



**THE SIGRID RAUSING TRUST**  
**Anniversary Report 1995-2025**

Cover image:

Nikishino, Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine, March 2015. Destroyed houses in the village of Nikishino which was the scene of intense fighting between pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian army.

Eastern Ukraine has seen heavy fighting between pro-Russia separatists and the Ukrainian army in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions since the overthrow of President Viktor Yanukovych in February 2014. © IVA ZIMOVA/PANOS PICTURES



The Sigrid Rausing Trust 1995-2025  
Reflections on Human Rights Philanthropy

The Sigrid Rausing Trust, established in 1995, has dedicated three decades and over half a billion pounds to supporting human rights and the rule of law, equality, and the preservation of nature.

This book tells some fragments of that story.

# INTRODUCTION: MODELS OF PHILANTHROPY

*by Sigrid Rausing*

One of our early grants was to Marie Stopes during the Bosnian war in the mid-1990s. A sexual health project had turned into a refugee support programme, and was in danger of shutting down for lack of funding. I travelled to Bosnia to see the project, meeting women and children whose husbands and brothers were mostly missing, presumed dead. A train had been turned into temporary housing, and other people slept in tents or huts. The programme – food distribution and talking groups – was run by a biologist from Sarajevo. She had escaped the siege. Her husband had not – when he eventually came out, he had lost most of his teeth. ‘I have a lot of respect for rice’, he eventually told me in answer to the unanswerable question, ‘What was it like..?’.

I also travelled to South Africa and Indonesia, and later to Ukraine and Georgia, with Oxfam. At that time, and maybe still now, Oxfam’s model of development aid was based on subsidised micro-enterprises, providing employment and an income stream. I didn’t find the model very convincing – it seemed to me that few of the projects were likely to be sustainable, and it wasn’t clear that the products always had a market, or that the enterprises were properly owned by the communities. The trips, however, were fascinating. To see remote parts of South Africa as it was democratising and to visit rural Indonesia and post-Soviet Georgia and Ukraine in the company of thoughtful and knowledgeable people was a privilege.

Early on, I travelled to Uganda with UNICEF around this time. We went to the districts of Gulu and Kitgum on the border with

South Sudan, where the Lord's Resistance Army kidnapped children, subjecting them to, and forcing them to participate in, acts of extreme violence. Most of the population along the border lived in protected refugee camps, vast arid areas of mud huts and tents. Girls, traumatised young teenagers, sometimes managed to make their way back, and were helped by UNICEF to re-settle with their families. It was impressive work. But UNICEF too had a somewhat hierarchical and at times intrusive relationship with the people they were trying to help. I remember a visit to a hospital in Kampala. We were taken to a room where a young woman lay dying of AIDS, and a maternity ward where a newborn baby was taken out of its cot, on show for the visitors. I thought of the collective farm in Estonia where I had carried out fieldwork for my PhD – One of my informants had told me about a group of officials visiting the maternity ward where she had given birth. Everyone else had to remove their shoes before entering the ward, but the officials tramped through the ward with their dirty shoes on. To her, that was emblematic of their power, and a key to what was wrong with the Soviet political system.

My research on that remote former collective farm (1993-4) had made me more aware of the fact that quality of life in any society is closely related to matters of policy. Seeing the environmental degradation and rural poverty in Estonia was no surprise – my parents had been vocal about the repression of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union – but the heritage of suffering, beyond the story of the dissidents, felt broadly unarticulated still. The small and fragile inter-war democracy of Estonia had eventually been taken over by a right-wing autocracy, suspending democracy and minority rights. The first Soviet invasion (1940), followed by the Nazi invasion (1941) and then the second Soviet invasion (1944) devastated much of the country – each invading regime purged the intelligentsia and the libraries, so that by the end of the war the professional class of Estonia (and the institutions they worked for) were almost destroyed. Lawyers, accountants, publishers, journalists, doctors, academics, businessmen, politicians – mostly gone. A third of the population had disappeared – killed, deported, or in exile. The small Jewish-Estonian community – gone. Those Jews who hadn't been deported

on the basis of class in the Soviet invasion fled or were murdered by the Nazis and their Estonian collaborators, alongside people from many other countries, transported to Estonia to be killed.

It was not the topic of my research, but my village was a case study both of the heritage of political repression and of the disastrous unplanned transition. The liberalisation of the economy led to massive inflation, and the currency reforms establishing the Estonian Kroon decimated savings. The collective farm had had a lively cultural programme, alongside a school, a culture house, a creche and a collective dining room, and the abrupt end of the subsidised activities in the village deeply impoverished village life. The school alone survived, now supported by Swedish aid. Subsidised brown coal, cheap heating, hot water and electricity – gone. Full employment – gone. Dental and medical care – virtually gone. The nutritional value of the diet had declined, too – in a meat-and-potato food culture people now ate mainly potatoes and cabbage, sometimes adding a symbolic sliver of a sausage or a tiny fish from the polluted sea. Cousins and relatives who had fled to Sweden during the war came back to visit. They were visibly taller and healthier than their Estonian counterparts, with all their own teeth, still. The people on the collective farm were physically marked by poverty, deprivation and alcohol, while the bodies of the visiting Swedes spoke of a society of good nutrition, healthcare and freedom. No micro-enterprise could address that – only government action could, and (very soon) did. The Estonia I knew was a country in a faster transition than I could imagine at the time. The state of destitution and bewilderment I describe in my PhD and monograph, and later in my memoir of that time, *Everything is Wonderful*, didn't last long. Within a few years, everything had changed.

My research in Estonia deeply influenced my philanthropy. The principles of human rights, cogently articulated living instruments, firmly grounded in a number of political traditions and already part of international law and institutions, seemed to me the best basis on which to build fair and stable societies, subject neither to populism and autocracy, nor to instrumentalist repression in the name of an

uncertain future good. Human rights, more than any other political system of thought, regulates the relationship between individuals and the state, setting out the rights of the former and the obligations and limits of the latter.

Within SRT, women's and LGBT rights were part of our conception of human rights from the beginning, and we soon began our environmental work, too. While the names of our programmes have occasionally changed, our thematic focus has remained stable over the years. Our geographic focus, by contrast, has shifted, concentrating on regions and countries in transformation, where we see traction for change. Our main focus currently is Eurasia, the Balkans, and Turkey, though we fund significantly in other regions and countries, too, not least in Britain and South Africa.

Our themes include freedom of expression and association, combatting corruption and undue influence, promoting justice and accountability for international crimes, preventing torture and rehabilitation for victims, and reparations for victims of human rights abuses. The Environment programme focuses on the regulation of harmful chemicals and pollution, the regulation of the environmental impact of business and development projects, and biodiversity. We also run a number of strategic initiatives (currently LGBTI de-criminalisation in 5 countries, reparations in Ukraine, and community cohesiveness in Britain and Northern Ireland).

Please see our website [sigrid-rausing-trust.org](http://sigrid-rausing-trust.org) for more details of our grantees and their stories. ■



Memorial Day March, April 14th, Pristina, Kosovo, 2023 © ASHA / KOSOVA REHABILITATION CENTRE FOR TORTURE VICTIMS



Goniwe Park in Villiersdorp, March 2022 © ASHRAF HENDRICKS / GROUNDUP



Homeless people Cape Town, May 2020 © JAMES STENT / GROUNDUP



Srebrenica Genocide Memorial, Potocari, Bosnia, July 2015 © VELIJA HASANBEGOVIC / TRIAL INTERNATIONAL



Protests after the Law and Justice party lowers judges' retirement age in Poland, sparking fears of government control over the Supreme Court, Warsaw, July, 2018 © AGENCJA GAZETA



Community members celebrate receiving land ownership certificates, Melkraal, South Africa, 2007  
© LEGAL RESOURCES CENTRE

# MINORITY REPORT: THE PLIGHT OF ESTONIA'S ETHNIC SWedes

COLUMN FOR THE NEW STATESMAN, DECEMBER 2014

*By Sigrid Rausing*

In 1993 I found myself living on a former collective farm in a remote border protection zone in western Estonia. The place was like small collective farms everywhere in the Soviet Union: there was a cultural hall, a school, a dining room (then closed), some rusty workshops and concrete blocks of flats, built on the field behind the former manor house, which had been left to decay. There was a manned barrier on the only road into the Noarootsi Peninsula through salty marshland – until 1991, everyone had to show their papers there, no matter how well known they were to the Soviet soldiers on duty. Abandoned watchtowers dotted the coastline, and in some areas you could still see the intermittent line in the sand 50 metres from the sea, beyond which local people were not allowed to go.

When the Soviet Union dissolved in December 1991 I was working on a PhD in the anthropology department at University College London, on Melanesian systems of law. I changed my thesis to a Soviet theme: looking at how national minorities in Soviet countries reconnected with their history to form new national identities. I decided to focus on Estonian Swedes, and chose the collective farm in western Estonia as a field site. The village I lived in – Birkas in Swedish, Pürksi in Estonian – had become a centre for Swedishness in the independence era between the wars, and the Swedish minority culture was now being revived there.

It was desolate, yet also compelling, a region affected by all

the major European political events of the 20th century: the first revolution in 1905, the First World War, the Russian Revolution, brief independence, Soviet and Nazi occupations and, finally, in 1991, independence. I was interested in the small community of Swedes, a minority within another minority, stacked like Russian dolls inside the Russian empire and the Soviet Union. And I wanted to know how Soviet censorship had affected local people's perception and knowledge of history.

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**S**wedish-speaking groups had settled in Estonia in the early Middle Ages, probably migrating down from Finland. They lived on the islands and west coast of Estonia, fishing, farming and trading across the Baltic Sea. After independence in 1918 and the First World War, Swedish tourists started coming to Estonia. The Estonian Swedes, in their traditional folk costumes, stared solemnly into a hundred cameras, fetched water for the tourists from their wells, and talked about their feelings for the Motherland, which few of them had ever seen. The tourists cycled from farm to farm, slept in hay barns and delighted in the kinship.

It was patronising, perhaps, and often sentimental, but it was also helpful: from the 1880s onwards, evangelical missionaries travelled from Sweden to support and spiritually enlighten the Estonian Swedes, who lived in great poverty. After independence, nurses, teachers and agronomists followed. Estonian Swedish cultural activists started newspapers, journals and schools. Swedish people were moved by the hardship of the Swedish minority, and by their struggle for cultural survival. The Russifying policies of the tsarist empire had been harsh. In addition, the large estates and the repressive bureaucracy and censorship had entrenched the poverty of the rural population. To counteract this, independent Estonia instituted land reform, minority protection and democracy, in an attempt to encourage a thriving civil society to emerge.

The discussion about the preservation of the Swedish culture in Estonia was part of debates about minorities in the new nation states

of Europe following the First World War. Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia came into being, in the spirit fostered by President Woodrow Wilson, whose Fourteen Points of 1918 outlined a postwar Europe of free trade and democracy. The former Russian territories, however, were not given independence by the newly created Soviet Union: the emerging countries had to fight for it. In the case of Finland and the Baltic states the battle was, eventually, successful. In Ukraine, where three empires met, the First World War turned into a civil war. In 1922 about half of Ukraine formed one of the original Soviet Socialist Republics; the rest of the region was parcelled up between Poland, Belarus, Russia, Moldova, Romania and Czechoslovakia. Georgia, like the Baltic states, declared independence in 1918. It didn't last long.

For the countries that escaped Soviet control, the 1920s were an era of new parliamentary democracies, each with minority populations struggling for recognition and protection. The talk was of disarmament and diplomacy, of the League of Nations and the balance of power. It didn't last long. All the efforts of benign philanthropists and missionaries of that era, of nurses, doctors, agronomists and teachers, came to nothing in the end.

From the summer of 1940 to the summer of 1941 the Baltic states were occupied by the Soviet Union. It was a brutal process, culminating in mass deportations, mainly of professional families. In June 1941 Operation Barbarossa, the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, began. The *Wehrmacht*, followed by SS forces and the specialised *Einsatzgruppen*, tasked with finding and killing Jews, unleashed the Holocaust in what the American historian Timothy Snyder has called the “Bloodlands”: the killing fields across Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus. Estonia, albeit with a small Jewish population, was part of it, too. Only a handful of Estonian Jews in hiding survived the Holocaust, and many thousands of people from other countries were transported to the little-known Estonian concentration camps.

And the Estonian Swedes? From 1943, the *Wehrmacht* began the forced recruitment of Swedish men (Estonian men were already subject to conscription). Many families fled to Sweden in small

boats. In 1944, several high-ranking Nazis – including Bruno Peter Kleist, an SS officer from the inner circle of Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German foreign minister – were involved in secret negotiations with the Allies. According to the historian Reinhard Doerries, Kleist travelled to Stockholm to discuss the settlement of ethnic Germans in occupied territories, and the resettlement of the ethnic Swedes from Estonia to Sweden.

Heinrich Himmler, the SS leader, had also entered into negotiations with various people in Sweden through his massage therapist, Felix Kersten, a Baltic German who was hired by Himmler to treat his painful stomach condition. Kersten had become famous in the 1920s and 1930s, treating royalty and celebrities. On 20 April 1945, Norbert Masur, a Jewish refugee in Sweden who was a representative of the World Jewish Congress, travelled to Germany with Kersten. They met Walter Schellenberg, head of German foreign intelligence, and Himmler. That conversation was the beginning of the initiative to save some of the inmates of the concentration camps – some Jewish, some with Scandinavian connections – by evacuating them to Sweden on Swedish Red Cross buses (the “white buses”).

The previous year, the Swedish government had made a deal with the SS about the Estonian Swedes. For a payment of 50 Swedish crowns per person, the SS evacuated some 7,000 Swedes, out of a population of 8,000, to safety in Sweden. The *Wehrmacht* then settled ethnic Estonians evacuated from Russia in the abandoned farmhouses. In autumn 1944, Soviet forces reoccupied Estonia. After the wave of deportations from the countryside in March 1949, followed by forced collectivisation, the distinction between the locals and the refugees ceased to matter.

By now there were few Swedish families left. The ones that had remained came under suspicion because they had relatives abroad, and were banned from joining fishing collectives. Their children were barred from the Young Pioneers, the Soviet youth movement. Soon most of them took Soviet Estonian identities: it was safer that way. In turn, when the Estonian Swedes came to Sweden they were told to assimilate as best they could, and not talk about the Nazi evacuation. And assimilate they did.

