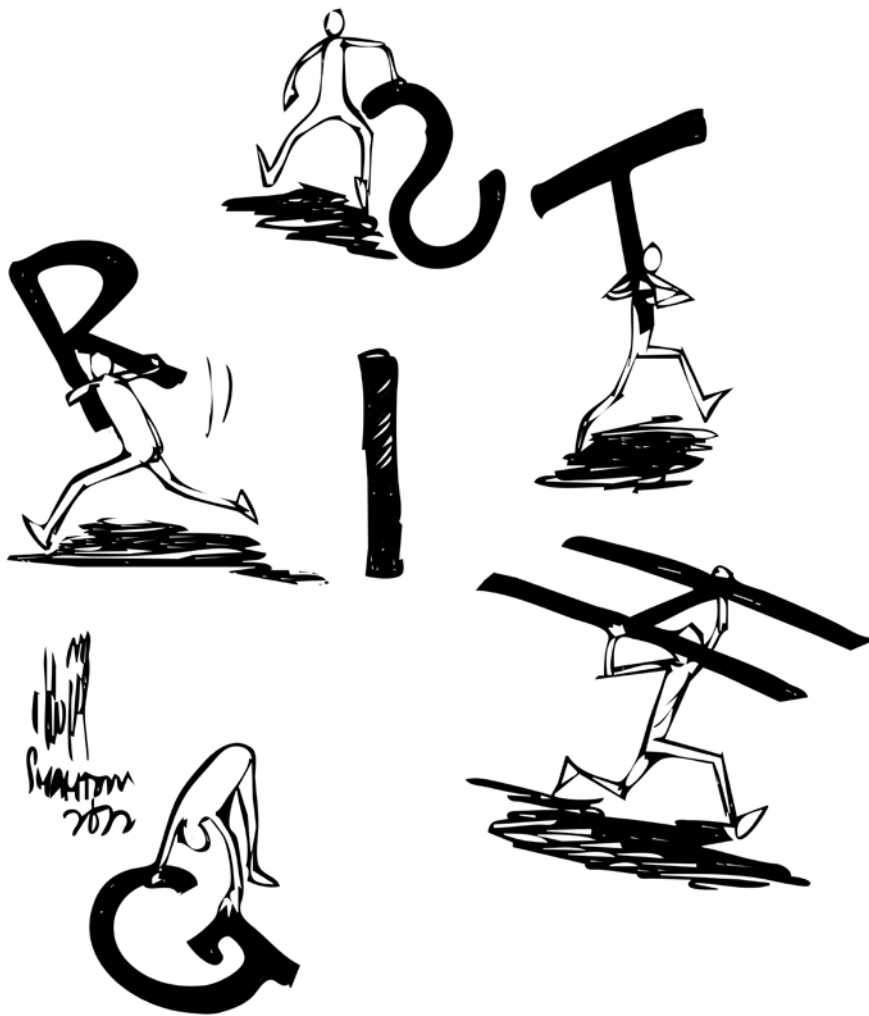


AFGHANISTAN

SHABNAM SALEHI

“Today, human rights defenders are suppressed; they are hiding because of their activism.”

A Visiting Researcher at the University of Ottawa, she is a scholar and a prominent women’s rights activist from Afghanistan. She started her academic journey in 2012, when she became an Assistant Professor at the Kabul University. From 2019 to 2021, Shabnam was Commissioner and Head of the Women’s rights Promotion and Protection Unit (WPU) in the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). Under her leadership, the WPU designed and implemented interventions that contributed to the protection and promotion of women’s rights in Afghanistan. Prior to the Taliban regime, Shabnam Salehi advocated for women’s participation in private and public institutions, and helped strengthen women’s participation in the decision-making. She also contributed to reform laws affecting marriage, virginity tests, divorce, transgender rights, sexual harassment, violence against women, and female prisoners. Since August 2021, Shabnam Salehi continues her advocacy work for women’s rights in Afghanistan in exile.





AFGHANISTAN

HOMA ALIZOY

“As long as I live, I will gradually fight for the protection of women and human rights. I consider myself to be on a mission more than before. Now is the time for our struggle to make it global.”

Homa Alizoy has been working as a judge for more than thirty-five years. She was head of the Family and Juvenile Courts, as well as Kabul Criminal Court of Appeal. Homa Alizoy is a senior Member of the Afghan Women’s Network (AWN) and founder of the Regional Women’s Network, where she has been leading its activities towards peace, and has proposed constitutional amendment to the government of Afghanistan. In 2014, Homa Alizoy was elected as a peace champion in the country by the president of Afghanistan. Her work has been also recognized by the parliament of Afghanistan, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, and several other international organizations. She has participated as a speaker in many international conferences on women right, peace, and security in the Netherlands, Iran, India, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Germany, Tajikistan and USA.



