



On the Record: Human Rights Defenders (1998)

Issue 2: December 8, 1998

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From the AP Editorial Desk

The Evolving Threat from Impunity

"No impunity!" It has become the battle cry of the Defenders' Summit in Paris. Fired by the extradition proceedings against Chile's former dictator Augusto Pinochet, and the adoption of a new international criminal court, human rights activists are daring to hope. They may be right. But they should also understand that the challenge of impunity is also changing. This will require a shift in strategy if they are to maintain the momentum.

When governments are asked to call war criminals to account they reply that it will hinder the prospects for peace and reconciliation. This refrain has dominated international peace-making since the early 1990s. Take, for example, the October 23, 1991 Paris agreement on Cambodia, that made no reference to the appalling crimes of the Khmer Rouge for fear that they would abandon the peace process. The Dayton agreement on Bosnia broke new ground in agreeing that any Bosnians indicted for war crimes could not stand for elections, but NATO has been reluctant to make arrests, for fear of antagonizing the Bosnian Serbs. As a result, the two indicted Bosnian Serb leaders, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic remain at large.

In both cases, the concessions were pointless, because neither the Khmer Rouge nor the Bosnian Serbs had any real intention of working with the international community anyway. The Khmer Rouge were killing Cambodians again before the ink was dry on the Paris Agreement. Just recently the Bosnian Serbs elected an extremist to the presidency of the Bosnian Serb Republic.

Nonetheless, governments cling to the myth that justice is incompatible with peace. They will find new evidence in this in the controversy over Augusto Pinochet. After the landmark decision by Britain's House of Lords ruling that Pinochet could be extradited to Spain, French human rights activists asked the Paris prosecutor to arrest Laurent Kabila, the president of Congo, who was visiting Paris for the Franco-African summit. The charge would have been torture (which is subject to universal jurisdiction under French law). The request was turned down by the Paris prosecutor on the grounds that Kabila was a serving head of state, and as such entitled to immunity that Pinochet could not claim. (Just to make sure, Kabila had checked with the French government before leaving the Congo and received a guarantee of immunity against prosecution.)

Nonetheless, many activists here in Paris feel that a valuable precedent has now been established. They are talking here about the need to prosecute anyone who deserves it. The Defenders Summit today called for the international human rights movement to track the traveling plans of past and present rulers, with a view to lodging a complaint for former abuses and seeking redress.

It is easy to see why this will rattle governments. Why, they will say, the wheels of international diplomacy would come to a grinding halt! Doesn't every country have some skeletons in the cupboard?

This is a reasonable point, and human rights activists will need to address it head on. They will need to show that accountability advances, not obstructs, peace within and between nations. This should not be difficult. Relatives of disappeared persons and torture victims can attest to the damage that impunity does to the credibility of law – something that is absolutely crucial in a young democracy.

Moreover, the effects of impunity tend to linger, like a wasting disease. Witness Argentina, where the Mothers still don their scarves every Thursday. Look, too, at Japan, which refuses even to apologize to its neighbors for the horrors wrought by its Imperial Army 50 years ago. This has angered the entire region and the Japanese had a nasty shock this August when a score of aging "comfort women" appeared in a Tokyo court and told how they had been used as sex slaves of Japanese soldiers in World War II. Germany, in contrast, helped its readmission to the community of nations after the last world war precisely because it accepted the evil wrought on its neighbors by Nazism.

Human rights defenders need to build on these examples, and refine this line of reasoning. But they also need to elevate their campaign against impunity from an emotional *cri de coeur* to a sophisticated political debate capable of sustaining an international campaign. It remains to be seen how "l'affaire Pinochet" will play out, but right now it shows that accountability is a friend of peace.

Pinochet's detention is a grievous blow to the pride of Chilean nationalists, but the majority of Chileans want rid of their former tormentor. They had no say in the amnesty that was imposed on them by Pinochet before he stepped aside in 1989. Most would probably agree that Chilean democracy would have been strengthened by reversing the amnesty and prosecuting the killers, from Pinochet downwards. Pinochet was the embodiment of power, in its rawest, most undemocratic form. But he could not have been budged by Chileans without antagonizing the Chilean army and inviting another coup.