After 1989, there was a new Swedish revival in Estonia – exiled people, former owners, came back to visit. Seeing them next to their cousins left behind made me realise the marks repressive regimes leave on their people. Living in a benign welfare state makes for good height and good teeth; living in a repressive state makes for the opposite. The few Swedes who had remained in Estonia looked so much older than their relatives who had left as children.

It is easy to assume that the only people who are affected by repression are dissidents or minorities, and to think that the only rights abused in the Soviet Union were civil and political rights. In fact, people's social and economic rights were equally violated. On the collective farm, a woman told me about losing her baby in hospital and seeing a political delegation troop through the ward. Not one of them took their shoes off, or washed their hands, as all the patients' relatives had to do. To her, that moment symbolised Soviet oppression.

After I'd lived on the former collective farm for nearly a year, I gave a speech to a group of diplomats visiting the peninsula. I outlined my research project, and described some of the current problems in the community as I saw it. The headmistress of the school, who was married to the former director of the collective farm, was not happy with what I had said. What should I have said? I asked Alar and Hele, my neighbours and friends. "That everything is all right," Alar said ironically. "That everything is wonderful." The Soviet tendency to conceal reality was still alive and well.

I had gone to the collective farm to investigate people's sense of the past in the context of the Soviet censorship of history. What did people remember about the war, the deportations and collectivisation? The intellectual elite had been decimated in the Baltic states and the other newly incorporated Soviet republics. Two hundred thousand library books were destroyed; independent publishing was over; censorship lists were drawn up; schools and universities became political institutions. By the end of the war most intellectuals had either disappeared or become conformists.

When I finished my speech about the Swedish community, one

of the French diplomats in the audience seemed surprised. “But your English is very good,” he said. “Do you come from this area?” I didn’t, of course. But I might have done – strangely, I have never lived anywhere where I melted in better. Many of the villagers had names like mine: German-sounding without being German. We dressed alike, and looked alike. The old Swedes searched for Swedish words, their mother tongue hidden, like mine, behind another language.

The culture I was studying in that remote border protection zone was in fact the surviving fragments of a once-thriving rural economy and culture. Every village on the peninsula had decreased dramatically in size since the census of 1934: the population had never recovered from the war, the deportations and the exodus of the local Swedes. And the people in those bedraggled villages no longer knew what they had lost. The world that was lost had disappeared from history.

This is no longer the case. In the past 20 years, Estonia has been good at history, good at memorialising the Soviet era and good at establishing a liberal democracy and civil society. This is in stark contrast to Russia, with its oligarchical capitalism and nostalgia for authoritarian communism, its violence, its dying villages and dismal life expectancy. There is an echo of the Soviet Union’s destruction of history in the crisis in Ukraine: in the minds of Russian nationalists, Russia’s enemies are always fascists, no matter what history tells you. The echo is faint, but it’s dangerous nevertheless, because the anti-fascist struggle is an ideal for which Russians are willing to sacrifice much. ■



## THE EARLY YEARS

In the early years, the Trust supported the key US and UK groups defending fundamental freedoms. Among the first recipients of the Trust's multi-year grants were Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Human Rights First and Womankind Worldwide — large and growing groups advocating for justice, accountability, and gender equality in a range of contexts and countries. The long-standing support for Human Rights Watch (HRW), in particular, was important, helping to expand the organisation, which had about a \$5million dollar budget when SRT first funded it. Sigrid Rausing and Trustee Josh Mailman were both on the board of HRW, and Sigrid travelled with Executive Director Ken Roth to Uzbekistan to witness the work and advocacy there. Bob Bernstein, one of the founders of HRW, was at one time a board member of SRT, and behind Bob and Ken Roth were Aryah Neyer and George Soros. Their vision of civil society advocacy in burgeoning democracies was deeply influential. South Africa, Latin America and the former Soviet Union were opening up, and the question of transitional justice – truth and reconciliation commissions, tribunals, reparations and memorialisation – was becoming an important part of the human rights work and discourse.

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Founded by Sigrid Rausing, the Trust is deeply influenced by her anthropological research in post-Soviet Estonia, where she observed the lingering long-term effects of political repression. Her fieldwork and research shaped a commitment to supporting civil society initiatives that address systemic injustice and defend liberal values.

Andrew Puddephatt  
Co-Director and Deputy Chair of SRT

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I had the good fortune to meet and befriend Sigrid as she was starting her philanthropy. She pursued the effort with characteristic rigor, traveling to the field, joining the board of Human Rights Watch, and actively participating in our deliberations as we built the organization and sought to contribute to the broader movement. She regularly demonstrated her profound and always-thoughtful commitment to the cause.

Over time, Sigrid came to understand that her most important contribution would be less with better known international organizations than with smaller national and local groups. Because of the political and economic risks, few local philanthropists venture onto the human-rights terrain. Local groups thus often depend on Western government funding, which can be fickle. Sigrid recognized the value of private philanthropy in providing a principled source of funds that could be counted on regardless of the latest political currents. Her foundation's support provided a crucial base for a genuinely global human rights movement whose vitality is essential for the effective defence of people's rights.

Kenneth Roth  
Executive Director, Human Rights Watch (1993-2022), currently visiting Professor, Princeton

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LGBT activist Daniil Grachev is arrested, St Petersburg Russia, June 2013 © MADS NISSEN / PANOS PICTURES / ILGA

These early grants reflected the Trust's belief in the importance of robust institutions capable of conducting evidence-based advocacy, holding governments to account, and amplifying the voices of those too often silenced. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International used their grants to support investigations and fieldwork, reporting on abuses ranging from political repression and torture to unlawful detention and violence against women. Womankind Worldwide, by contrast, channelled support to grassroots women's organisations, helping to build feminist leadership and secure rights-based reforms in a range of countries from Nepal to Zimbabwe. Raising Voices in Uganda was a new initiative addressing violence against women through community engagement, Tostan addressed FGM, using the village-to-village model that stopped Chinese foot-binding, and the women's groups Mama Cash, the Global Fund for Women, and Camfed empowered women in communities across the world. The Trust also supported minority rights, notably through Interights and the European Roma Rights Centre from 1998 to 2013. This organisation played a crucial role in promoting education, combating discrimination and advocating for the rights of Roma communities across Europe.



Tostan undertaking community work in Senegal, ca 2008 © TOSTAN

EXTRACTS FROM AN ADDRESS TO THE UK CONFERENCE ON  
PHILANTHROPY, CENTRAL HALL WESTMINSTER, DECEMBER 6<sup>TH</sup>, 2011

*By Sigrid Rausing*

I thought I would start by saying a few words about the culture of philanthropy I grew up with in Sweden, or perhaps more precisely the lack of it. Our history text books de-constructed as bourgeois oppression 19th century charitable concerns about over-crowding, alcoholism and sexual abuse in the homes of people then known as the *lumpen proletariat*. In the 1970s, we assumed there was no poverty left in Sweden. Remnants of the lumpen proletariat and others who had fallen into addiction were termed ‘asocial’ or sometimes ‘the excluded’. The police kept illegal records of travellers, and the security police kept clandestine records of communist sympathisers based on blacklists compiled by unions and shared with company management.

The state was supposed to provide, and did provide, for most people. But the *asocials* huddled on municipal benches outside the state alcohol outlets and asked people to buy vodka for them. Alcoholics were blacklisted, prohibited from buying alcohol. Police cars cruised through the cities and school curriculums were unimaginative though socially cohesive.

My grand-father, Ruben Rausing, had been an outstanding student. He studied at the Stockholm School of Economics and Columbia, New York. He worked first at a paper company in Stockholm (Esselte) and later as the managing director of the main liberal daily newspaper (DN). He then founded a company with a friend, Åkerlund and Rausing, and out of Åkerlund and Rausing, after the war, Tetra Pak was born, with five employees, and my father as the very young Managing Director.

Before the war, my grandmother fell ill with breast cancer. After surgery, she was the first woman in Sweden to receive experimental chemotherapy, but to no avail – she died in 1946. That leads me to the first instance I knew of as charitable activity. My grandfather donated generous amounts to cancer research in Sweden. He later found out that for every sum he donated, the state cut the same amount from their block grant. That knowledge clouded what might otherwise have been a fruitful and meaningful exchange, and he withdrew, instead, to conduct his own research – I don't think particularly successfully, though he wrote at least one and maybe several papers on the subject.

The familiar British web of local fund-raising activities for various charities was absent in Sweden – the sponsored runs, the climbs, the bike rides and the village fetes. Much of civil society was organised around what had been the workers' literacy movement which later developed into all kinds of subsidised courses for adults. There were church groups and choirs, and various protest groups, but local fundraising had gone when I was a child.

I moved to England in 1980. In that harsh era, I discovered philanthropy. My first large grant - £50,000 - was to Oxfam. The fund-raiser invited me to attend an organisation called the Network for Social Change – it may be familiar to some of you. The Network was a sister organisation to a larger American group called the Donuts, or the Threshold Foundation. People with money, inherited or made (mainly inherited), met, talked about their feelings about wealth, and learned from each other how to assess and fund projects. The groups funded were in areas such as peace and preservation, human rights, and arts and culture, and the grants were generally small.

In the mid-90's, I set up my own foundation, with a focus on human rights, which had been my main interest since I was a teenage Amnesty member. Why human rights? Partly because I grew up knowing and hearing more about the Holocaust than most of my friends did – my parents had close friends who were Holocaust survivors, and I had friends who were children of survivors. Also, my best friend's mother was from Jamaica, and I saw the subtle – and often not so subtle – racism she was subjected to at school. I was aware of the human rights abuses in South America, and in

Chile, in particular, as Pinochet's refugees, many of them victims of torture, started coming to Sweden, but I was also very conscious of the human rights abuses in the Soviet Union. I came to see the philosophy of human rights as a way to negotiate between left and right, whilst always holding the state to account. It was, and is, an enlightenment project.



Ruben Rausing at home, ca. 1977

Our guiding principles are:

- We recognise the essential role of core funding.
- We look for good and effective leadership.
- We are flexible and responsive to needs and opportunities.
- We value clarity and brevity in applications and reports.
- We establish long-term relationships with grantees.

How did we come to those principles? Our trustee Andrew Puddephatt sent me a seminal paper by Michael Shuman titled ‘Why do Progressive Foundations Give too Little to too Many?’, published in *The Nation* in 1998. Shuman, a Fellow and former director of the Institute for Policy Studies, argued that in the US conservative funding tended to be more successful than progressive funding, even though the latter were significantly better funded. The most important reasons, Shuman argued, were that conservative funders treated their recipients, mainly think-tanks, as peers, and gave them long term, core support, rather than one year ear-marked project grants. Progressive funders, he argued, required lengthy applications (all different) and long reports. Their stringent requirements often meant that grantees had to hire new staff to serve the funders’ needs. ■

Trustee Josh Mailman highlighted the transformative impact of early funding: ‘We supported groups when they had a million-dollar budget and 15 years later they might have 20-million-dollar budgets – we would increase our grant in line with budget increases to help organisations grow.’

But SRT’s commitment was more than just financial—it was also philosophical. The Trust took a distinctive approach to philanthropy, one grounded in trust and respect for the autonomy of grantee partners.

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Sigrid and I had a meeting of minds: to give general grants that enabled groups to be imaginative rather than constrain them with our ideas of what should be done. Our requirements were that organisations should be clear about what the problem is and clear about how they would tackle it. This has been SRT’s philosophy from the beginning.

Andrew Puddephatt  
Co-Director and Deputy Chair of SRT

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In Britain, the Trust made a critical investment in tackling domestic violence by supporting what was then CAADA – now SafeLives. This created an innovative approach to domestic violence by keeping the victim in their home while moving the perpetrator out, and providing ongoing support and co-ordination from statutory agencies. The project cut repeat violence by up to 50% and became a national model of best practice.

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It is probably fair to say that SafeLives would not have existed if it hadn't been for the Sigrid Rausing Trust. From the initial funding to provide the evidence base for a new approach to domestic abuse, to the sizeable, long term and flexible funding that we then received for 9 years, the Trust was unique. The trustees combined ambition, patience, flexibility and trust in our approach and in our team which allowed us to plan for the long term and innovate every step of the way, so touching the lives of hundreds of thousands of survivors of domestic abuse, and their children. We are deeply grateful.

Baroness Diana Barran  
Founder of SafeLives

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Participants attend training session, ca. 2014 ©  
SAFELIVES

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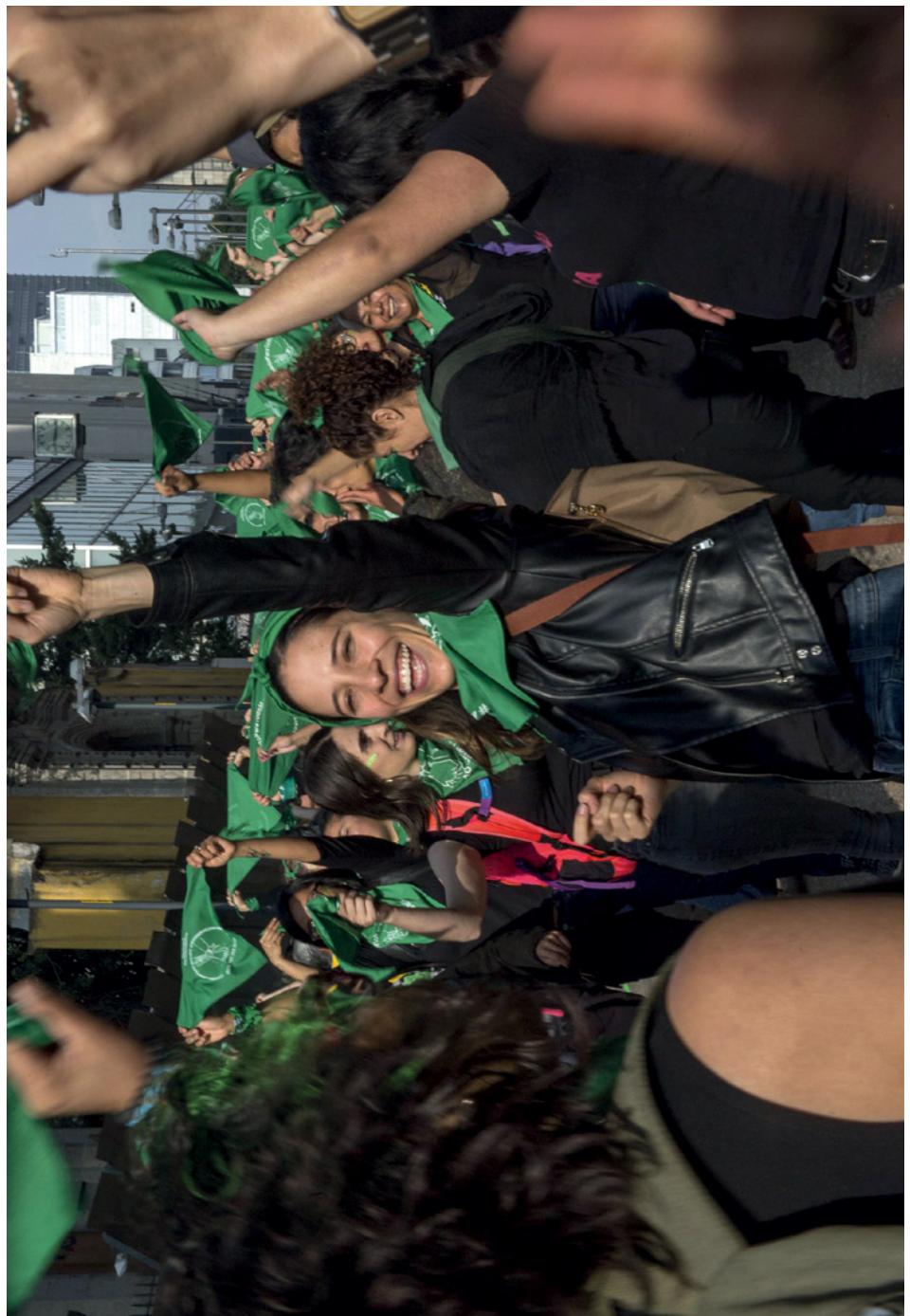
The greatest strengths of the Trust are, firstly, its mission to provide core funding. That's important because it doesn't put organisations through artificial hoops. It recognises that core costs are important. Secondly, the conviction that beneficiaries know better than we do how best to use resources, and that it would be inappropriate of us to tell them how much to spend on x, y or z. It's a respectful attitude to the beneficiaries. They are partners rather than recipients of benevolence.