**Interview
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**Interview
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PAKISTAN

NIGHAT DAD

“Keep learning new technological advancements and digital tools to counter propaganda in the digital and non-digital spaces.”

Nighat Dad is the founder and Executive Director of Digital Rights Foundation, a non-profit organization working on digital freedoms in Pakistan. She is also a member of the Facebook Oversight Board. Her work focuses on digital rights, especially data protection, free speech online, and online violence. She identifies herself as a feminist and works to empower women in the Global South through the use of digital technology. Nighat Dad is the recipient of the prestigious Human Rights Tulip Award. She is also a TED Fellow and a TIME's Next Generation Leader.







**Interview
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PAKISTAN

HINA JILANI

“I cannot complain about injustice in our state or our society, if I do not stand up and do something against it.”

One of the founders of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and its current chairperson, Hina Jilani is a leading human rights defender at national and international levels. She has been at the heart of Pakistan's women movements, championing women's rights fearlessly despite hostile threats and propaganda. In 1980, she founded Pakistan's first all-women law firm, and the Women's Action Forum. She is also one of the founders of Dastak, a shelter that provides legal aid and refuge to the survivors of gender-based violence. In 2000, Hina Jilani became the first Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Human Rights Defenders, through which she worked to empower and protect rights defenders worldwide. A pioneer of human rights, she has also received numerous awards and honours, such as the 2001 Millennium Peace Prize for Women and the 2020 Stockholm Human Rights Award.

MEXICO

JOSÉ ANTONIO GUEVARA BERMÚDEZ

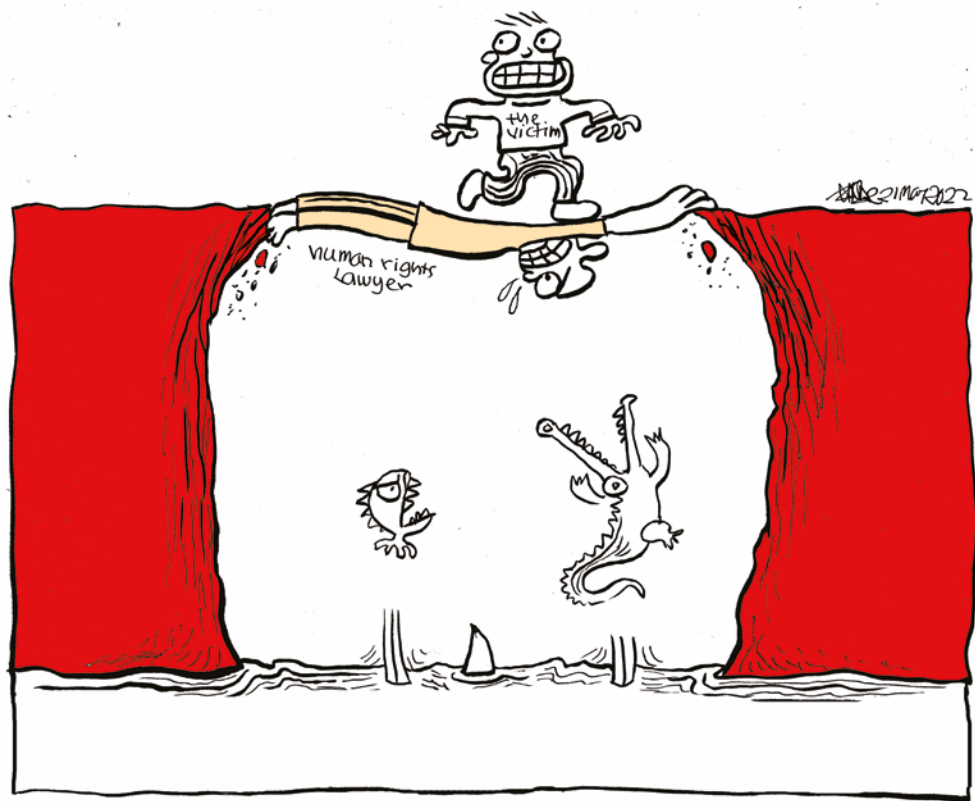
“I am going to use the space, where I was attacked and talk about the serious problems that the country is going through in terms of torture and crimes against humanity that are being committed.”