The dilemma has temporarily been taken out of their hands by two Spanish judges and some bewigged British lawlords. In many ways, Chile's democrats could eventually enjoy the best of both worlds. They have protested to Britain and done what they could to salvage national pride. They may also rid themselves of the dinosaur. Even if Pinochet returns to Chile, his reputation will have suffered a mortal blow.

This is a huge boost to democracy and peace, and it has profound implications for young governments that are grappling with past abuses. The dilemma they face is real enough, but they cannot be expected to resolve it alone. Argentina tried it in the mid-1980s, and suffered through three attempted coups until President Carlos Menem called a "punto final." The best – indeed the only way – to resolve the dilemma is through a disinterested third party. And what better than an international criminal court, able to dispense justice impartially, without fear of compromising trading links or diplomatic relations? It is one more argument for the swift and early ratification of the ICC statute.

Twelve Million Individuals Pledge Commitment to the Universal Declaration

Book of signatures handed to UN Secretary-General, hailed as "appeal to the conscience of the world"

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan today received books carrying the signatures and thumbprints of 12,266,194 individuals, who have personally committed themselves to the fulfillment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In a moving ceremony at the end of the first day of the Defenders' Summit, Annan was handed the books by Pierre Sane, the Secretary-General of Amnesty International. Amnesty has led the campaign to collect the signatures over the past 12 months in time for this ceremony and the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration.

Roughly one quarter of the entries are in the form of thumb prints, which have been collected by a special "Make Your Mark" campaign launched a year ago by the Dalai Lama, Anita Roddick of the Body Shop, and the head of Amnesty's campaigns division. The thumb prints were handed to Annan by Ledum Mitee, acting president of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in Nigeria.

Mitee, who shared a cell with Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Ogoni leader before Saro-Wiwa was executed, praised the role of the Body Shop as a constructive example of private sector

involvement in human rights. "The Universal Declaration has no future if we do not involve business," he said.

The 12 million plus names come from every continent and contain some prestigious names like Nelson Mandela, Yasser Arafat, and Aung San Suu Kyi. But the vast majority are ordinary people. Securing their signature has required a vast effort from Amnesty's network of local members – itself well over a million. But as several speakers at the ceremony observed, the mere effort of collection has helped to rekindle Amnesty's campaigning zeal. Almost one third of the total population of Ireland (3.5 million persons) signed. The pledge also contains 150,000 signatures from Palestine, and half a million from Australia.

This formidable effort received heartfelt praise from Kofi Annan. In a statement which may not please those governments routinely criticized by Amnesty, the Secretary-General began with the stirring words: "Tonight I see before me the real United Nations of 'We the people.'" And he said, the people "had voted with their hands, their computers and their fingerprints" on behalf of the Universal declaration.

Annan's comments were also notable for their ringing endorsement of the use of the Internet in advancing human rights, and providing civil society with a mouthpiece: "I hope email will keep governments and intergovernmental organizations on their toes in the 1990s and beyond," he said, adding "I know I'll get into trouble for saying that!"

At the same time as testifying to the power of grassroots organizing, the "Golden Book" of signatures also reaffirms the universality of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is at a time when China, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia are attacking the notion of "universal" human rights as a form of Western neocolonialism that does not respect the "Asian approach" to settling differences and promoting rights.

Amnesty took pains to ensure that this argument was comprehensively disputed at the ceremony by speakers from all the world's different regions, including one prominent activist from Pakistan. Indeed, reaffirming the universality of human rights has already emerged as a key goal of the Defenders' Summit. In a video message that was made specially for the opening of the Summit from her home in Burma (where she is under house arrest) Nobel Laureate Aung San Su Kyi dismissed the claim of Asia's authoritarian leaders, saying that "the need of Asians for peace is the same as that of Africans, Americans, and Europeans."