Geoff Budlender  
State Counsel in South Africa and former SRT  
Trustee

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The choice to provide general operating support—rather than funds earmarked for projects—was radical for its time, signalling the Trust's confidence in the agency and creativity of civil society actors. By freeing organisations from donor-imposed priorities and rigid frameworks, the Trust enabled them to respond flexibly to changing political conditions, experiment with new approaches, and invest in core capabilities like staffing, training, and strategic planning.

This model of grant making also aligned with the Trust's long-term vision: to contribute to a resilient ecosystem of human rights defenders, where sustainable impact stems from local knowledge, lived experience, and organisational strength.



## THE NEXT PHASE

As the volume of grants grew SRT appointed its first Director, Jo Andrews, who began the process of building a professional organisation capable of sustaining a large grants programme. Jo laid the foundations for a process of grant-making still in use today – a detailed initial assessment followed – all being well – in long-term support.

As the field evolved, the early grants laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and diverse global rights movement—one that championed not only civil and political liberties, but also justice and the rule of law, gender and LGBTI equality, openness, and the protection of the environment. The human rights landscape evolved, and the Trust broadened its focus to encompass emerging issues. In 1997, it made its inaugural grant to the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (now OutRight International), marking the beginning of its support for LGBTI rights. The commitment to basic equality expanded to funding groups advocating for LGBTI rights across Eastern Europe, Eurasia, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and Africa. ILGA Europe became a long-standing partner, as did the Human Dignity Trust.

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In the early 2000s, SRT stood out as one of the rare private foundations in Europe willing to invest in LGBTI equality through long-term, flexible support. That commitment enabled ILGA-Europe not only to expand its advocacy before key European and international institutions, but also to support emerging local partners in countries where LGBTI activism was just taking root. The Trust's backing gave us the time and space to grow, take risks, and build something lasting. In many parts of Europe, this has helped contribute to real legal and social advances – from anti-discrimination protections to the recognition of partnerships and families. Today, across much of Europe and Central Asia, LGBTI communities face renewed – and in many places, escalating – threats. We are witnessing the spread of propaganda-style laws, open political incitement, and the scapegoating of LGBTI people as part of a wider politics of polarisation. In this context, the importance of principled, patient philanthropy cannot be overstated. The Trust's early support helped lay the foundation for a more resilient and better-connected field – one that continues to fight for dignity, equality, and safety amid increasingly hostile political winds. Its example remains a powerful reminder that flexible, long-term support can make a lasting difference.

Evelyne Paradis  
Executive Director, ILGA Europe

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I have had the privilege of working with the Trust both as a grantee and as a member of staff. In 2012, as one of the first staff at the Human Dignity Trust – then led by the late Jonathan Cooper and Tim Otty – I saw first-hand how the Trust’s flexible support gave space for an early-stage idea to take root and grow. As staff, I have tried to carry forward the ethos I experienced as a grantee: thoughtful and enabling, always questioning – but with respect. I take as much pride in a landmark legal win by our grantee in Romania that led to recognition of same-sex partnerships, as I do in knowing our support also helped the same group fix the plumbing in their office.

Working with our Trustees has also been a highlight – being challenged, encouraged, and inspired during our regular meetings. We are a small team – Trustees and staff – and I have learnt a great deal from some of the finest professionals across diverse fields.

**Kapil Gupta**  
SRT Senior Programme Officer, Human Rights and the Rule of Law

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# UGANDA ANTI HOMOSEXUALITY BILL

COLUMN FOR THE NEW STATESMAN, 2009

*By Sigrid Rausing*

‘I recently re-organised the books in my study, and collected my remnants of feminist theory on a separate shelf - a small fragment of another world. There were some copies of Feminist Review, Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir, Andrea Dworkin and Mary Daly. There, also, was Adrienne Rich’s pamphlet, ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’, a dense and learned tract about the repression of lesbians.

Consciousness-raising made little distinction between street and boardroom thuggery and the effects of laws in repressive states. We didn’t doubt Adrienne Rich when she said that lesbianism had been ‘crushed, invalidated, forced into hiding and disguise’. We forgot the lesson of the Holocaust, which is that if the law and the power of the state supports discrimination and violence, you may end up with genocide. Many minorities around the world still face discrimination, but only lesbians and gay men still face significant international legal discrimination.

Consensual homosexual acts between adults are still illegal in about 70 countries in the world<sup>1</sup>. Most countries have moved to repeal those unjust and repressive laws. In Uganda, however, the Hon David Bahati has recently sponsored a far more draconian anti-homosexuality bill than the existing code. It begins with principles and threats: the value of traditional family values, the threat of homosexual

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<sup>1</sup> The current number is 63.

contamination. The logic of the bill is this: ‘This legislation further recognizes the fact that same sex attraction is not an innate and immutable characteristic.’ Only if sexual orientation is voluntary can a person be held accountable for their choice. Science, meanwhile, has concluded that sexual orientation is a core personality trait, not a choice. You no more choose to be gay or bi-sexual than you choose to be left-handed or ambidextrous; it’s a morally neutral position.

Sexual expression and behaviour, however, is cultural and psychological, just like the expression of many other core personality traits, like addictiveness, musicality, religiosity or empathy. Innate traits express themselves in a multitude of ways, depending on the psychological, cultural and political environment. Cultures, like people, can be alcoholic (Soviet Russia), homosexual (ancient Greece), conformist or liberal, creative or stifling. Knowingly or unknowingly, homophobic governments make the category mistake of confusing core personality with cultural expression, criminalising, in the process, a fairly stable and substantial minority of any given population. In this case, Bahati wants to get rid of ‘sexual rights activists seeking to impose their values of sexual promiscuity’, as well as gay pornographers and paedophiles. There is no distinction in his mind between people who fall in love with people of their own gender, advocates for gay rights, and sexual sleaze and crime – it’s all a filthy mess of HIV, pornography, western values, decadence, feminism, and predation.

The draft bill separates ‘the offence of homosexuality’ from ‘aggravated homosexuality’. The former is clearly consensual, but addresses only the ‘offender’, as though, in gay relationships, there were only ever a perpetrator and a victim:

- (1) a person commits the offence of homosexuality if –
  - a) he penetrates the anus of mouth of another person of the same sex with his penis or any other sexual contraption;
  - b) he or she uses any object of sexual contraption to penetrate or stimulate sexual organ of a person of the same sex;

- c) he or she touches another person with the intention of committing the act of homosexuality.

(2) a person who commits an offence under this section shall be liable on conviction to imprisonment for life.

There is a more serious offence, termed ‘aggravated homosexuality’, defined either by clearly identifiable victims, or, importantly, by the term ‘serial offender’, defined in the introduction to the law as ‘...a person who has previous convictions of the offence of homosexuality or related offences.’

Anyone who is a confirmed gay man, or a confirmed lesbian, and who already has a sexual history – and, by definition, the confirmation is in the history –faces the death penalty, alongside homosexual rapists and child abusers. There is no distinction between these groups.

This is how the law will work: victims are not to be penalised; they are to be assisted, and their identities will be protected. Judges may even order that the offender has to pay them compensation. In addition, ‘aiding’, ‘abetting’, or ‘promoting’ homosexuality becomes illegal. Perhaps most importantly, failure to inform the authorities – within 24 hours - of suspected homosexuals will itself become a criminal offence.

The Ugandan people must turn informants, or risk jail. Lovers must choose between ‘victim’ or ‘offender’; the former protected and paid, the latter imprisoned or killed.

Criminalisation in Britain led to blackmail, prison sentences, hormonal ‘treatments’, suicides, sexual repression, ruined lives. The Ugandan bill, however, like the Nazi laws before it, makes homosexuality punishable, ultimately, by death.

A decade ago I visited Uganda, including the vast refugee camps in the north. The Lord’s Resistance army conducted murderous raids from their camps in Southern Sudan, abducting children. The boys became soldiers, brutalised and drugged, and the girls were kept as slaves. I remember the fixed smiles of the girls who had managed to escape from captivity. I remember their drawings of killings and death; children forced to kill children. Sexual violence is everywhere

in Uganda. This bill, too, is part of that culture; violent arrests, the real risk of punitive rape, intrusive questioning, conviction and imprisonment. And what is the death penalty for homosexuality if not sexual murder? The state that sets out to purge the nation of homosexuality becomes, in the end, itself a sexual predator. ■



A woman by the old railway tracks in Gulu, Uganda, July 2019 © JIM JOEL / CREATIVE COMMONS

# ÊTRE ET AVOIR

NEW STATESMAN DIARY, 2008

*by Sigrid Rausing*

It's about 9.30 in the morning as I write this, one child is off sick, seemingly with tonsillitis, another is off school for Rosh Hashana, and I will deliver him to his father later today. The three dogs have not been walked, but our cleaning lady fed them. Rosh Hashana child had forgotten his homework at school, and, to add insult to injury, he later confesses that his tearful plea not to be sent to school for the morning lessons, was deliberate (French test avoidance, or should that be evasion?), and that he can cry at will: 'I just have to think really really sad thoughts.'

Meanwhile, I have had 17 emails so far, some requiring long and thoughtful responses. I answer them on my Blackberry in between writing this, and testing my son on French adjectives, masculine and feminine. In the process of testing him I discover to my horror that he can scarcely say 'I am' or indeed 'I have'. Être et Avoir have passed him by, except in the form of sweetly distorted mnemonic songs. I set him exercises, and return to the most urgent emails. 'Mummy,' he says sternly, 'don't play with your phone whilst I'm working'.

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I recently visited Monk's House, where Virginia and Leonard Woolf lived. There's an otherworldly silence about the place, and a feeling, unexpectedly, of leaden dread. Virginia's writing shed is at the end of the garden, by the flintstone wall to the churchyard and a small Norman church. Jackdaws circled in the afternoon sun. Inside the shed was her desk, with some folders, her tract 'Three Guineas' on top.

Afterwards I walked with my old spaniel towards the River Ouse, where Virginia Woolf drowned herself in March 1941, as the war in Europe intensified. The river is like a small canal at this point, the water not more than a foot deep now, brown slurry on top. My dog was tramping behind me, stiff with age. I thought of the boundary between sanity and insanity, and the difficulties of knowing when that line is crossed, and that perhaps it's not a 'line' at all, but more like merging fields of being. Time briefly stood still, a moment of being and homage

I watched the last half of the Biden-Palin debate on Friday night; we had tried to tape it and ended up recording an old Jeff Goldblum monster movie instead, which meant we missed the first half of it. For the intellectual content, as well as sick fascination, we might as well have watched the movie. This is Palin, from the transcript: 'Darn right it was the predator lenders who tried to talk Americans into thinking that it was smart to buy a \$300,000 house if we could only afford a \$100,000 house. There was deception there, and there was greed and there is corruption on Wall Street. And we need to stop that. Again, John McCain and I, that commitment that we have made, and we're going to follow through on that, getting rid of that corruption.' And: 'Darn right we need tax relief for Americans so that jobs can be created here.'<sup>2</sup>

Her answer to Joe Biden's cogent critique of the Bush regime was to admonish him, jocularly: There you go again, looking backwards when we should be looking forward, steely wink at the camera. Thus the logic of a thousand self-help books about 'moving on' legitimises the political expediency of refusing to engage with the legacy of the past eight years of Republican rule. Lest we forget, here's an (incomplete) list: \$10 billion dollars a month spent on an unwinnable war; 100,000 Iraqis dead, 4,000 American soldiers killed and at least 20,000 wounded; drowned bodies in dirty, flooded New Orleans; massive financial melt-down on Wall Street; Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib; torture memos which provided legal justification for

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<sup>2</sup> Palin's language, shocking then, looks moderate and even reasonable now, in the context of the present administration.

‘enhanced interrogation techniques’. All this dismissed by Palin as essentially irrelevant to the new Republican project, with America remaining as ever the ‘shining city on a hill’, the beacon of hope and redemption. Palin was quoting Ronald Reagan, though John F Kennedy and Walter Mondale, too, referred to the shining city. But the phrase was originally used by John Winthrop, a puritan born in 1588, and the governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony. “For we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a hill,” he said. “The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world”

How apt, and how sad. ■

The Trust soon developed strong grant-making portfolios in regions with complex political landscapes, including Israel, Turkey, and South Africa. In Israel, the Trust has supported a range of human rights and civil society organisations working to promote equality, legal advocacy, and minority rights, often in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Its funding has enabled groups to monitor and challenge rights violations, support legal aid services, and advance social cohesion across deeply divided communities.