José Antonio Guevara Bermúdez is Co-Director of the Center for the Investigation of Atrocity Crimes in Mexico. Since 2015, he is a professor of international human rights and international criminal law at the Faculty of Law and Criminology, the Autonomous University of Tlaxcala. From 2014 to 2022, he was one of the five Members of the UN Human Rights Council’s (HRC) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. José Antonio was also Member of the Coordination Committee of the Special Procedures of the HRC (2018–2019). He holds a law degree from the Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City, and a Ph.D. in human rights from the Carlos III University of Madrid, Spain.



**Interview
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ZIMBABWE

DOUGLAS COLTART

“I am convinced that human rights are not primarily won in the courts.”

Douglas Coltart is a Zimbabwean lawyer, activist and peacebuilder. He is a partner at Mtetwa & Nyambirai Legal Practitioners and a member of Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights. He is the co-author of a book on constitutional law and has published widely on human rights and public interest litigation. He believes in the power of ordinary people to create peaceful and just societies through strategic nonviolent collective actions.



**Interview
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**Interview
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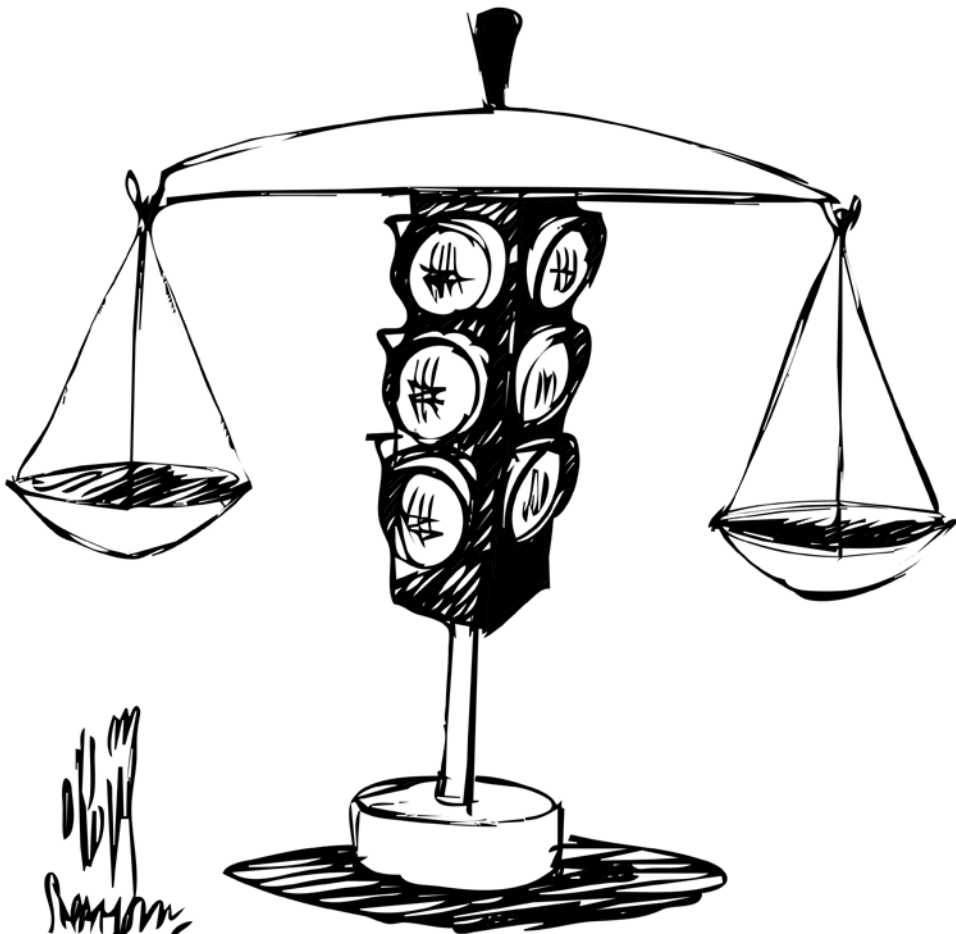