Summit Calls for Pinochet's Extradition to Spain

British urged to fulfill "international obligations," US urged to turn over information on violations by Chilean military

The Summit of Defenders today called on the British government to "collaborate fully" with the judicial proceedings initiated against the former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, even if it means extraditing him from Britain.

The call came in a resolution that was adopted unanimously at the Defenders' Summit, and it will be transmitted to the British government. Britain's Home Secretary, Jack Straw, is expected to decide later this week whether Pinochet is to be extradited to Spain, or whether he can return home to Chile.

The resolution expressed support for the judicial initiatives undertaken in Spain, Switzerland, France and Belgium to bring those responsible for the "massive and systematic" violations of human rights committed in Chile under Pinochet's rule. These constituted crimes against humanity, said the resolution. Those responsible should be brought to justice.

The resolution also called on the United States and other countries to provide all information in their possession on the crimes committed by the Chilean military in Chile and abroad. In one of the most notorious acts of terrorism committed on American soil, the Chilean secret police (DINA) murdered the former Chilean Foreign Minister, Orlando Letelier, in Washington. Human rights groups have criticized the Clinton Administration for not joining those insisting on Pinochet's extradition.

Twinning Initiative Links Defenders and French Deputies

Friendships formed as part of initiative to protect defenders

Fifteen defenders met with French parliamentarians today as part of an attempt by the Summit organizers to "twin" individual human rights activists with French Deputies.

The initiative is aimed at personalizing the struggle for human rights, and ensuring that activists have powerful friends to argue their case in the event of harassment or worse – one of the major goals of this Defenders Summit. A total of 170 French deputies have expressed a willingness to join the twinning project out of the 575 elected to parliament. Sixty have followed up by contacting the Summit organizers.

In each case, the actual choice of twins was made by the Summit organizers, who canvassed both sides for their preferred issues (child rights, impunity etc.). Two hundred defenders replied.

The organizers are disappointed that more defenders were unable to take up the offer, but this is put down to the general scrimmage that marked the opening day. The formula may already have demonstrated its potential. One defender from Guinea-Conakry was on the point of being refused permission to leave his country. His French "twin" intervened with the French embassy and the two enjoyed an amicable lunch in Paris together today.

Twenty-five defenders will visit the National Assembly tomorrow (Wednesday) where they are expected to join in a debate about human rights.

Europe Should Resist Pressure to Extradite Kurdish Leader to Turkey, Says Danielle Mitterand

Danielle Mitterand, president of the non-governmental organization (NGO) France-Libertes, urged European governments to resist the pressure by Turkey's military to extradite the Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan from Italy to Turkey, where he would face "certain death."

Opening the Defenders' Summit, Mitterand said that Italy was under growing economic pressure from Turkey to extradite Ocalan, who was arrested last month. Ocalan is the head of the Kurdish PKK, which is fighting for independence in Turkey. His arrest in Italy has sparked protest by Kurds throughout Europe, and creates a major dilemma for Italy.

Mitterand said that Europe should unite to resist the pressure. "It is frustrating that Europe does not present a unified front, and show the Turkish government that its behavior is reprehensible," she said.

Mitterand paid tribute to the role of human rights activists. "For the last 50 years, generations of human rights defenders have succeeded, by using the power of their conviction in every way possible. But they lacked the sources of information available to us today."

Amnesty Chief Blasts Threat from Economic Globalization

Sane calls for human rights defenders to form "counterweight" to multinationals

The head of Amnesty International told the Defenders' Summit today that human rights groups must form a coordinated international network of pressure groups and campaigns to combat the effect of economic globalization and the power of multinational corporations.

Speaking at the opening session of the summit, Pierre Sane, the Secretary-General of Amnesty, said that private firms and multinationals had been given "total freedom" to operate, and that this had increased their power. This so-called globalization, he said, had caused "inequality, social disintegration, and a process of cultural uniformity that has....caused a daily increase in the number of excluded persons."