In Turkey, the Trust's engagement led to the establishment of the Strategic Fund for Turkey, aimed at nurturing grassroots organisations and fostering a culture of human rights and robust civil society. As the legal system in Turkey began to allow for human rights funding, the initiative was able to support an emerging human rights movement – from the local Amnesty branch to emerging Turkish human right groups and organisations supporting vulnerable minorities such as Armenians, Kurds and Laz.



Arrest of activist from 'Saturday Mothers', Turkey, August 2018 © HAYRI TUNC / AFP

In South Africa, the Trust has played an important role in strengthening post-apartheid civil society. It has funded grassroots movements, legal advocacy groups, and organisations combatting economic inequality, xenophobia, gender-based violence and corruption. The support for TAC, the AIDS Coalition, helped to get antiretrovirals to patients after President MBeki's long period of AIDS-denialism. The South African grants reflect the Trust's commitment to transitional justice and the promotion of constitutional rights in a country still grappling with the legacy of institutionalised racism, entrenched corruption, political violence and socioeconomic disparities.



Blikkiesdorp - temporary relocation area, Cape Town, South Africa, June 2018 © ASHRAF HENDRICKS / GROUNDUP



Shack, South Africa, ca 2013 © S. STANFORD / PHILANI



Flooding in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, June 2022 © ASHRAF HENDRICKS / GROUNDUP

Later, a range of grants across South American countries built on the memorialising work in South Africa. The trust supported groups using the techniques of forensic anthropology to uncover, analyse, and process human remains interred in mass graves, and funded efforts to articulate and memorialise the repression of the Latin American dictatorships.



Dejusticia, pictures of disappearance victims, Colombia, 2007 © PAUL SMITH / PANOS PICTURES

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The organisations we were supporting in Israel and the Occupied Territories were brave and inventive and doing important work. To me the most important one was Breaking the Silence, an organisation of former Israeli (IDF) soldiers who speak publicly and campaign around what they personally experienced when serving in the Israeli army. Personal testimony is terribly important. The idea of amplifying voices is very important.

Geoff Budlender  
Former SRT Trustee

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Volunteers, Israel, ca 2017 © BREAKING THE SILENCE

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It was the end of the second intifada in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, around 2004. I was working on Palestinian rights. I was very concerned that whenever there was violence against them, either by the army or settlers, we never saw the Palestinian side. We were only presented with what the army or the Israeli media reported. It was very clear that without hearing or seeing the other side, we could never achieve justice in cases of violence.

I had an innovative idea, which was later branded as ‘citizen journalism’: to give Palestinians cameras to document what was happening to them from their point of view, giving them the ability to document settler and army violence against them. Back then, we still had to buy cameras and train people to use them. It was a significant investment, as we planned to cover a large part of the occupied territories.

Fortunately, The Sigrid Rausing Trust also believed in this vision and supported the project, which was revolutionary. It gave us the ability, for the first time, to see what reality looked from the Palestinian side. The documentation produced by this work led to much better accountability and a reduction in violence wherever cameras were present, and even in other places where soldiers and settlers were afraid of being filmed acting violently or against the law. This project is still running with adaptation 20 years later and still achieving great results.

Anonymous

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# CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM V SONS OF IBRAHIM

COLUMN FOR THE NEW STATESMAN, JULY 2010

*By Sigrid Rausing*

There is silence on the scrubby hills overlooking Bethlehem. The hills are dotted with cylindrical Israeli guard towers, looking down into the valleys. Tiny fields of olive trees line the roads; the disputed areas, here at least, are so small. We are just above the wall dividing Israel from the West Bank. It is deceptively peaceful, almost somnolent. Sparrows dive in and out of the glittering razor wire on top. From the hill you can see how close it is to the Palestinian homes of Bethlehem, how comfortably distant from Israeli homes.

Most of the land in Israel is owned by the state. The uneven distribution of facilities, from sewerage to education, remains a problem. In addition to communal disadvantages, the privileges that flow from army service, such as subsidised education and housing, are also denied to individual Palestinians, who do not serve in the army. Hebrew remains the language of teaching in the universities, which affects Palestinian students. And yet many Palestinians in Israel fear that, in the eventual peace deal, their villages will be traded for land in the West Bank with Jewish settlements, depriving them of Israeli citizenship.

Persecution, the tragedy of exile and the wish to return to the land of the forefathers are part of the DNA of Jewish culture. These are now clashing with another strand of the culture which is about social revolution, human rights, equality and secularism. The conflict is no longer simply about Palestinians v Jews, nor about the ultra-Orthodox v the secular; it is also a bitter cultural civil war between beleaguered human rights organisations – the remnants of the Israeli left – and the secular right.

This is not about Zionism. If you are a Jew living in Israel you are, for better or worse, a Zionist. But human rights activists, along with many Israelis, remember the original dream of Israel as a refuge for all Jews and a democracy where no one is discriminated against on the grounds of race or religion. They remember the Israeli Declaration of Independence, which states that Israel ‘... will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the United Nations.’

They believe in keeping Israel accountable to its origins and ideals, even in the face of war and terrorism.

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People on the right are concerned with security, listen to the anti-Semitism of the Muslim world and take seriously the openly anti-Semitic charter of Hamas. Liberals, by contrast, listen to Palestinian narratives of oppression and discrimination. Conservatives believe that the forces that want to destroy Israel and drive the Jews into the sea may prevail; liberals believe that peaceful coexistence is possible. Conservatives believe that liberals co-operate with the forces that conspire to bring about Israel’s destruction; liberals believe that conservatives exploit Israel’s exceptionalism, particularly the memory of the Holocaust, in the name of security. Liberals abhor racism and oppression, while many conservatives, especially supporters of Avigdor Lieberman, now believe in permanent separation. For conservatives, external criticism of Israeli policies is always a sign of anti-Semitism or self-hatred. They also increasingly argue that internal criticism of Israel delegitimises the nation, undermining Israel’s very right to exist.

I am here to visit the Israeli grantees of my charitable foundation. Israeli human rights organisations are almost entirely funded from abroad. To a greater or lesser extent, that is true of all Israeli institutions, and the country does indeed have an affluent sheen

about it that speaks of generous grants from funding bodies. For the human rights organisations, however, foreign funding has led to a certain disconnection from Israelis themselves. Advocates are turning towards the international audience rather than the domestic one, to English rather than Hebrew. As a result, they have become somewhat isolated within Israel.

Yet they have achieved results. Palestinian detainees are no longer hooded or put into stress positions, or threatened with the arrest and maltreatment of relatives. Their shackles now have to be at least 50cm long, rather than 30cm. Detainee maltreatment is carefully monitored by NGOs.

The Supreme Court, too, has helped with many favourable rulings in cases brought by human rights groups. The ban on torture and the improvements to detainee conditions are sometimes used as arguments against human rights organisations, on the grounds that they are “unnecessary”. The internal debate is combative, mirroring in many ways the American debate on torture in the Bush era. Many Israeli hawks are American-born (though, now, probably more of them are Russian), and many American hawks are deeply engaged in Israel.

We visit Hebron with one of the organisations we support. In Kiryat Arba, the settler suburb, we stop off at the Meir Kahane Memorial Park. There is the tomb of Baruch Goldstein, who killed dozens of unarmed Palestinians in the Tomb of the Patriarchs, known to Muslims as the Ibrahimi Mosque, in 1994. Israeli soldiers looked on, bewildered and motionless, until finally he was killed by members of the public.

Goldstein, born in Brooklyn, joined the ultra-nationalist Kahane's Jewish Defence League and lived in the Hebron settlement. The Hebrew inscription on his tomb states:

‘Here lies buried the holy one Dr Baruch Kappel Goldstein... He gave his soul for the people of Israel, for the Torah and for the land. Clean of hand and pure of heart. Murdered while protecting the Nation of God.’

There is a shoddy bus shelter next to the little park. The streets are empty.

In 1929, 67 Jews were killed in Hebron, ending Jewish life in the city. The settlers started to reoccupy Hebron in the late 1970s, house by house. Kiryat Arba now has some 600 inhabitants, guarded by 1,200 soldiers. Hebron itself is divided into two sectors – H1, home to about 180,000 Palestinians, and H2, the four square kilometres at the heart of city, which is under direct occupation.

There, on the narrow streets around Abraham's tomb, all shops are closed and sealed. People still live on the first and second floors. Every window is covered with a light metal mesh. The Palestinians' laws prevent them from selling their houses to the settlers, so the inhabitants of H2 are financially locked in. Houses are sometimes abandoned when owners die or move away. Settlers drape Israeli flags on them – another victory for Zionism, another (self-imposed) defeat for the Palestinians.

There are a few settler quarters in H2 as well. They are affluent and orderly, in contrast to the dismal Palestinian streets. On some streets, Israelis can drive and Palestinians cannot. In some places they have to walk on the other side of concrete barriers. Israeli soldiers, armed with machine-guns, complain only about the settlers, who often try to provoke fights with the Palestinians.

Our grantee has handed out video cameras to Palestinian families to record settler attacks, which are many and frequent. If there is a fight, the soldiers will step in – the post-Holocaust ideology of the Israeli state mandates that Jewish lives must always be protected. Without that protection, there would be guerrilla warfare in the West Bank.

We chat with a soldier in a watchtower. There is a bag of rubbish on the floor: chocolate wrappers, cans and paper, the detritus of the young. Outside, Breaking the Silence, a group dedicated to soldier testimony of abuse of Palestinians in the occupied territories, is taking a group of visitors around. Next to them is a conservative group, showing the settlements. The atmosphere is tense; the soldiers are watching in case they clash. I ask if the liberal groups ever attack the conservative ones, and our guide laughs and shakes his head.

Confrontation in Israel is now the domain of the right, like the young activists of the neo-Zionist Im Tirtzu who recently targeted the

progressive New Israel Fund with posters depicting its Israeli director with a horn in her forehead. A few streets away, settlers have painted naive scenes of Jewish life on a wall, political graffiti minimising the oppressive force of the occupation. The captions are in English:

Living together  
A pious community  
Destruction 1029  
Liberation, return, rebuilding 1967  
“The children have returned to their own borders”  
cf Jer 31:17

We visit the tomb of Abraham and Sarah, where Isaac, Jacob and their wives are also interred. Herod built a memorial temple over the tombs.

Pieces of paper – prayers – are thrown into the sealed rooms of the tombs. Birds fly in and out; padlocks seal the doors. Children, tourists, Orthodox men and women talk comfortably, drifting from tomb to tomb. A man sleeps on a plastic chair. I look into Abraham’s tomb. Diagonally across from me, a Palestinian woman simultaneously looks through the bars of her identical window; Abraham is locked in between the two sides.

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Later, we visit the mayor of a Palestinian village on the sea. His family accounts for 40 per cent of the population. He seems a little sleepy, talking about education, culture and sports, but without any enthusiasm – those words represent grants, and, like with Potemkin façades, the reality behind them is uncertain. This is the poorest village in Israel, between Haifa and Tel Aviv, and next to the wealthy Jewish village of Caesarea, where Prime Minister Netanyahu has a weekend house. The inhabitants of Caesarea built a sand barrier between the two villages.

The mayor’s dream is a €50m holiday home development on the beach, funded by the European Union, temporarily stopped because of ownership issues. I can’t imagine a holiday resort on this

littered beach, despite the blue sea. We stand there, deep in thought, when suddenly an Arab horse canters by, and then another – fleeting images of Palestinian freedom and defiance.

The saddest thing we saw was not Hebron, or the partly bulldozed Palestinian cemetery in the Mount Carmel National Park, or the barrier wall. It was a prison outside Tel Aviv that houses asylum-seekers. Most of the male detainees are Africans, lounging on narrow beds in fairly open conditions. Some have walked across the Egyptian border. There is a ping-pong table in the open-air common-room; a cockroach crawls along a wall.

The female detainees are Asian and eastern European. A Ukrainian woman is thought to have been trafficked, but can't be helped unless she says so herself – she was picked up from a brothel, and is not saying. Her grey, expressionless face and bleached hair are haunting. But the saddest thing is the children's ward. Two boys are locked in a cell. They look about 12; younger than that and they are detained in boarding schools. The locking up is, I believe, temporary, like the stench from the garbage that is being removed as we stand there. I don't know where they were from – Sudan, perhaps. But the sight of them, the same age as my own son, was indescribably sad. ■

# GRASS-ROOTS BANKING

COLUMN FOR THE NEW STATESMAN, NOVEMBER 2008

*by Sigrid Rausing*

**O**n the morning of Friday 10 October, as even the mainstream US media were speculating about the possibility of the end of capitalism as we know it, I went to visit Grameen Bank in Queens, New York. Founded by Professor Muhammad Yunus, who invented microcredit in Bangladesh in 1976, Grameen is often thought of as a bank for the developing world. But 36.5 million people in America live below the poverty line. Up to 28 million have no bank account. Many are immigrants. They rely on payday loans or cheque cashiers, and short-term loans – some legal, some not – with annual average interest rates reaching 300 or even 400 per cent. They, too, need “Banking for the Unbanked”, as Grameen’s slogan puts it. The Queens branch, its first in America, opened last November and made its first loan in January.

The office is on a peaceful street in a mainly Bangladeshi area of Jackson Heights. Ritu Chattree, vice-president of finance and development, formerly of Insead and J P Morgan, opens the door to a shabby, steep staircase with a torn patterned carpet. Upstairs is a single room with six worn desks, some photos and hand-drawn maps of Brooklyn and Queens on the walls.

All the staff are out visiting clients, apart from Shah Newaz from Bangladesh, who runs the office. He gives me instant coffee with sweet powdered creamer. The contrast is beguiling – the runaway success of the bank, its Nobel Peace Prize-winning founder, the great and the good on the leadership council; and this tatty, tiny office. The ethos of providing financial services to the poor permeates the room. That day, in the context of the collapse of Bear Stearns and Lehman

Brothers, this form of grass-roots banking seems not only ethical but also solidly safe: its payback rate, so far, is over 99 per cent.

Grameen Bank started 34 years ago, in Bangladesh, when Professor Yunus lent \$27 to a group of 42 women. That was the beginning of the microcredit movement, which has spread to most of the developing world, not least through Grameen, whose model has been replicated in more than a hundred countries. The core principles are simple: the poor need credit, not aid. They need loans, given with respect and received with dignity, within the context of supportive groups, and in close contact with Grameen staff. Loans are given to women because evidence shows that they put the money to better use. The sums lent are carefully considered: the right amount is empowering; too little, or, interestingly, too much, is thought to be damaging.