PERU

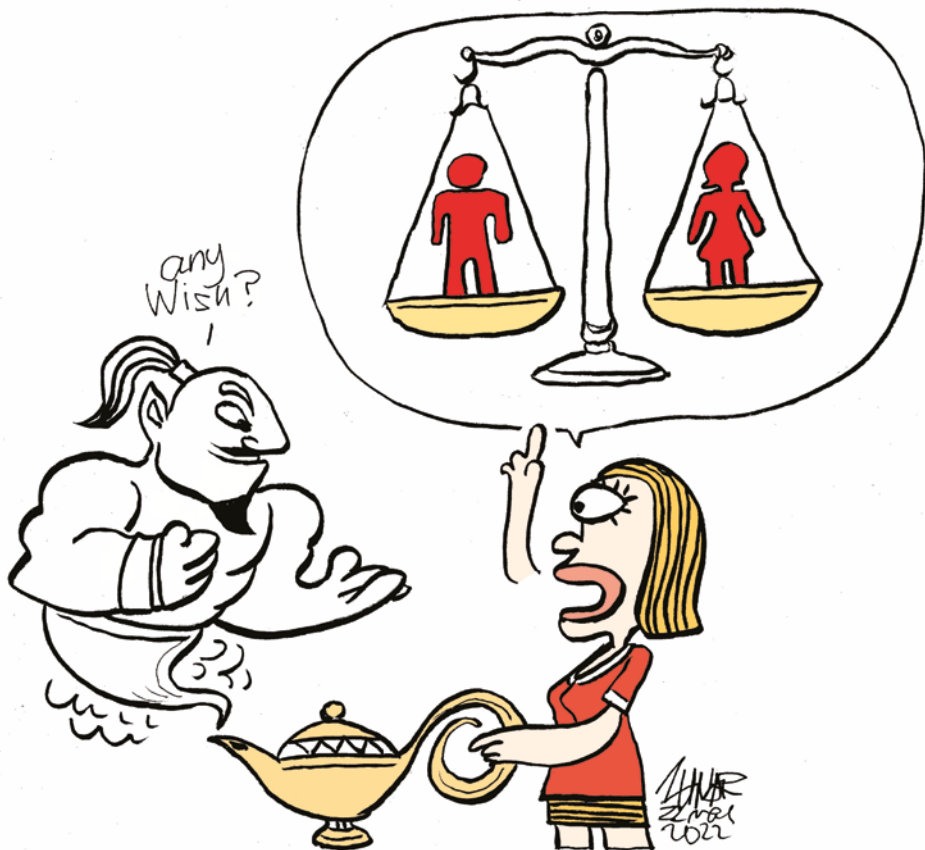
YESENIA ÁLVAREZ

“In order to defend the fundamental rights, it is necessary to multiply the knowledge about them among citizens.”

Yesenia Álvarez is a lawyer and Director of the “Instituto Político Para La Libertad”, a Peruvian organization that promotes freedom and democracy in Peru, Latin America, and the Caribbean through democratic and human rights education. She is producer of the documentary “Cuba and the Elephants,” and co-author of the 2021 book “Libertad y Prejuicio” which contains reflections on the defense of LGBTIQ + rights. She received fellowships from the Latin American Visitors Program of the Foundation for Social Analysis Studies, and the CES-Centre for European Studies held in Spain and Belgium during 2011. Yesenia Álvarez has also been awarded the Friedrich Naumann Foundation scholarship on three occasions and attended the Leadership Training Academy in Gummersbach, Germany.



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**Read more
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TURKEY

LAWYER CAN ATALAY AND THE GEZI TRIAL

Can Atalay is a lawyer for Taksim Solidarity and Chamber of Architects, and a Member of the Social Rights Association, an activist advocacy group. He has litigated many cases that have attracted public interests in Turkey, such as workers and their families who died in 2014 Soma mine disaster; students who died in the 2016 Aladağ dormitory fire; those who lost their lives in the 2018 Çorlu train massacre; and workers and their families who died in the 2021 Hendek fireworks factory explosion. He is also the lawyer of many journalists, who have been sentenced to imprisonment for their news activities, especially journalists that were tried in the Cumhuriyet newspaper case.