It is this, said Sane, that has led to the savage persecution of human rights defenders. The only possible response must be to beat the firms at their own game, and organize: "The authors of globalization use international and regional institutions, the UN, and the World Trade organization to advance their interests. We must do the same and more: we can and must make sure that the voice of civil society is heard in the UN and other international fora. These organizations are too important to be abandoned to states alone."

Human rights defenders, he continued, must create coalitions and nurture contacts with a view to unifying all those who fight for social justice. "We must create a global movement that unites those who fight racism, poverty, exclusion and discrimination against women; which protects the environment and indigenous peoples; and – certainly – those who defend the rights of workers. We must drive globalization from the bottom up."

One way to do this, he suggested, would be to organize regular defenders' meetings, so as to create a counterweight to the political forum of the United Nations and the annual economic

symposium at Davos. It was also important to multiply urgent actions, whenever any defender was threatened.

This view of globalization as all-encompassing and destructive was echoed by Jean Tonglet, the executive Secretary of the ATD Quart Monde, one of the four NGOs organizing the summit. But this was not entirely unexpected, since ATD Quart Monde was set up to help the poor mobilize.

Sane's stinging attack on the private sector, however, will probably be seen by many as a sign of how far Amnesty has come from its original mandate, which was to campaign for the release of individual prisoners of conscience. Indeed, many traditional Amnesty members remain dubious about edging into anything that resembles "economic rights," for fear that it might blunt the clear focus on political prisoners that has given Amnesty its unique appeal.

Even some defenders may see risk in this. One participant noted that defending political prisoners is politically acceptable, and may even be demanded by Amnesty's middle class membership. Attacking capitalism, however, swims against the stream and challenges the popular notion that the poor are lazy and irresponsible.

To judge from his talk today, Sane would have none of this. Indeed, in stressing the all-round damage done by unchecked globalization – and the untrammelled power of large firms – he seemed to imply that globalization may take over from torture and dictatorship as one of the issues that will unify the human rights movement and take it into the next century.

UN Funds Local Human Rights Initiatives in 23 Countries, Says High Commissioner

Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, told the Defenders Summit that "strong support" from governments has enabled her office to award 70 grants to local human initiatives in 23 different countries.

Speaking on the opening day, Robinson said that funding would continue into 1999, and that she was hopeful it could evolve into an "ongoing" form of cooperation between her office and civil society. Known as ACT, the program is administered jointly by the UN Human Rights Centre and the UN Development Program. Most of the funding has come from governments.

This will be welcome news to human rights activists, who are constantly in need of funds and who find that most donors are unwilling to fund small projects because of the administrative cost. In addition, donors change their funding requirements disconcertingly, and impose bureaucratic demands that often create major burdens for local human rights groups.

Robinson welcomed the growing involvement of NGOs and other civil society groups in the UN's human rights work. She noted that the UN General Assembly will adopt a Declaration on the rights and responsibilities of individuals this Thursday, after 13 years of debate in the UN Human Rights Commission. Two hundred NGOs had helped, by signing a petition at the critical moment, she said.

NGOs had also played a "vital role" in organizing the "Vienna plus 5" meeting this year in Ottawa, which reviewed progress made in implementing the action plan of the 1993 Vienna Human Rights summit.

The High Commissioner said that such cooperation does not require NGOs to compromise their independence or undermine their integrity. "Partnership is a sign of strength – not of weakness; there is much to be gained from strategic partnership, and no reason for loss."

200 Urgent Interventions Made by Monitoring Group on Behalf of Defenders in 1998

Pressure secures release of Egyptian human rights chief

One hundred and twenty-six interventions were made on behalf of more than two hundred defenders in forty different countries by the monitoring group Observatory, according to the president of the International Federation for Human Rights.

Patrick Baudoin told the Defenders Summit that the pressure on human rights defenders is increasing daily, and paid tribute to defenders who had been killed or disappeared in the course of their work. The plenary session of the Summit observed a minute's silence for fallen defenders on the opening day.

Observatory was set up two years ago by the International Federation and the World Organization Against Torture to monitor the protection of defenders. Its latest report, which has just been released, provides details of the harassment and risks they undergo.