There are four aspects to the client relationship: the loan, the savings account through the Citibank partnership, five days of financial literacy training (important for the many clients who did not previously have bank accounts) and a partnership with Experian, which establishes credit ratings for Grameen clients.

Initially it was difficult to reach the target group in New York. Leafleting proved ineffective, and Shah found it a culture shock to work with such atomised and individualistic communities where suspicions of Mafia connections or moneylender abuse were widespread. He speaks of Americans with the thoughtful concern of NGO workers worldwide, who always mirror the societies they work in. This, more than anything, strikes me as the essence of Grameen America. Shah is not only talking about the poor, he is talking about Americans, and the nature of America, just as westerners in Bangladesh talk about Bangladeshis.

The culture shock may be mutual. American women may wonder why a bank based on an explicitly woman-oriented theory of change is so lacking in feminist language. According to its leaflets, Grameen America anticipates its clients using their loans for purposes such as selling beauty salon products, clothing and jewellery, bakery goods, handicrafts and flower arrangements. There are many things that women's borrowing groups might do, and specifically suggesting the

most traditionally female crafts strikes a surprisingly conservative note.

Grameen will open six more branches in the city over the next two years, as well as a mix of urban and rural branches in the rest of America. It is hoping to reach between 18,000 and 20,000 people within the next five years.

This is a fraction of the millions of people below the poverty line in the US, but the model is easily scalable. Perhaps a part of that \$700bn bailout ought to have gone not to Wall Street, but to a community bank providing small loans and a personal financial service to the poor.

Two days after my visit, the tatty Stars and Stripes flags on Fifth Avenue barely move in the humid heat. We are trapped by the Hispanic Columbus Day parade, led by eight young women marching with replica guns. Countless cops with real guns are lined up, obsessively controlling movement across the street. Election tension is palpable. Never before have I felt a sense of so much being at stake in this country. I don't know if Grameen's arrival in the US is a sign of hope, or a sign of the end of the American era. Perhaps, on reflection, it could be both. ■

## THE RULE OF LAW

From its earliest years, SRT recognised that durable human rights protections cannot exist without strong, independent systems of justice. The Trust supported the coalition of NGO's supporting the International Criminal Court, and a range of advocacy and legal empowerment work, enabling communities to seek redress and holding perpetrators—whether they be states or corporations—accountable. The early 2000s marked a shift in the Trust's grant making, as it began to engage more deeply with human rights challenges emerging from conflict and post-conflict societies. These were years marked by global instability—from the aftermath of war and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans and genocide in Central Africa to the threat of terrorism and the post-9/11 erosion of civil liberties worldwide. The Trust recognised that building sustainable peace required not only reconstruction and development, but also a commitment to justice and an understanding of history (even if no shared narrative can be agreed), and to underlying institutional reform.

In 2002, the Trust began supporting the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), whose mission—helping societies reckon with legacies of repression and atrocities—resonated with our core values. The organisation worked in countries such as Sierra Leone, Colombia, and East Timor, providing critical support for truth commissions, reparations programmes, and judicial reform processes. ICTJ helped elevate the voices of victims and survivors, placing them at the centre of transitional justice efforts and fostering pathways toward collective healing and institutional accountability.

The Trust supported the organisation Looted Art, founded by Anne Webber, from 2004 to 2018. The group, initially focusing on Nazi Germany, researches, identifies and recovers looted property on behalf of families, communities, institutions and governments.

It played an important part in establishing principles for looted property rights, and has restored over 3,500 objects looted by the Nazis to their rightful owners. Looted Art has now expanded their remit to help museums and other institutions establish guidance regarding looted cultural property more generally.

In 2004, the Trust began to support Reprieve, a legal advocacy charity founded to challenge death penalty cases and extreme abuses of state power. At a time when the US-led War on Terror was undermining the rule of law, Reprieve stood out as an advocate for justice and due process. The organisation focused on unlawful detention, torture prevention, and capital punishment, offering legal and advocacy support to prisoners and detainees.

Reprieve's legal teams played a critical role in the release of over 80 people held at Guantánamo Bay—men detained indefinitely without charge or trial, many of whom had already been subjected to torture at other sites. Working in hostile legal and political environments, Reprieve fought to restore the rights and dignity of their clients, mobilising public support and challenging impunity at the highest levels.

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It is hard to overstate the impact that SRT funding and support has had on Reprieve over the last two decades. To know that you have such a partner, committed to providing unrestricted, loyal, financial support means the world to human rights organisations, particularly those defending some of the world's most vilified people. SRT's committed support allowed Reprieve to grow from a tiny acorn to the mighty oak tree it is today, and we remain eternally grateful to the Trust for giving us your support. Thank you.

Anna Yearley  
Co-Director of Reprieve

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The Trust also supported Human Rights First’s successful project to mobilise generals and the FBI to oppose CIA-sponsored torture. With the generals and FBI on board, there was a real opportunity to turn the American public against the use of torture. The project created lasting change, and remains one of the best examples of civil society coalition building around a single issue the Trust ever supported.

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Many thanks to the Sigrid Rausing Trust for its support of Human Rights First’s efforts to put an end to the United States’ use of torture. After the 9/11 attacks, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) engaged in a systematic program of torturing people it believed to have information about terrorism. When details of this program came to light, political leaders justified the policies of abuse by claiming, without evidence, that these practices were necessary to prevent future attacks.

To put an end to this program, Human Rights First rallied a coalition of national security professionals—retired admirals and generals, experienced interrogators, and others—who contradicted the claim that torture was an effective tool to ensure public safety. These professionals educated lawmakers, candidates for office, and the public about the ways in which abusive policies hindered, rather than helped, the country’s national security objectives.

On President Obama’s second full day in office, he signed an executive order ending the CIA’s torture program flanked by members of this coalition. But ending the so-called “enhanced” interrogation program was only the first step. To ensure that government officials never again considered torture and official cruelty to be legitimate policy options,

Human Rights First pushed for transparency about what had happened and safeguards to prevent it from happening again.

With the support of Sigrid Rausing, Human Rights First successfully advocated, against the odds, for the public release of portions of the Senate Intelligence Committee's torture report (Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program). Armed with this definitive record of both the scale of the abuse and the harm it did to American security interests, we won passage of bipartisan legislation clarifying that any return to policies of abuse would be a violation of U.S. law.

This strategy paid dividends when, during his first term, President Trump proposed bringing back the CIA's torture program. The current Senate Majority Leader, John Thune, when asked about the Trump proposal, rejected it by saying, "Those issues are settled law. Congress has spoken."

Human Rights First

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During my time at the Trust, I have witnessed the organization's commitment to support societies undergoing transition, helping, for instance, local groups search for missing persons after dictatorships and wars, collect evidence for future accountability, ensure that civil society and activists can propose and advocate for change, and that a diverse and inclusive societal memory is preserved. Global attention tends to move quickly, from crisis to crisis, but the Trust has remained a consistent partner, supporting the patient and difficult work of local actors to address deeper issues and ultimately contribute to the foundations for a functioning democratic society.

Fabien Maitre-Muhl  
SRT Programme Manager for Human Rights and  
Rule of Law

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Detainees wake up before dawn prayers to exercise at Camp Delta, Guantanamo, 2010 © TIM DIRVEN / PANOS PICTURES

Page 60: Camp Delta prison housed over 600 alleged jihadis indefinitely, 2003 © JEZ COULSON / PANOS PICTURES

Redress is a London-based human rights organisation working around the world seeking reparation for torture survivors by engaging in litigation, advocacy and capacity-building. The group played a critical role in securing justice for survivors of torture in Sudan, and their ongoing work also includes helping to find innovative means of financing reparations. With asset recovery the organisation challenges the financial impunity of certain high-profile perpetrators of torture by taking legal cases to seize their corrupt assets and, where possible, use them to provide reparations to their victims.

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For many years the Sigrid Rausing Trust has been a reliable supporter of Redress. Our work to deliver justice and reparation for survivors of torture can take many years to achieve impact. The sustained approach of the Trust means we can provide consistent representation to survivors of torture. It provides the core support needed to effectively run an NGO, and opens up opportunities for additional funding to support key projects and deliver our strategy. Through their experience and expertise, the staff and board members of the Trust have always had a strong understanding of what we do, which has empowered us to develop new and innovative areas of work, such as the recovery of assets to provide reparation for survivors, and allowed us to grow the charity. The Trust's long-term support has been crucial for the global anti-torture movement to flourish.

Rupert Skilbeck  
Director, Redress

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# TIMELINE

Below is a timeline that integrates some of the key global events, treaties, and agreements affecting human rights, women's rights, LGBT rights, and the environment from 1985 to today.

## 1985

- Mikail Gorbachev is elected General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. His policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) pave the way for democracy, and, ultimately, the break-up of the Soviet Union.

## 1986

- Olof Palme, Prime Minister of Sweden, is assassinated.
- Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

## 1987

- The first Intifada begins in Palestine.
- Black Monday stock market crash.
- Montreal Protocol signs International treaty to phase out substances that deplete the ozone layer—one of the most successful environmental agreements ever.

## 1988

- Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- Pan Am flight Lockerbie bombing, killing 270 people.

## 1989

- May. Hungary opens its border to Austria, and thousands of East Germans flee across the border.
- The Fall of the Berlin Wall marks the end of the Cold War, fostering democratisation and human rights reforms in Eastern Europe.
- Lech Walesa of the Solidarity movement is elected President of Poland.
- Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia; dissident writer Vaclav Havel becomes President.
- Tiananmen Square Massacre in Beijing, China – hundreds killed in brutal crackdown on pro-democracy protests.

## 1990

- Iraq's first invasion of Kuwait under Saddam Hussein.
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child sets international standards for the protection of children's rights.
- The first Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report published, catalysing global environmental awareness.
- German reunification.
- Nelson Mandela is released from prison.

## 1991

- Dissolution of the Soviet Union.
- Soviet troops occupy Vilnius in Lithuania; tanks move through Latvia and Estonia.
- Coup against Gorbachev. Yeltsin's speech standing on a tank saved the fragile democracy, resulting in the independence of 15 republics, including Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic States.
- Gorbachev resigns, and Boris Yeltsin becomes the President of Russia.
- The wars of Yugoslav Succession Begin: Slovenia and Croatia

declare independence, sparking conflict as Yugoslavia begins to unravel.

- START I (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) signed between the U.S. and USSR, significantly reducing nuclear arsenals.

## 1992

- Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro) leads to the adoption of Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration, and conventions on biodiversity and climate change, setting a foundation for sustainable development.
- Ethnic tensions explode in Bosnia and Herzegovina after its declaration of independence, leading to one of the most devastating conflicts in the region. The Siege of Sarajevo (1992-6), begins.
- Maastricht Treaty signed.

## 1993

- Vienna World Conference on Human Rights declares that women's rights are human rights, bolstering global efforts toward gender equality.
- World Trade Centre truck bomb explodes, killing six people.

## 1994

- End of Apartheid in South Africa.
- Nelson Mandela's election symbolises a global victory for racial justice and equality.
- UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Enters into Force.
- Establishes a framework for international cooperation on combating climate change.
- The First Chechen War begins, ending in 1996.
- Genocide in Rwanda. Tutsi civilians are massacred across the country.

- Belém do Pará Convention in Brazil is the first legally binding international treaty to criminalise all forms of violence against women recognising it as a violation of human rights.

## 1995

- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action advances global gender equality and women's empowerment.
- The Oklahoma City bombing, the deadliest domestic terrorist attack in U.S. history, is carried out by far-right US veteran Timothy McVeigh, who detonated a bomb killing 168 and injuring over 600.
- Srebrenica Massacre. 8,000 Bosniak men and boys are murdered in the UN 'safe area' of Srebrenica. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia is founded, eventually indicting 161 people.
- The Dayton Agreement ends the Bosnian War, establishing a fragile peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a complex political structure to balance ethnic groups.

## 1996

- Taliban Seizes Power in Afghanistan - begins harsh rule with severe human rights abuses, especially toward women and girls.
- End of IRA cease-fire. Bombs in London and Manchester.
- Multiple suicide bombs in Israel.
- Terrorist bomb kills 90 in Sri Lanka.
- Saudi Hezbollah kills 19 Americans in bomb attack.

## 1997

- Kyoto Protocol Adopted - the first binding international treaty to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, addressing climate change.
- Ottawa Treaty (Mine Ban Treaty) prohibits the use, stockpiling,

and transfer of anti-personnel landmines, safeguarding civilians in conflict zones.

- Hong Kong handover to China.

## 1998

- The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) establishes the ICC to prosecute crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide.
- The Human Rights Act is made law in Britain, incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights.
- The Good Friday Agreement (Belfast Agreement) ends decades of conflict in Northern Ireland, promoting peace and reconciliation.
- The Kosovo War Begins - ethnic tensions escalate into armed conflict between Serb forces and Kosovar Albanians, drawing international attention.
- Google founded.

## 1999

- Boris Yeltsin resigns. KGB intelligence officer Vladimir Putin is appointed Prime Minister of Russia. Within months he is acting President, then President.
- The Second Chechen War begins, ending in 2010.
- Some 1,400 people are killed in East Timor, following a referendum on independence from Indonesia.
- NATO bombing of Yugoslavia during the Kosovo War – significant NATO intervention without UN authorization.
- End of second Chechen war. Estimates of civilian deaths vary, but the war was extremely brutal.

## 2000

- UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) launches global goals to address poverty, education, gender equality, and environmental sustainability by 2015.
- The Terrorism Act is passed in the UK.
- The Real IRA launches a rocket-propelled grenade at the MI6 headquarters in London.

## 2001

- 9/11 Al Qaida terror attacks. 3000 civilians are killed in the Twin Towers conflagration. Hundreds are killed in the attacks on the Pentagon, and the failed hi-jacking.
- The Global War on Terror raises significant human rights challenges, including surveillance, detention, torture and counterterrorism laws.
- Durban World Conference Against Racism highlights global issues of racism and xenophobia, though controversy surrounds its anti-Zionist stance on Israel/Palestine.

## 2002

- The International Criminal Court (ICC) becomes operational.
- East Timor gains independence.
- The Department of Homeland Security is established in the US
- Anna Lindh, Sweden's Foreign Minister, is murdered in Stockholm.
- Terrorist attack in Bali kills over 200 people.
- Chechen rebels take a theatre audience hostage in Russia. In the effort to free the victims, 200 people are killed.