TURKEY

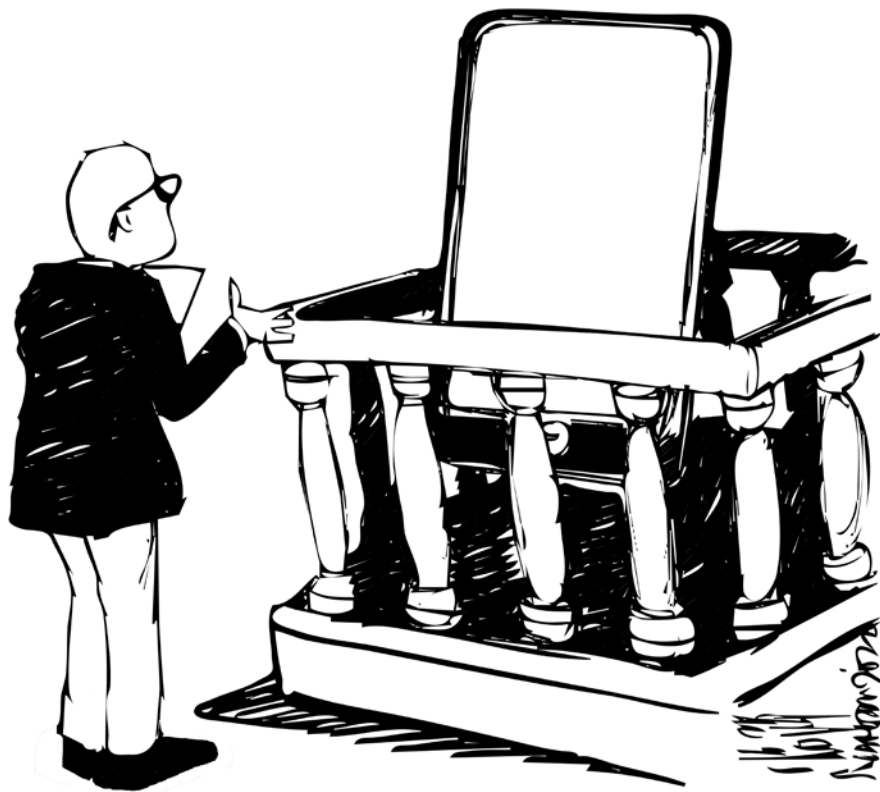
VEYSEL OK

“Let’s continue to make our objections tirelessly and without getting bored with it!”

Veysel Ok is a leading lawyer for freedom of speech and media based in Istanbul. He defends media and journalists. Previously, he worked as a lawyer for the now-defunct Taraf newspaper, and then went on to start the non-government organization “Media and Law Studies Association” (MLSA), which provides Pro-Bono legal support to writers and journalists who have been subject to intimidation, surveillance, smear campaigns and legal harassment. Throughout his career, he has defended more than 100 journalists regardless of their ideological, political and ethnic backgrounds, or popularity level. He has defended writers and journalists vilified by the Turkish government, such as Ahmet Altan, the novelist, and Deniz Yücel, the Die Welt correspondent. Outside the courthouse, Veysel Ok has been leading advocacy campaigns for those writers, journalists or dissenters wrongfully imprisoned for expressing their free opinions. Veysel Ok has himself faced surveillance and legal harassment for standing up for freedom of press.



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BULGARIA

DENITSA LYUBENOVA

“It is our duty as lawyers to protect equal rights of people, democracy and human rights in our respective countries.”

Denitsa Lyubenova is a lawyer and human rights defender. She is graduated from the University of National and World Economy, and Utrecht University with the specialization in public international law, the Netherlands. Denitsa Lyubenova has many years of experience and proven expertise in LGBTI cases, such as recognition of marriage concluded abroad, recognition of birth certificates of children of same-sex couples issued abroad, cases for change of the legal gender of trans and intersex people, and other cases of discrimination against LGBTI persons. She has numerous cases pending before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). She is also a guest lecturer at the Human Rights campus of the Council of Europe University in Venice, Italy. Denitsa Lyubenova has published numerous legal research articles, reports and book on gender, LGBTI people, etc.

ARMENIA

LOUSINEH HAKOBYAN

“I can say that I am a human rights person by nature and if I see injustice, and people need my help when they reach out to me, I will take up a case.”

Lousineh Hakobyan is a founding member, and since 2011, president of the Europe in Law Association (ELA). In 1998, she graduated from the Romance-Germanic Faculty of Yerevan State University; and in 2006, from the Armenia branch of Moscow International Academy of Entrepreneurship with a Diploma in Jurisprudence. Moreover, Lousineh Hakobyan completed her LLM in European Law at Queen Mary, University of London, and received her advocate's licence in 2011. She has litigated cases in both domestic courts and in the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Her pending cases before the ECtHR, among others, focus on protection of the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, right to life, liberty and security of a person, and prohibition of torture of a number of active citizens following the protest acts taking place in 2013–2014. She has conducted a series of human rights trainings for journalists and practicing lawyers.



**Interview
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A portrait of Gerhart Baum, an elderly man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a dark blue turtleneck and a grey patterned jacket. The background is a gradient of blue and purple with a large circular shape. The text is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

GERHART BAUM

**“FOR THE SAKE OF
EUROPE AND OUR
BASIC LAW”**

Imprint

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Creation:

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Photo Credits :

Foreword, p.2: Tobias Koch
Comics (Cover, p. 9,11,13,15,17,19): 2022 by Zunar
Comics (p. 10,12,14,16,18,20): 2022 by Akhtar Shah
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