On the other hand, said Baudoin, the report also shows that pressure can pay off. In one notable example, Afez Abu Seda, secretary-general of the Egyptian organization for human rights, was arrested on December 1, but released five days later after a concerted international campaign by Observatory and its affiliates.

"We know that nothing is worse than silence and that our best weapon against dictators is first and foremost to publicize their misdeeds. For that to happen, activists cannot be isolated. To Aung San Suu Kyi and all you others who are absent, I say: you are present among us, in our hearts."

Profiles: Thailand, Taiwan, USA, Belarus, Senegal, and Colombia by Manisha Thomas

Thailand: Narumol Nirthron, Thammasat University

When Narumol Nirthron joined Thammasat University in Bangkok 10 years ago, it was because of her work with child laborers, the poor, and the underprivileged. An assistant professor in the Labor and Welfare Development Department of the Faculty of Social Administration, Nirthron met a member of ATD Quart Monde at a meeting on child labor approximately four years ago. It was that meeting that prompted her to join ATD as a committee member two years ago to

continue to work with the underprivileged in society. Nirthron wants to meet other human rights defenders sharing the same interests and to learn new approaches to defending human rights.

Taiwan: Stephen S. Lee, Taiwan Association for Human Rights

Stephen S. Lee has been a defense lawyer for political prisoners for almost 20 years. The Kaohsiung Incident, which took place on December 10, 1979 in Kaohsiung, Taiwan's second largest city, left an indelible mark on Lee. A demonstration was organized by opposition leaders demanding more democracy. The ruling party called in riot police to surround the demonstrators who were branded as trying to overthrow the government. Following the demonstration, many of the protesters, including members of provincial legislatures, were arrested. The law at the time allowed for the court-martialing of anyone in opposition to the government. Eight of those arrested were court-martialed. Lee acted as one of the defense lawyers. According to martial law, the guilty should have been given the death penalty, but the cases became a human rights issue and the accused were spared that punishment. One person was given a 14-year term and six others were given 12-year terms. Others, who were tried under a judicial court, received only 5 years or less in jail.

In 1984, Lee became one of the founding members of the Taiwan Association for Human Rights, one of the most prominent human rights NGO in Taiwan. It started as an association working for the rights of political prisoners, but soon expanded to deal with issues of police torture and national security laws. Its members participate in demonstrations and act as defense lawyers.

The "May 20 incident" was one instance in which Lee, as a human rights defender, came under attack from the police for his efforts. During a farmer's demonstration on May 20, 1987, many of the demonstrators were arrested. Lee, acting as a defense lawyer, wanted to visit those arrested. When he got to the police station, plainclothes policemen tried to beat him as he attempted to approach the detainees. In an effort to escape the policemen, Lee fell, injuring his leg.

From 1988 to 1990, Lee served two consecutive terms as President of the Taiwan Association for Human Rights. He continues to be a member of the Taiwan Association for Human Rights and is the Executive Director of the Bar Association.

United States: Joseph Wronka, Springfield College

There are three to six million homeless people in the US. Joseph Wronka collects information such as this as an associate professor in the School of Social Work at Springfield College, Massachusetts and as a researcher at the Heller School for Social Change at Brandeis University. Wronka catalogues such information in his efforts to monitor the US's compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and especially with the social, economic, and cultural rights. Wronka also looks at what is being done to improve the situation of human rights. He argues that the United States should show a little humility and take a look at the human rights that are not respected at home, including the prevalence of child poverty.

Wronka, who is involved with Amnesty International, became aware of human rights at a young age. He spent a considerable amount of time with a Catholic worker while growing up during the

Vietnam War, and was exposed to the protests against the American involvement in Vietnam. He also heard many stories of relatives who had been in concentration camps. While working with the Inuit in the poor regions of Alaska, Wronka found that the problems facing the community, such as alcoholism, suicide, and domestic violence, were rarely reported in the news. These experiences turned Wronka into a defender of human rights and gave him the material for a book exposing the hypocrisy of his own government. The United States, says Wronka, fails to respect economic, social, and cultural rights. He is also critical of the fact that the US does not investigate its own human rights record, but continues to investigate those of other countries. Wronka would also like to ensure that the Paris Declaration holds governments responsible for the respect of human rights.