## 2003

- US invasion of Iraq begins under President Bush.
- Janjaweed ethnic cleansing in Darfur intensifies. In five years, hundreds of thousands of civilians are killed until a combined African Union and United Nations peacekeeping force-imposed order.

## 2004

- Indian Ocean Tsunami kills hundreds of thousands.
- Yogyakarta Principles on LGBT Rights provides a framework for applying international human rights law to issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Eight Eastern European countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Slovenia) join the European Union, integrating them into Western political and economic systems.
- President Vladimir Putin re-elected in Russia.
- The Orange Revolution breaks out in Ukraine, leading to the ousting of the corrupt President Yanukovich.
- Madrid train bombing – Al-Qaeda terrorists kill 193 people and injures over 2,000.
- Facebook founded.

## 2005

- Responsibility to Protect (R2P) endorsed by UN member states to prevent genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.
- July 7 London bombings on the Underground and buses, kills 52 people and injurs over 700.
- Hurricane Katrina devastates New Orleans, causing approximately 1,800 deaths and triggering conversations on race, inequality, and disaster response in the U.S.

- The Maputo Protocol, an African Union treaty ensuring women's political, social, economic, and reproductive rights and banning FGM and child marriage, comes into force.

## 2006

- Al Gore's An Inconvenient Truth popularizes awareness of climate change, influencing global opinion and activism.
- Saddam Hussein, captured in Iraq, is executed.
- Argentine government re-opens investigations on crimes against humanity and begin prosecutions of military and security officers responsible for the so-called 'dirty war', when some 30,000 people, many of them left-leaning students, were murdered.
- Boris Yeltsin dies.

## 2007

- IPCC Fourth Assessment Report - raises global urgency about climate change. The organization is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize along with Al Gore.
- Launch of iPhone kickstarts the smartphone era, reshaping activism and the conversation about digital rights.

## 2008

- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) advances the rights of persons with disabilities and promotes their inclusion.
- Kosovo unilaterally declares independence from Serbia, sparking ongoing tensions and divisions in international recognition.
- Barack Obama becomes the first Black President of the United States.

- President Putin becomes Prime Minister of Russia, under new President Dmitry Medvedev.
- Global Financial Crisis begins with Lehman Brothers collapse causing global economic turmoil and major policy shifts.

## 2009

- 2.9 million Afghan refugees flee the Taliban.
- Hamas accepts ceasefire, and Israel withdraws from Gaza
- Multiple suicide attacks in Baghdad kill hundreds of people and injure many more

## 2010

- Haiti Earthquake kills over 230,000 people.
- UN Women founded, uniting multiple UN bodies to advocate for women's empowerment and gender equality.

## 2011

- Arab Spring begins - pro-democracy uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa amplify calls for freedom and human rights. This eventually leads to regime changes in some countries but also triggers ongoing conflicts and instability in the region.
- Far-right terrorist Anders Breivik kills 77 people in Norway, many of them children attending the youth summer camp of the Social Democratic party.
- UN Resolution on LGBT Rights.
- The Human Rights Council passes its first resolution recognising LGBT rights as fundamental human rights.
- Vaclav Havel dies.
- The Istanbul Convention, a Council of Europe treaty to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence, is adopted,

setting legally binding standards for protection, prevention, and prosecution.

## 2012

- Vladimir Putin returns to the Presidency. The election was marred by allegations of fraud and protests.
- US passes the Magnitsky Act, designed to impose sanctions on foreign officials involved in human rights abuses and corruption.
- Suicide attack in Yemen kills over 90 people.

## 2013

- Edward Snowden whistleblower leaks - reveals global surveillance practices, sparking international debates about privacy and human rights.
- Black Lives Matter Movement Begins after the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's killer, becoming a global rallying cry against systemic racism and police brutality.
- The Maidan uprising in Ukraine leads to the fall of corrupt President Yanukovych.

## 2014

- Civil war in Syria. The Islamic State (ISIS) declares a caliphate, controlling territory in Iraq and Syria. They commit atrocities, particularly targeting the Yazidi community. Some 6.7 million Syrian refugees enter Turkey, Germany, Sweden and other countries.
- Following the Ukrainian Orange Revolution, Russia annexes Crimea, sparking international condemnation and ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine.
- Repression of Uyghurs in China begins.

## 2015

- Paris Agreement signed - a landmark climate accord committing nations to limit global warming to well below 2°C, with implications for climate justice.
- UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a broader successor to the MDGs, focusing on inequality, gender justice, and environmental sustainability, are agreed.
- Multiple Islamist terrorist attacks in Paris, including the attacks on satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo staff and a Jewish supermarket (January), and co-ordinated massacres in the Bataclan theatre (November) and elsewhere in Paris. At least 137 people are killed. The government declares a 3-month state of emergency.
- U.S. Supreme Court legalizes same-sex marriage nationwide.

## 2016

- Colombian Peace Agreement ends decades of conflict with the FARC, integrating human rights protections for marginalized groups.
- Standing Rock Protests Indigenous-led demonstrations against the Dakota Access Pipeline highlight environmental justice and indigenous rights.
- UK Votes For Brexit, by 51.9%.
- Donald Trump wins US election.
- Islamic State bombing in Brussels kills 35 people.
- Islamic State truck attack in Nice kills 87 people.
- Islamic State Christmas market attack in Berlin kills 13 people.
- Failed Coup in Turkey leads to mass purges and consolidation of power by President Erdogan.

## 2017

- Me-Too movement against sexual harassment and violence begins.
- Islamist Manchester Arena bombing kills 23 people.

- Islamic State attack in Barcelona kills 24 people.
- Rohingya Genocide in Myanmar – a brutal military crackdown causes over 700,000 Rohingya Muslims to flee to Bangladesh.

## 2018

- IPCC Special Report on Global Warns of catastrophic effects if global warming exceeds 1.5°C, urging immediate action.
- Repeal of Ireland's Eighth Amendment legalizes abortion in Ireland.
- Greta Thunberg's Climate Strikes inspires a global youth movement demanding urgent climate action.
- President Vladimir Putin is re-elected.
- Jamal Khashoggi murdered in Saudi consulate in Istanbul causing an international outcry over press freedom and state violence.
- South Africa's Jacob Zuma is forced to resign due to mounting pressure from the ANC amid numerous corruption allegations and a loss of political support.

## 2019

- Protests in Hong Kong following Chinese crackdowns.
- Amazon rainforest fires spark outrage.
- Deforestation and environmental degradation in Brazil ignite global concern about indigenous rights and biodiversity.
- Greta Thunberg Speaks at UN Climate Summit - “How dare you?” speech galvanizes global climate movement.
- EU declares climate emergency and launches the European Green Deal to become climate-neutral by 2050.

## 2020

- COVID-19 Pandemic. Millions die, sparking global debates

about state policy, discrimination and corruption.

- George Floyd murdered by police in Minneapolis, reinvigorating the Black Lives Matter movement and global conversations about systemic racism and police violence.
- Russian anti-corruption campaigner Alexi Navalny is poisoned with Novichok in Russia, survives.
- Volodymyr Zelenskyy becomes President of Ukraine.
- Mass protests against perceptions of a rigged election and oppressive rule in Belarus under President Alexander Lukashenko. Harsh crackdowns follow.

## 2021

- Escazu Agreement Latin America's first binding treaty on environmental rights and protection of human rights defenders enters into force. COP26 (Glasgow). Nations pledge to phase down coal and strengthen climate action, though many commitments fall short.
- Alexei Navalny returns to Russia and is jailed after a sham trial.
- U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Taliban's return to power has major humanitarian and geopolitical consequences.
- Supporters of President Trump storm the US Capitol.
- Pegasus Project revelations show global use of spyware to monitor journalists, activists, and politicians.
- Hungary passes anti-LGBTQ+ “propaganda law”, outlawing LGBTQ+ content in materials accessible to minors.
- China pledges to reach net-zero emissions by 2060, signalling a shift in global emissions leadership.

## 2022

- Ukraine War. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine begins. The war triggers a major refugee crisis, intensifying focus on displaced populations' rights.

- Bosnia and Herzegovina gains EU Candidate Status.
- UN declares repression of Uyghurs in China a probable crime against humanity.
- Assassination of former Japanese PM Shinzo Abe – rare political violence in Japan with global attention.
- US Supreme Court votes to overturn Roe v. Wade, returning the authority to regulate abortion to individual states.
- Twitter takeover by Elon Musk, raising global alarm over digital platform governance, disinformation, and content moderation.
- Pakistan floods displace 33 million people, drawing global attention to climate vulnerability in the Global South.
- UN Resolution on the Human Right to a Healthy Environment officially recognizes a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as a fundamental human right.

## 2023

- Hamas fighters break out of Gaza, killing some 1,100 Israeli civilians, taking 250 hostages. Israel invades Gaza.
- Sudan Conflict reignites. Clashes between military factions lead to humanitarian disaster, with an estimated 150,000 deaths over two years, and a reported 14 million people displaced.
- India Passes Controversial CAA and NRC Laws - widely criticized for potentially discriminating against Muslim citizens, sparking human rights protests.
- Iran Protests Over Mahsa Amini's Death. Widespread uprisings led by women challenge theocratic rule, met with brutal crackdowns. Slogan: "Woman, Life, Freedom.".
- AI Ethics and Governance Debates Accelerate with growing global concerns about misinformation, bias, and surveillance arising from unregulated AI technologies.

## 2024

- Anti-corruption campaigner Alexei Navalny dies, presumed murdered, in a Russian jail.
- Sweden and Finland join Nato.
- Global Push for Climate Finance.
- Wealthy nations begin delivering funds to address climate-related losses in vulnerable regions, promoting climate justice.
- Declaration on Future Generations (UN) commits to safeguarding human rights and environmental sustainability for future generations.
- President Trump re-elected.
- COP16 Biodiversity and COP29 Conferences Criticized.
- The COP conferences are criticised universally for failing to deliver sufficient outcomes to help manage the climate crisis.
- Return of Far-Right Governments across Europe (7 states so far)
- After strong showings in 2024 elections, there are far-right parties within government in seven European countries: Croatia, the Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands and Slovakia.

## 2025

- President Trump signs Executive Order “Protecting The American People Against Invasion,” triggering harsh crackdowns on immigrants, including increased arrests, detentions, and deportations, even without criminal records.
- President Trump fires Librarian of Congress and places federal library agency staff on leave, while the Pentagon orders the removal of nearly 400 titles on race, gender, critical race theory, and diversity from military academy libraries.
- Israel’s ongoing bombing of Gaza, combined with a partial blockade of aid, and plans for Gaza’s clearance and occupation, triggers a severe humanitarian crisis. 62,000 Palestinianians have been killed in the conflict and hundreds of thousands have been injured and

displaced. Israel faces mounting international pressure, including from the UN and 28 countries, to allow unrestricted humanitarian aid into Gaza.

- To mark the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration, 193 UN member states recommit to gender equality, calling for closing digital and care gaps, expanding economic rights, and ending violence against women.
- Hungary enacts constitutional amendments banning public LGBTQ+ events and recognising only two genders.
- The International Court of Justice declares (by consensus) that failing to address climate change may violate international law and that a clean and sustainable environment is a universal human right.
- UN Ocean Conference secures billions of euros in finance pledges for marine protection and over 800 voluntary commitments.

# AMERICAN TORTURE: CIA THEORIES OF INTERROGATION

A TALK AT YORK UNIVERSITY, 12 NOVEMBER 2010

*By Sigrid Rausing*

My topic tonight is theories of interrogation. My main focus is America, but Britain too has been implicated in coercive interrogation techniques, as shown by the recent leaks from the army base Chicksands. The Guardian reported this week that UK soldiers may face a war crimes trial (10<sup>th</sup> November), and that the Ministry of Defence has been unable to explain why interrogators were trained in techniques that appear to breach the Geneva conventions, such as threats, sensory deprivation, and enforced nakedness. According to the Guardian, ‘...training materials drawn up secretly in recent years tell interrogators they should aim to provoke humiliation, insecurity, disorientation, exhaustion, anxiety, and fear.’ The allegations are under investigation.<sup>3</sup>

WikiLeaks released 400,000 files recently, compiled by US troops between 2004 and 2009. Amongst other atrocities, there were more than 1,000 reports of torture by the Iraqi authorities, and 300 reports of abuse by coalition forces, all taking place after the Abu Ghraib scandal. Many more cases of torture are undoubtedly still un-reported – over 9,000 detainees have been handed over to Iraqi authorities so far.

Before President Obama was elected, he promised to close Guantanamo. We assumed, wrongly as it turned out, that he would also close the network of secret detention centres. We hoped there would be a legal process concerning the Bush administration breaches

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<sup>3</sup> The Iraq Historic Allegations Team was established in 2010 to investigate alleged abuses (including torture and unlawful killings) by UK forces. It did not lead to any prosecutions, and was closed in 2017.

of the Geneva convention. Human Rights Watch suggested that Obama appoint an independent panel to study recent American torture (2008). The International Herald Tribune asked for a prosecutor to be appointed to consider criminal charges against those who were involved in planning abusive interrogations (December 18th, 2008). It didn't happen. Human Rights Watch estimated then that approximately 100 men had been killed in American detention; the ACLU estimate of deaths now is hundreds, not a hundred.

In 2009 the Herald Tribune carried an article headlined, 'Torture admission complicates the debate about closing Guantanamo's prison' (16.1.09). Trying prisoners who have been subjected to torture is a complicated business: confessions obtained under duress are normally inadmissible in American courts. One sentence caught my eye at the time: 'Military records show that one teenage detainee, Mohammed Jawad, was moved from cell to cell 112 times in a 14-day period in 2004 to keep him in a state of sleepless disorientation.'

It made me wonder when, and how, did the American authorities conclude that disorientation and extreme exhaustion are helpful to the process of extracting information? What are the key texts of American interrogation techniques?

To understand what happened in Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib and the secret detention centres, we need to understand the CIA and US army theoretical framework of interrogation. In essence, a part of the US Army training course in how to *resist* interrogation – SERE ('survival, evasion, resistance, escape') - was appropriated and transformed into techniques of *conducting* interrogation. The methods of SERE, in turn, were based on earlier CIA and ARMY interrogation manuals.

