UNPO NEWSLETTER
MAY 2016 EDITION

Raising Awareness of the Baloch Cause:

Successful Conference and Congressional Briefing in Washington DC

Workshop/Training:

Budapest and Brussels
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Upcoming Conference:
Minority Rights and Regional Cooperation in South East Asia

In the spotlight:
Why Ilham Tohti deserves the 2016 Sakharov Prize
A Pen is Mightier than a Sword: Ilham Tohti’s Peaceful Struggle for Reconciliation

3 June 2016

“Both now and for always, I intend to hold fast my belief in the hidden strength of the human spirit”, peace and human rights activist Andrei Sakharov wrote in 1975. Just like Sakharov, Ilham Tohti never wavered in his commitment to dialogue, peaceful coexistence and intellectual freedom. Acting in the firm belief that separatism, terrorism and religious extremism can never be a way forward, Tohti devoted himself to bridging the divide and promoting understanding and tolerance between indigenous Uyghurs and migrant Han in China’s restive Xinjiang region. The only ‘weapons’ Tohti ever picked up were the sharpness of his mind and his pen, both of which he used to publicly denounce religious persecution and systematic suppression of Muslim Uyghurs by the Chinese government. But even in view of the horrible suffering of his own people, Tohti did not despair, did not hate and did not suggest extreme approaches. Tirelessly, he called for peace and dialogue between the Uyghur people and the authoritarian and undemocratic leaders of China. Ilham Tohti’s courage and passionate outspokenness landed him on the government’s blacklist. He was repeatedly placed under house arrest and, in 2014, was arrested at his home in Beijing. A kangaroo court in Xinjiang’s capital Urumqi sentenced him to life imprisonment on false charges of ‘separatism’. The ruling prompted an international outcry and drew widespread condemnation by governments and human rights organizations all over the globe. For instance, Tohti’s courage was recognized by the prestigious PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award.

But clearly, his case merits more attention. The European Parliament has recently adopted a resolution linking China’s exports to the EU to its compliance with the EU’s five criteria for market economy status. If only the EU applied an equally rigid approach as in the economic realm to the grave and systematic human rights violations that continue to occur in China. There is an urgent need for the European institutions to honour and re-affirm their commitment to the rule of law, democracy and justice. A significant way to do so would be to award Ilham Tohti the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, an award named after the late Russian dissident Andrei Sakharov. Every year since 1988, the European Parliament has awarded this prize to individuals or organizations who dedicate their lives to the defence of human rights and freedoms, particularly the right to free expression. A liberal intellectual and a firm believer in freedom of expression and democracy, who has dedicated his work to building bridges between Han and Uyghurs, Tohti not only deserves international recognition – but he also represents an ideal candidate for the 2016 Sakharov Prize.

UNPO will continue to act in support of justice for Ilham Tohti on every international level. On 25 May 2016, we thus convened, in partnership with the newly founded Ilham Tohti Initiative and other supporters, a conference in the European Parliament to discuss the case of Tohti. It was also the occasion to officially put forward Ilham Tohti as a worthy candidate for the 2016 Sakharov Prize. The event’s host, Mr Ilhan Kyuchyuk (ALDE) was the first MEP to officially support Tohti’s candidature with his signature. Awarding the prestigious Sakharov Prize to Tohti would be a strong political symbol. It would show that the EU is standing beside the many people in China who have been unjustly accused and imprisoned, and that it is committed to the discussion of human rights within China – regardless of China’s reaction.
EP CONFERENCE LAUNCHES ILHAM TOHTI’S CANDIDATURE FOR SAKHAROV PRIZE
25 May 2016
UNPO, the Ilham Tohti Initiative (ITI), the Society for Threatened Peoples and chinachange.org organised a conference at the European Parliament entitled “Does China Want Real Ethnic Harmony? Professor Ilham Tohti in Perspective”. Hosted by Ilhan Kyuchyuk MEP (ALDE), the event focused on the unjust imprisonment for life of Professor Ilham Tohti, an Uyghur economist and writer well-known for his peaceful work to build bridges and create dialogue between Han Chinese and Uyghurs. The outcome of the conference was a declaration calling on the Chinese government to free Professor Ilham Tohti immediately and unconditionally, investigate the allegations of his mistreatment while detained and to ease repressive policies targeting the Uyghur people. It also called on the European Parliament to consider Ilham Tohti’s candidacy for the 2016 Sakharov Prize. For further information, including the conference declaration, click here.

UNPO DELEGATION TO WASHINGTON DISCUSSES HUMAN RIGHTS AND BALOCH LANGUAGE BROADCASTING
8 – 20 May 2016
Mr Nasser Boladai, Spokesperson of the Balochistan People’s Party (BPP) and President of UNPO visited Washington D.C. for two weeks together with Ms Johanna Green, UNPO Program Manager. During the trip they had the opportunity to raise awareness at the political level of the ongoing dire human rights situation in both the Iranian and Pakistan parts of Balochistan, through targeted advocacy meetings (read more).

CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFING ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN BALOCHISTAN
10 May 2016
Congressman Louie Gohmert (R-TX) presided over a Congressional Briefing, co-organised with UNPO, on the human rights situation in Balochistan. During the briefing Rep. Gohmert reiterated his support for an independent Balochistan. A video of the whole Briefing can be found on UNPO’s Youtube Channel.