Belarus: Evgueni Novikov, Belarus League for Human Rights

Over 700 NGOs were formed in the four years following the independence of Belarus in 1991. At the time of independence, there were no structures of civil society, only pro-government organizations. In 1992, Evgueni Novikov and 18 others founded the first non-profit, non-political, non-party organization in Belarus, the Belarus League for Human Rights. The founders of the League were former prisoners of the Stalin Gulag concentration camps or the children or grandchildren of former prisoners. Novikov's grandfather was killed in a concentration camp.

The Belarus League for Human Rights worked on fostering the creation of other NGOs, which are now independent, including the Belarussian Association of Journalists and the Belarussian Society of Former Prisoners of the Stalin Gulag. Over the last two to three years, the League has had more human rights work to do, especially in fighting against censorship and the lack of freedom of expression in Belarus. Through various projects, such as education on human rights standards, the League has worked to foster roots from which civil society can grow. It has maintained good contact with international organizations. The information published by the League on the human rights situation in Belarus is distributed to the international community and to the Belarussian Government. One of the main rules of the organization has been never to take money from the government.

In January 1995, the Belarussian Ministry of Justice began a special policy to liquidate NGOs. The Ministry of Justice had realized that the proliferation of NGOs was creating a stronger civil society. According to official statistics taken from a newspaper article, the number of NGOs decreased from 700 to 400 from January 1995 to mid-1997. The Belarus League for Human Rights began facing problems with the government in September 1997 when pro-government persons stole money, computer equipment, furniture, and databases from the League's office. Norikov himself was arrested and the police tried to get him to sign a confession saying that he had been involved in criminal activities. Such a signed confession would be enough to convict him to several years in prison. Norikov refused to sign despite being beaten by the police. He said that he would sign the confession if he was allowed to write his own notes on the confession, as is permitted under the law, but the police did not agree. They said that he could write his own notes on a separate piece of paper if he signed the confession. When he continued to refuse, the police had to finally release him since they had no grounds on which to charge him. However, they refused to return the equipment or money belonging to the League.

The government has since created a second Belarus League for Human Rights, bearing the same title, logo and stamp of the original League. This "replacement" is part of the Ministry of Justice's attempt to replace independent NGOs with government organized NGOs (GONGOs). Norikov was able to alert the international organizations that the League had been working with as to this attempt by the government to discredit the original League. This "new" League has been charging people for legal consultations. An appeal has been made to the Presidential Administration to look into the fact that there are two organizations with the same names and logos. Norikov and the other members of the League are awaiting a decision. One Minister of Justice tried to tell Norikov that the whole situation was the work of an officer, who has since been dismissed, who was working for the KGB. However, Norikov believes that this was just an attempt to create a struggle between the League and the KGB.

By coming to the Human Rights Defenders' Summit, Norikov hopes to use the international contacts to press the Belarussian government for real economic, social, civil, and political rights in Belarus. In addition, he plans to discuss sub-sector development in Belarus with members of the French National Assembly. When he returns to Belarus, the decision of the Presidential Administration will hopefully help the Belarus League for Human Rights to regain its assets and equipment from the government and have the second League be dismantled.

Senegal: Sidiki Kaha, Organisation Nationale des Droits de l'Homme (ONDH)

Human rights violations in Senegal are being perpetrated by both sides as the confrontation between the government armed forces and the Mouvement des Forces Democratique de la Casamance (MFDC) continues. The Senegalese army has been responsible for summary killings and forced "disappearances" and the MFDC has arbitrarily arrested civilians.