On February 7th 2002, George W Bush declared that the United States was no longer legally committed to comply with the Geneva Conventions, the international body of law that determines military conduct in war. The same year, administration legal counsels (Jay Bybee, John Yoo, Alberto Gonzales and others) began to produce memos legally justifying torture. Unilateral Presidential power was part of the argument, and so was the distinction between 'Prisoners of War' and 'Unlawful Combatants'. John Yoo's memo of 2003, for example, states:

‘While the Geneva Convention (TII) Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Aug. 12, 1949, 6 U.S.T. 3316, T.I.A.S. 3364 (“GPW”), imposes restrictions on the interrogations of prisoners of war, it does not provide prisoner of war status to those who are unlawful combatants. Those restrictions therefore would not apply to the interrogations of unlawful belligerents such as al Qaeda or Taliban members. (p.16)’ [...] ‘We conclude that the War Crimes Act does not apply to the interrogation of al Qaeda and Taliban detainees because, as illegal belligerents, they do not qualify for the legal protections under the Geneva or Hague Conventions that section 2441 enforces.’

The message that prisoners had no rights travelled to Abu Ghraib via Guantanamo Bay. Philip Gourevitch and Errol Morris’ book, *Standard Operating Procedure*, quotes an interviewee: ‘He told us what he did over in Guantanamo Bay, ‘Like in Guantanamo Bay, they don’t have no rights, no Geneva Convention’, blah blah blah. We were thinking, Wow – ok.’<sup>4</sup>

The so-called torture memos were subsequently contradicted by the US Army Field Manual 34-52 (2006), which sets a rigorous contemporary standard for the treatment of detainees. It contains no less than 21 lengthy references to torture:

Use of torture is not only illegal but also it is a poor technique that yields unreliable results, may damage subsequent collection efforts, and can induce the source to say what he thinks the HUMINT [human intelligence] collector wants to hear. [...] Acts of violence or intimidation, including physical or mental torture, or exposure to inhumane treatment

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Gourevitch and Errol Morris (2008) *Standard Operating Procedure: a War Story* p. 94

as a means of or aid to interrogation are expressly prohibited. Acts in violation of these prohibitions may be a violation of US law and regulation and the law of war, including the Geneva Conventions of 1949, and may be criminal acts punishable under the UCMJ and other US law. Moreover, information obtained by the use of these prohibited means is of questionable value.

The Army Field Manual also dismissed the dubious distinction of the torture memos between lawful and unlawful enemy combatants:

Enemy Combatant: In general, a person engaged in hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners during an armed conflict. The term 'enemy combatant' includes both 'lawful enemy combatants' and 'unlawful enemy combatants.' All captured or detained personnel, regardless of status, shall be treated humanely, and in accordance with the Detainee Treatment Act of 2005 and DOD Directive 2310.1E, 'Department of Defense Detainee Program', and no person in the custody or under the control of DOD, regardless of nationality or physical location, shall be subject to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, in accordance with and as defined in US law.

Testimony collected by Philip Gourevitch and Errol Morris in their book is harrowing:

But, especially at night, some interrogators preferred doing their business right on the tier, in the cells, or in the showers, or in a chamber under the stairs. They put a sheet up over the door and for hours and hours and hours, all you would hear is screaming, banging,

slamming, and just more screaming at the top of their lungs'. 'When they were done eight, ten hours later, they'd bring the guy out, he'd be halfway coherent, or unconscious. You'd put him back in the cell and they'd say, 'OK, this guy gets no sleep. Throw some cold water on him. We'll be back for him tomorrow.<sup>5</sup> [...] And if it turned out you'd been given the wrong man, when you were done making his life unforgettably small and nasty, you allowed him to be your janitor and pick up the other prisoners' trash.'... 'There was always another prisoner, and another. Faceless men under hoods; you stripped them of their clothes, you stripped them of their pride.<sup>6</sup>

Tormented prisoners, many innocent, were starved, beaten and hung naked from the ceiling. They were submersed in icy water, raped and sodomised. They were kept from sleep for days and nights on end. They were subjected to painfully loud music, to vicious dogs, and to many forms of humiliation. *60 Minutes*, the news show, first reported on the story in April 2004, followed by Seymour Hersch in the *New Yorker*, though an army investigation at that point was already under way. Following the revelations, some conservatives posited the idea that Abu Ghraib was the result of 'a few bad apples', the phrase of choice for denial of the practice.

These barbaric techniques may have seemed chaotic or random, but the practice of torture was in fact systematic, based on flawed theories of effective interrogation. The legitimation of torture, and particularly the assumptions behind the disorientation theory of interrogation, began in 1952, when the recently established CIA set up a secret programme called, variously, MKULTRA, Bluebird, or Artichoke, led by an eccentric chemist and speech therapist, Sidney Gottlieb. They experimented with chemical interrogations (LSD and other drugs) on volunteers and unwitting participants, in the US and abroad, and conducted psychiatric, chemical and biological warfare

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<sup>5</sup> op.cit. p.99

<sup>6</sup> op.cit. p. 184

research. Some of the experiments took place outside America, out of reach of American law.

During the Cold War, interrogation techniques and training in how to withstand them, went hand in hand. Mind control, involving drugs, hypnosis, electric shocks, and sensory deprivation, was thought to be of central importance. In the West, the techniques were essentially thought of as defensive, partly because it was widely, and mistakenly, believed that the glazed eyes and outlandish confessions of the victims of the Moscow show trials were a result of mysterious brain-washing techniques.

The assumption behind the American and British (Porton Down) psychiatric mind control research of the 1950s was that to gain co-operation the psyche had to be fragmented and then built up again. The methods of fragmentation within mainstream psychiatry were many and varied, involving, for example, prolonged insulin-induced comas, electric shock treatment, sensory deprivation, lobotomy, and drugs. In a milder form, it was the basis for some now discredited kinds of group therapy, where the patient was supposed to be 'broken down' by the group before they were 'built up' again. It is a model with a certain mechanical appeal: taking a faulty engine apart and putting it back together again seems a sensible course of action. But the engine analogy has obvious limitations, and the history of the research, frequently conducted on vulnerable patients or prisoners, without informed consent, is disturbing.

The 1950s CIA mind research was funded through an entity called the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology (later the Human Ecology Fund), which supported research in psychology, sociology and anthropology from the mid 1950s to the mid 1970s. In 1976 thousands of CIA documents were released, and 80 American institutions, including 44 universities, were notified that they had, at times unwittingly, taken part in CIA sponsored research.

The mind control research formed the basis for the first CIA manual of interrogation, KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation (1963). It is informed by psychiatric language and techniques, including a strong emphasis on the relationship between interrogator

and subject. It deplores physical torture as ineffective and counter-productive: ‘Intense pain is quite likely to produce false confessions, as a means of escaping from distress.’<sup>7</sup>

The manual is a little more ambivalent about induced debility:

Relatively small degrees of homeostatic derangement, fatigue, pain, sleep loss, or anxiety’ will [lead subjects to] talk and usually reveal some information that they might not have revealed otherwise.<sup>8</sup>

Ten pages later, however, the authors state:

No report of scientific investigation of the effect of debility upon the interrogatee’s powers of resistance has been discovered. For centuries interrogators have employed various methods of inducing physical weakness: prolonged constraint; prolonged exertion; extremes of heat, cold, or moisture; and deprivation or drastic reduction of food or sleep. Apparently the assumption is that lowering the source’s physiological resistance will lower his psychological capacity for opposition. If this notion were valid, however, it might reasonably be expected that those subjects who are physically weakest at the beginning of an interrogation would be the quickest to capitulate, a concept not supported by experience.<sup>9</sup>

There is, for obvious ethical reasons, little discussion of evidence. The conclusions that the authors draw from the evidence that they do present are frequently unsupportable. Yet those conclusions formed the basis of countless covert operations and advice to ‘friendly

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<sup>7</sup> KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation (1963), p. 94

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 83

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 92

nations', not least the junta regimes in South America, over the decades. British and Israeli interrogators too followed the same basic framework in the context of interrogating terror suspects. They eventually led directly to Abu Ghraib.

The KUBARK document lists the following techniques: arrest, detention, sensory deprivation, threats and fear, debility, pain, heightened suggestibility and hypnosis, narcosis, and induced regression. Arrests are to be carried out in early morning, when resistance is low. Clothes are immediately to be removed. Prison clothing of the wrong size is useful for 'particularly proud or neat' detainees. The environment – diet, sleep, and 'other fundamentals' must be kept irregular, to create disorientation, which is 'very likely to create feelings of fear and helplessness'.<sup>10</sup>

Those feelings are now regarded as ends in themselves, re-enforced by sensory deprivation. The idea that sensory deprivation is a good tool for interrogation is supported in KUBARK only by a study of polar and ocean explorers' autobiographies: 'The symptoms most commonly produced by isolation are superstition, intense love of any other living thing, perceiving inanimate objects as alive, hallucinations, and delusions'.<sup>11</sup> There is a slurring transfer, here, between the explorer's accounts of being alone in nature, and the sensory deprivation of detainees, which may take place, the authors suggests, in an iron lung, for maximum control.

Despite the lack of evidence for its efficacy as a tool in interrogation, sensory deprivation and isolation are still practiced now. Jane Mayer, in her 2008 book about the War on Terror, writes that one of her political sources told her that he felt a twinge of conscience at the sight, through a camera, of a very young Islamic combatant curled up in a fetal position on the floor of a small American prison cell. The prisoner was subjected to extreme isolation, which, it was assumed, would forge a bond between him and his interrogator.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 87

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.88

<sup>12</sup> Jane Mayer (2008) *The Dark Side: the inside story of how the war on terror turned into a war on American ideals*

KUBARK was succeeded by the U.S. Army and CIA interrogation manuals, seven military training manuals which were used in the US Army School of the Americas up to 1991. They were de-classified by the Pentagon in 1996. In 1997, two additional CIA manuals were de-classified. They are partly based on KUBARK and retain the psychiatric core model. The tone, however, has hardened, despite some later revisions.

The CIA interrogation manual of 1963 was milder, and more emphatic in its condemnation of physical coercion, than the 1980s versions. Those, in turn, still condemned physical coercion. Sexually humiliating torture, a significant part of the contemporary abuse of Muslim detainees, began after Operation Desert Storm, the first Gulf War, again essentially as a defensive part of SERE training. In 1995, after a training scandal and a \$3million lawsuit, it was given up as part of the training, but fragments remained, and filtered into the Bush administration plans for 'enhanced interrogation'. There is little evidence of a coherent theory of interrogation. Sexual and religious humiliation, which frequently gives rise to deep hatred, was practiced side by side with isolation, which was supposed to strengthen the relationship between interrogator and subject. The benign and paternal cold war interrogator of 1963 has little in common with the interrogators of the Bush administration, who seemingly operated in an atmosphere of chaos, fear, and revenge, using fragments of old theories of interrogation.

The fog of war seemed to be thinning in 2008-9. The Senate Armed Services Committee issued a bipartisan report which made a case for bringing criminal charges against Donald Rumsfeld, his legal counsel, William Haynes, and other top officials including Alberto Gonzales and David Addington, Vice President Dick Cheney's former chief of staff. On December 19<sup>th</sup> a leader in the Herald Tribune stated that, 'Unless America and its leaders know precisely what went wrong in the last seven years, it will be impossible to make sure those terrible mistakes are not repeated.'

None of it happened. The culture of revenge, fuelled by right-wing radio and tv talk-shows, led to an indescribably sordid and abusive prison regime at Abu Ghraib and torture at many other places of

detention. It was carried out using dubious theories of interrogation dating from odd and un-scientific secret CIA research from the 1950s. Even now, as we have seen, those theories are still used in British army training manuals.<sup>13</sup> We urgently need to establish new principles of interrogation that do not provoke deep hatred and mistrust, and that are based on cultural and individual respect.

The war of terror is otherwise unwinnable. American brutality has inspired countless misguided young men and women to sign up to the principle of terrorism. It's not, obviously, the only factor in that process, but it provides a meaningful narrative of incitement which is entangled with the religious narrative and gives strength to it. ■

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<sup>13</sup> Following public enquiries, these theories are now legally restricted, and no longer used in Army training manuals.



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The Sigrid Rausing Trust has always been unique in the world of philanthropy, as its grantees are engaged in some of the most difficult and challenging issues to promote human rights throughout the world. More than just a funding stream, SRT has always provided “courageous capital.” The Board, staff and principal of the Trust have always asked the hardest of questions, and when they provide support they give more than money. They provide analysis, a network, and sage advice honed across geographies and over three decades of deep engagement. In the US, the Sigrid Rausing Trust was one of a handful of donors who dared to fund the litigation and advocacy around Guantanamo and the commission of torture by US officials. When other donors were afraid or tentative, Sigrid and the Trust stepped boldly into the breach. While the world is in a troubled place right now, imagine where it would be if the Sigrid Rausing Trust had not existed and had it not supported the causes it did.

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Anthony Romero  
Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union

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# AMNESTY MAGAZINE

2011

*By Sigrid Rausing*

My husband, Eric Abraham, was born in South Africa in 1954. His father was a refugee from Hungary; his mother's family came from Ireland and France, via Poland.

In September 1975, when Eric was still very young, he started his own news agency, SANA, to focus on news about black political movements, and human rights abuses perpetrated by the apartheid regime. He supplied pieces to the BBC, The Guardian, Oslo Dagbladet, and others. At the end of 1975 he was prevented from leaving the country, and his passport was withdrawn.

From the beginning of 1976 all SANA documentation was banned by the Publications Control Board as prejudicial to the internal security of South Africa. A number of SANA contacts and correspondents were detained, and harassment from right-wing extremists increased. In the country-wide crackdown that followed the Soweto uprising June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1976, several black journalists and photographers connected with SANA were interned. In November that year Eric was house-arrested and banned for 5 years.

The secret Memorandum from the head of intelligence to the Minister of Justice supporting the restriction order claimed that 'Abraham's continued encroachment on internal security has now reached a high-water mark with his formation of the Southern African News Agency (SANA) which is aimed at discrediting the Republic abroad, especially with regard to so-called political trials and arrests'. The Memorandum – part of Eric's security file – provides a comprehensive log of his 'undesirable activities', at least some of which must have been provided by informers.

Before his house arrest, Eric wrote to a friend, 'Dear Mike, a favour... in the event of my detention please could you do the following'. There followed a list of people to call – lawyer, correspondents, the British Consul, and Martin Ennals of Amnesty International. Lastly, he wrote:

NB FOR ATTENTION OF CLERK OF COURT

This is to confirm that any evidence/thing I might say in detention which might be used against any other person or incriminate them in any way should not be accepted as reliable evidence in court of law since it/ such a statement/ would only have been made under extreme physical or mental (psychological) duress.