MAURITANIAN ANTI-SLAVERY ACTIVISTS RELEASED
17 May 2016
UNPO welcomes the release of Mauritanian anti-slavery activists Biram Dah Abeid and Brahim Bilal Ramdhanne, who were arrested in November 2014 during a peaceful anti-slavery march. In January 2015, they were sentenced to two years’ imprisonment on charges of ‘inciting trouble’, ‘belonging to an unrecognized organisation’, ‘leading an unauthorized rally’, and ‘violence against the police’. The Supreme Court has now ruled that the facts of their case must be requalified to constitute an offense punishable by only one year of imprisonment, therefore leading to their release on 17 May 2016 (read more).

EP RESOLUTION ON CRIMEAN TATARS
12 May 2016
The European Parliament passed a resolution on the situation of the Crimean Tatars, condemning the human rights violations that are occurring in the occupied peninsula, which are affecting the local population and in particular the indigenous Tatars. The resolution highlights violations that are exemplary of the level of repression that the community has been facing since the illegal annexation of the peninsula by Russia in 2014, including restrictions on the media and the recent closure of the Mejlis, the main political body representing the Tatars’ interests. (read more).

CONFERENCE REPORT: FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION IN GREECE
2 June 2016
UNPO in cooperation with the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) released a report titled “Freedom of Association in Greece: A Loophole in European Minority Rights Standards” following a conference with the same title organised in early March 2016 at the European Parliament, with the support of Csaba Sógor MEP (EPP). The report contains the transcription of all speeches delivered at the conference as well as the speakers’ biographies and media coverage of the event (read more and download the report here).

UNPO SIGNS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH THE INTERNATIONAL FUND APSNY
26 May 2016
UNPO signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the International Fund Apnsy, one of the most important Abkhaz non-governmental organizations. The MoU recognizes the existence of mutual interests and the need to coordinate efforts to achieve common goals, thus it represents a remarkable step in strengthening ties between the two organisations (read more).

BALOCHISTAN CONFERENCE IN WASHINGTON DC
10 May 2016
In light of continuing and systematic human rights violations in Balochistan, UNPO convened a half-day conference on the geopolitics behind the Pakistan-Balochistan conflict at the Carnegie Endowment Conference Center in Washington DC. All expert speakers agreed that flagrant human rights violations – especially those targeted at human rights defenders and journalists – must be urgently addressed, not only by the US, but by the international community as a whole (read more).

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Please send us your agendas for the coming months for inclusion in our diary.
CONFERENCES ON MINORITY AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

14 June 2016

In collaboration with the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD) and Haella Foundation, UNPO will convene a conference entitled ‘Prospects for Minority and Indigenous Rights in South East Asia: Towards Regional Cooperation’. The event will take place at the European Parliament, and will be hosted by Urmass Paet MEP (ALDE).

The event will provide an overview of the current state of minority rights in South East Asia, as well as evaluate lessons learned from regional instruments such as the EU, the Council of Europe and OSCE (read more).

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

28 June 2016

Julie Ward MEP (S&D) and UNPO, in coordination with the People’s Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (PAFD), will be convening a roundtable discussion entitled ‘Introducing PAFD: A Progressive Initiative to End Ethiopian Repression’ at the European Parliament in Brussels. The event will provide a forum to introduce the newly-founded PAFD to European policymakers and to discuss the role the alliance can play as a democratic platform to unify the voices of the oppressed peoples of Ethiopia (read more and register here).

HELP OUR MEMBERS!

DONATE TO UNPO

We rely on financial support from our Members and friends to continue our work each year. Such donations are crucial to ensure the continued full participation and engagement of a great number of unrepresented communities, indigenous peoples, minorities and occupied or unrecognized territories.

The 2012-2015 Secretary General’s Activity Report provides an overview of the activities we have been working on over the past years with the help of our partners. Please do also spread the word about UNPO or invite your friends to like our Facebook page or follow us on Twitter.

UPCOMING EVENTS

14 June: Minority and Indigenous Rights in South East Asia – Conference, Brussels
17 June: CHT Peace Accord – Roundtable Discussion, Brussels
28 June: PAFD as a Progressive Initiative to End Ethiopian Repression – Roundtable Discussion, Brussels
22-25 August: Youth Perspectives on Migration – Workshop, Budapest
8-9 September: Unrepresented Diplomats – Workshop, Brussels

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION ON CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS PEACE ACCORD

17 June 2016

In cooperation with the South Asia Democratic Forum (SADF) and No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ), UNPO is organising a roundtable discussion with civil society actors at the office of No Peace Without Justice. The event aims at discussing the 1997 Peace Accords between the Bangladeshi government and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) and brainstorming possible cooperation opportunities. It will take the form of an interactive discussion between representatives of the PCJSS and civil society members interested in the issue (read more).

UNPO TRAININGS

WORKSHOP ON YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON MIGRATION

22 – 25 August 2016

UNPO, in cooperation with EFAY, Left Youth of Finland and the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, will be organising a four-day workshop in Budapest which seeks to debate the European ‘migration crisis’ from the point of view of youth actors, and to formulate ideas for a long-term European strategy on the matter. For more information and to register, please click here.

III. UNREPRESENTED DIPLOMATS WORKSHOP

8-9 September 2016

The third workshop organised as part of the “Training Diplomats from Un-represented Nations: Capacity-Building for Effective UN-Lobbying” will be held in Brussels, and will provide participants with an introduction to the European institutions and on how to most effectively use HR advocacy and lobbying to influence their human rights agenda. Click here for more information and registration.

SURVEY ON ADVOCACY EXPERIENCES AT THE UN

Deadline: 15 June 2016

The deadline for the survey on the experiences of members of unrepresented nations in lobbying at the UN has been extended until 15 June 2016. Please tell us your experience regarding access to the UN, challenges you face and training you have received and would like to receive! Click here.