It is in this context that lawyer Sidiki Kaha works for various human rights organizations in Senegal. Recently re-elected as President of the Organization Nationale des Droits de l'Homme (National Human Rights Organization), Kaha has been active in the defense of human rights since 1979. In addition to his involvement with ONDH, Kaha was also elected vice-president of the International Federation of Human Rights in 1997. President of ONCH since 1995, Kaha has monitored elections in Madagascar, Gabon, and Senegal. He is also active with Amnesty International, the Inter-African Lawyers' Union (of which he was a founding member), and the African Centre for Democracy and the Study of Human Rights.

Kaha was part of a team sent to Mauritania to observe the trial of human rights activists. In 1994, he was sent to Rwanda as a consultant for UNDP to assess and suggest reforms for the justice system. The same year, the Government of Mali appointed him as a consultant on the human rights situation in that country.

In 1998, Kaha was part of a project in cooperation with UNICEF and TOSTAN (an NGO) that set up villages for human rights defenders. Kaha has attended several conferences on human rights in Senegal and internationally. He lectures on human rights and has published three books, including "Defendre le Declaration Universelle des droits de l'homme" ("Defending the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) in 1998.

Colombia: Gloria Herney-Galindez, Asociacion de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos

Extrajudicial executions, political assassinations, and disappearances are all too common in Colombia. Even though the death penalty has been abolished, at least 10 people are killed every day.

Gloria Herney-Galindez joined the Asociacion De Familiares De Detenidos Desaparecidos (ASFADDES- Association of the Families of the Detained and Disappeared) in 1989 following the disappearance of her companion. The association works towards three objectives for the disappeared and the detained: truth, justice, and reparations.

Currently President of the Association and a member of its Executive Committee, Herney-Galindez has herself come under threat for being a human rights defender. The threats against her were so grave that Peace Brigades International volunteers were enlisted to accompany her (see below). The presence of these unarmed international volunteers in some cases has been enough to protect defenders from threats, harassment, and even death. Defenders in Sri Lanka, El Salvador, Haiti, Croatia, Serbia, Mexico, and some indigenous areas in the United States and Canada have been accompanied by PBI in their work.

Colombia: Luis Enrique Eguren, Peace Brigades International

Peace Brigades International (PBI) was formed in 1981 in Canada by a group of activists who felt that there was a need to provide protection to human rights defenders. They felt that the presence of volunteers accompanying defenders would be enough to protect them from violence. This idea has expanded to over 14 countries now and offers a modest means of protecting defenders. The organization now has over 500 people, 95 percent of whom are volunteers. There are between 35 to 40 people working in teams accompanying human rights defenders.

Eguren has been working with PBI Colombia for over 10 years both in the field and as a spokesman. His experiences accompanying defenders prompted him to co-write the book "Unarmed Bodyguards" chronicling the work and impact of PBI around the world. Eguren, in addition to working with local NGOs in Colombia, meets with government and military officials in an effort to ensure protection for human rights defenders and to increase awareness of PBI's work. The Summit is an opportunity for defenders to find new tools that can be used in their work. As defenders are under increasing threats, the accompaniment provided by PBI is another way defenders can be protected.

The organization networks with NGOs in various countries to determine which defenders are in need of international accompaniment and where PBI's presence would be most useful. The volunteers used are generally foreigners from northern countries because of the clout that they enjoy in most countries. If anything were to happen to these volunteers, there would be immediate intervention on the part of their governments. Volunteers from southern countries are used, but they are generally grouped with northern volunteers to ensure a greater degree of protection.

Workshops: Extreme Poverty

Human Rights Defenders Recognize the Indivisibility of All Human Rights

by Laurie S. Wiseberg

At a workshop on extreme poverty on the first day of the Defenders' Summit, human rights defenders went a considerable distance to illustrate the indivisibility and interrelatedness of human rights and to put to rest, once and for all, the argument that one set of rights (whether civil and political, or economic, social, and cultural) could trump or take precedence over the other.

Extreme poverty (which on first glance might be mistakenly considered to be largely about economic and social rights) was clearly demonstrated to be fundamentally about human dignity. And human dignity involves a recognition of the full range of rights guaranteed in the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Marguerite Masson, from the Brussels-based ATD Quart Monde, recalled how one homeless person had described the perspective of the street people in Brussels, where vagrancy was a criminal offense until 1993. "We didn't come here for a sandwich; we came to get our rights. They wake us up at 5:30 in the morning with a kick to our ribs. We don't want to be treated like animals. We want to be treated with dignity."

This motivated the homeless to organize to have vagrancy decriminalized. They were also able to get 10,000 signatures on a petition that led to the abolition of this law. This activism had a strong impact on changing the perception of residents of Brussels. "People who they had looked upon as carbuncles on society were able to act like citizens," said Masson. It was a major victory for those living under extreme poverty in a wealthy European society.

"Extreme poverty is a phenomenon that knows no boundaries," explained Leandro Despouy, who served as Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty for the UN Commission on Human Rights. "It exists in all countries and affects humanity at large." Indeed, interventions by human rights activists from societies as disparate as the United States, Thailand, Haiti, Peru, and Palestine described different aspects of the phenomenon manifested in their countries.

Despouy, an Argentinian human rights activist who had been forced into exile during the years of the dirty war, described the personal odyssey he had to undergo to come to terms with the phenomenon of extreme poverty. "For me, human rights were essentially political and civil rights. Dealing with extreme poverty was something very different. In the west, people didn't want to know about extreme poverty. They thought of it only as an economic phenomenon. The challenge was to express the concept in legal terms. And, as one dug deeper, one saw that extreme poverty concerned not only poverty, but also the right to housing, health care, and to education.

"But it also concerned civil and political rights. Indeed, there was a chain linking economic and social rights to civil and political rights. People living in extreme poverty had no way to know their rights. And if they did know their rights, they had no way to claim them. How could someone living in extreme poverty take a violation of their rights to court? Yet, only after we

give people their rights back, can we see the people behind the human misery," explained Despouy.

One human rights activist in Brazil, working with the rural landless poor, described the reception that the landless peasants receive when they protest their slave-like conditions and exploitation by large landowners: this year, 66 workers of the landless labor movement MST were assassinated. When the peasants marched 1,000 kilometers to put their demands before government authorities, they were met with machine guns. In other words, it is precisely when the poor start asking for their economic and social rights that their civil and political rights (and especially their rights to the security of the person) are put at risk: when MST went to court over the murder of three workers, they were confronted with a panel of judges in which 18 out of the 21 on the bench had links to the landowner believed to be responsible for the killings.

This was echoed by Dr. Beko Ransome Kuti, founder of the Nigerian Committee for the Defense of Human Rights, in his opening statement to the conference. He noted that in 1989 the Nigerian military regime began detaining well-known activists, lecturers, and students (thus violating their "political" rights) when they began agitating against the violation of (economic) rights under the harsh Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) that was imposed on Brazil.

Other similar linkages were suggested by participants. An American activist working with prisoners on Death Row drew attention to the fact that persons living in extreme poverty were far more likely to receive the death penalty than were others in the USA. Defenders from the Czech Republic and from Bulgaria both addressed the problem of the Roma, who were denied citizenship not just because they were a minority, but also because they lived in extreme poverty and had little recourse to legal tools to demand that their civil and political rights be respected.

A human rights defender from Women's Voice in India reflected on the fact that of the 40 percent of Indians who lived below the poverty line, 70 percent were women; and those most affected by extreme poverty were the Dalits or untouchables. They are also the people most vulnerable to other human rights violations: when they ask for land, or for access to health or education, they become easy targets for rape, imprisonment, or execution.

Other issues surfaced during the three hours that the workshop devoted to the question of extreme poverty. They included the unequal distribution of resources within countries and between countries; the untenable and unsustainable policies of international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank (which had to be made accountable to upholding human rights standards); the need to hold governments accountable for violations of economic and social rights – especially in the context of corruption – as well as civil and political violations; and the need to bring multinational corporations under the human rights regime.

All this reinforced the message of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of June 1993 – that "All human rights are universal, indivisible, and interdependent and interrelated," and that "the international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis." This has now turned from a slogan into a strategy of the human rights movement.