Eric was adopted as an Amnesty prisoner of conscience. He still has a copy of a letter from a small French Amnesty group, in French and English:

Dear Mister Eric Abrams [sic],

We live in Peage de Roussillon, located in the South-Est of France. Marry [sic] of us here know that you have been banned for five years. We are aware of the conditions under which you must live in your country and we want you to know that we are behind you in the struggle that you are waging.

Fraternally yours,

Eric was so grateful for those few words of solidarity from members of the international community. The isolation and fear of living under house arrest, with continuous death threats from far-right extremists who knew where he lived, were wearing him down.

That was over 30 years ago. Political repression continues in many parts of the world today. The accusations are all the same; 'revealing

state secrets abroad', 'undermining the dignity of the country,' and publishing 'false news... likely to disturb public order.'

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Amnesty International has a long and important history in the human rights movement. But I would like, here, to sound a note of caution about the future. The strength of Amnesty, originally, was the simplicity of the idea - focusing on prisoners of conscience. The UN, before it, was a great and important idea too. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is an extraordinary document: 30 articles written in language simple and profound, a list of rights and freedoms adopted by the General Assembly of the UN in 1948, following the gravest human rights abuses in human history.

Over the decades other covenants followed. One of the most important was the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights*, written in 1966. The intention was simple and laudable: 'Recognizing that, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his civil and political rights...'

Hard to disagree with that. But this was no longer 1948. In 1966, the cold war was in full swing, more compromises were necessary, and the language turned opaque and convoluted. Here is article 4:

The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize that, in the enjoyment of those rights provided by the State in conformity with the present Covenant, the State may subject such rights only to such limitations as are determined by law only in so far as this may be compatible with the nature of these rights and solely for the purpose of promoting the general welfare in a democratic society.

Despite the title of the 1966 Covenant, there was originally no mention of what we today understand by cultural rights - the word 'cultural' then was linked to progress in the arts and the right to participate in cultural activities, rather than the anthropological meaning of the word. The Covenant specifies work-related rights, the protection of the family, a decent standard of living, health, education, and culture. Articles 16-22 covers mandatory progress reports and article 23 covers actions should there be a lack of progress, including '... such methods as the conclusion of conventions, the adoption of recommendations, the furnishing of technical assistance and the holding of regional meetings and technical meetings for the purpose of consultation and study organized in conjunction with the Governments concerned.' The remaining articles are procedural.

There was, in fact, not a single right in the new covenant which had not been covered in the Universal Declaration. You have to ask, therefore, what the covenant was for. It had a weak machinery of compliance, requesting regular reports from signatories on progress. There are no consequences of note for non-compliance, and most of the articles are aspirational and vague, requesting 'progress' and 'improvement'.

My first point is this: the sins of omission are harder to pin down than the sins of commission, both for Amnesty and for the UN. When Amnesty decided to advocate for social and economic and cultural rights it ventured into the area of development advocacy. I don't think it's unimportant - I am just not sure that Amnesty (or Oxfam, or Christian Aid, or any of the other aid organisations) can make much difference in that area. And meanwhile, resources are removed from prisoners of conscience and human rights defenders, where Amnesty does make a difference.

My second, more general, point is that language matters. Badly written conventions are part of why the UN, and human rights, are now in seemingly permanent disrepute. It is no longer a discourse that most people can understand or sympathise with, and that is a great loss. At the same time, 'communication' risks becoming a PR exercise and a fund-raising tool. Can someone tell me what the Amnesty UK slogan 'protect the human' really means?

Human rights organisations started with the thought of shining a steady light on hidden abuses. Clarity, and impeccable research, were considered essential. Now human rights groups are flooded with a mixture of UN jargon, acronyms and PR-speak; easy targets, therefore, for populist demagogues. If we bury the grand and beautiful narrative of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights under new conventions written in incomprehensible language, we risk losing the grand narrative; the cultural meaning and memory of why human rights are important. And that, in turn, corrodes the human rights movement. ■



Community, South Africa, ca 2010 © LEGAL RESOURCES CENTRE

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I met Sigrid in the early 1990's, shortly after she had completed the fieldwork for her profound study of Post-Soviet Estonia through the investigation of a collective farm. She expressed an interest in establishing a charitable trust devoted to human rights and I noted that her interest was driven not only by generosity but also by strongly held liberal values which were deeply informed by her anthropological interest in communities and people as they actually live and are permitted to live.

The timing of the founding of the Trust coincided with a strong sense of optimism that, in Central and East Europe, the throwing off the shackles of the Soviet Union would allow the virtues of rights, the rule of law and democracy to thrive. There had been similar advances in South Africa and elsewhere, and Sigrid sensed that with some effort the Trust could contribute to other issues that were less likely to receive attention universally, such as the rights of women and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.

When I joined the Trust in 2016, I was struck by three in particular of its unique internal features. First, a willingness to contribute to the basic overheads of its grantees. As someone who had run a rule of law think tank, I knew that most giving organisations supported projects only, with few if any being prepared to fund administrative core costs. Secondly, I was so impressed with the flexibility of the SRT, such as the willingness to advance human rights not only through traditional lobbying or litigation strategies but also through the arts, a broad approach to humanitarian and also environmental matters, and the willingness to assist in a crisis. This was so different from the tedious bureaucratic constraints imposed by other such grantors.

Thirdly, I was struck by Sigrid's hands-on approach. She was constantly reappraising the Trust's strategies, its breadth, the appropriate level of grants, in the light of both short-term and long-term changes. That approach required an effective staff who could quickly assemble general as well as detailed information about specific grantees. SRT's flexibility permitted assistance to a number of organisations suddenly faced with challenging circumstances, such as during the Covid pandemic. And it has allowed the Trust to respond creatively at a time when too many countries seem to have abandoned the hope of the 1990s by descending into state capture of key institutions of democracy, such as interfering with independent judiciary and media, and indeed threatening the freedom to operate of many of the organisations which the Trust supports.

This flexibility and hard-nosed appraisal has also marked the Trust's recent actions, where it has developed a more sophisticated appreciation of the kind of projects that are sometimes disguised as furthering human rights values but in fact steer in the opposite direction, with a different agenda.

It has been a privilege to have observed the birth of the Trust and its growth into the significant organisation it is now, with its own voice and distinct approach. Sigrid has, amazingly, done much else in that time, not least in the area of publishing and, following that early study of Estonia, writing her own works of different kinds and on different topics.

Jeffrey Jowell KC  
Trustee and Director of SRT

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It's been a great privilege to have supported such tremendous and varied work over the years. For me that has included EHRAC's litigation on Russian responsibility for war crimes in Eastern Ukraine in 2014; Medical Justice's advocacy and casework on immigration detention; Luglio 21's work to bridge gaps between Roma and Italian communities; the leadership of European Network on Statelessness on a nascent and poorly funded issue; progress made through LGBTI activism in central and eastern Europe; investigative journalism on corruption; and finally our enduring support to groups in all of the contexts where civic space has been squeezed.

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Beth Fernandez  
SRT Director of Programmes

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# CAPE TOWN IS RUNNING OUT OF WATER AND DAY ZERO IS LOOMING COLUMN FOR

THE NEW STATESMAN, MARCH 2018

*By Sigrid Rausing*

**C**ape Town may be the first global city to run out of water. “Day Zero”, when the city will transition from the current preservation measures (50 litres/day) to disaster restrictions, will begin when dam levels hit 13.5 per cent of capacity (latest forecast: 15 July). The business district and “informal settlements” – shacks with no running water or sanitation – are exempt; people in other areas will collect their daily water allocation of 25 litres in plastic containers from taps at specified locations.

In this still profoundly segregated city, the newspapers give lifestyle guidance. “Drop water from your cooking,” reads one headline, recommending frying or grilling, rather than poaching. Another piece suggests frozen stones instead of ice cubes for “waterless gin cocktails”. People store drinking water in their garages and collect grey water for lavatories and irrigation. But they still have water.

In parts of Khayelitsha, by contrast, people have collected water in buckets and containers for years. Rows of lavatories, cement cubicles stacked against the motorway, are shared by up to 14 families. I once counted 67 children in a shack nursery, in two small rooms. The road to hell is paved by good intentions: these nurseries are unable to register for municipal funding because they do not meet the required space and equipment standards.

In January, in the dying days of President Zuma’s kleptocracy, the African National Congress was scathing about the water management of the Mother City. Patricia de Lille, the Democratic Alliance mayor of Cape Town, has been discredited in the year and a half since the last municipal elections, in which the party made significant gains and the ANC hegemony appeared to weaken.

President Cyril Ramaphosa has a heavy ship to turn, or rather several: he and his allies within the ANC have to purge and unify the party, the state-owned enterprises, the prosecution authorities and the police. He has to attract foreign funding while keeping Julius Malema’s Economic Freedom Fighters and the communists happy – hence the contested commitment to the expropriation of (white-owned) land without compensation in Ramaphosa’s ambitious State of the Nation address on 16 February. But poor black people are still moved off the land with no compensation when mining or other corporate interests are at stake.

‘#CapeWaterGate: Day Zero is a political attack on the people,’ according to the Water Crisis Coalition. A few hundred people are protesting. ‘Water for all not for profit,’ the placards read. “No to privatisation of our water”, and “Water is free”. Shaheed Mahomed, a committee member, said: ‘This is a feeding opportunity for profiteering by the big capitalists that is being opened up by the city and by various levels of government.’

Water in fact is not free, and the city’s income from water bills has declined dramatically. The authorities have fitted “water management devices” on some high-consumption households. The coalition has termed them ‘weapons of mass destruction’ – another disconnected meme – despite its anti-capitalist rhetoric.

Protest in South Africa is ritualised, and the reporting of protest is part of the political culture. The last crisis in this city was over electricity, when the city practised load-shedding, intermittently cutting off the supply. Affluent people bought generators, then. Now they employ water diviners to find the right spot to drill for boreholes; old men holding sticks or half-filled water bottles that tremble and shake at the right point. City governance is dying; magical thinking is growing.

NGO Gift of the Givers is collecting five-litre bottles of water to be distributed to needy institutions when the time comes. The city's health department has launched a campaign for the prevention of disease during water restrictions, issuing guidelines on sanitation. Irritated members of the public offer solutions in letters to the newspapers; the government is criticised for action and inaction. 'There will be cholera, for sure,' said Branko Brkic, editor of online publication the *Daily Maverick*, when we discussed the situation. 'You can't avoid it. If Day Zero happens, Cape Town becomes a dysfunctional space.'

But isn't it already a dysfunctional space? The town is still dramatically demarcated by apartheid. Pinelands, white, is separated from Langa, a black township, by two fences, a busy road and a train line. The Langa fence, I notice, is topped by three strands of barbed wire, angled into the township: it's a fence for keeping people in, not out. In Johannesburg, bridges have been built between some of the formerly separated areas, but not in Cape Town.

We are into March now. Hotel bookings, they say, have fallen dramatically. Camps Bay in January was still a sea of pink and red faces, a world of Windhoek lager and pizzas, of sashimi and carpaccio and troops of township child-performers forming human pyramids, jumping, dancing, collecting paltry tips in a red plastic bowl. Now, two months later, it's quiet. Occasionally, chilly mists drift in from the sea; predicted rains come to nothing. Damp sea air clings to my throat, that pungent and poignant Cape Town mix of sewage, kelp and salt.

At the Sea Point promenade a small black child throws a frisbee to his mother and runs towards a flock of pigeons picking at the dry brown earth. His mother throws up her hands pretending to catch the pigeons; the frisbee flies backwards, caught in the strong wind. A helicopter crosses the bay carrying a turquoise banner: 'Defeat Day Zero.'

But they say Day Zero probably won't come, at least not this year: the rains should start in June. The drought, in the context of this city, is so many things at once – a political football; an arena for public and individual virtue; a dystopian spectre of climate change; and a lived reality for hundreds of thousands of Cape Town's people.

Everything is changing; nothing is changing. ■

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There was a period of substantial democratization movements. Now we are in a different time - the language of human rights is rejected by many who hold power. The challenge is to somehow animate the language and ensure that we avoid slogans- we have to make real in the public imagination what human rights are. It's about people being allowed to live a life of dignity and freedom. There's an ideological battle going on about language and the meaning of rights.

Geoff Budlender

State Counsel in South Africa and former SRT Trustee

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The most inspiring aspect of the Trust's work to me is its support for organisations using public law alongside other strategies, to enable access to justice. South Africa's former Chief Justice Arthur Chaskalson, the founding chairperson of Trust grantee the Equal Education Law Centre, said the following words, which I feel capture this commitment of the Trust: "Although the legal profession is theoretically neutral and available to all, in practice it operates in favour of those who have greater power and wealth. Everywhere the best talents of the legal profession are sought to be drawn into the service of the rich and powerful. In most countries it is left to small groups of lawyers [...] and individuals within the profession, to provide the counterweight by devoting themselves to the problems of poor or marginalised communities.

Joey Hasson

SRT Senior Programme Officer for Human Rights

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In repressive contexts like Egypt, Russia, and Belarus, SRT funds a number of grantees that can no longer be listed on the website for fear of reprisals against employees of the groups.

In Ukraine, prior to and following the 2022 full-scale Russian invasion, SRT launched initiatives focusing on reparations, documentation, and legal redress. The Trust's support for the groups involved demonstrate a long-term commitment to justice in the aftermath of atrocities. But legal remedies alone are insufficient; amplifying survivor voices, recording and archiving atrocities, and demanding state accountability are equally vital in rebuilding societies fractured and divided by violence.

The Trust also supports rights litigation, such as that pursued by the European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR), which challenges corporate and state complicity in human rights violations, from war crimes in Syria to labour abuses in global supply chains.

Beyond litigation, the Trust invests in capacity-building for legal institutions and civil society actors. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, for example, it supports groups building legal literacy and public interest law, often in collaboration with regional bar associations or ombuds institutions.

As these efforts evolved, they became a blueprint for the Trust's broader approach: supporting grantees that focus upon the lived experiences of affected communities, challenge systems of impunity, and using the law as a tool for social change.



A photo taken by Truth Hounds field researchers during the survey of abandoned Russian military positions on the territory of the Visokopilia Central District Hospital © TRUTH HOUNDS



Protestors at Russian embassy, Finland, 2014 © JUULIA NIINIRANTA



Anna Politkovskaya's apartment, Moscow, 2006 © JOHN MARTENS, PUBLIC DOMAIN

# AFTER THE REVOLUTION

COLUMN FOR THE NEW STATESMAN, FEBRUARY 2009

*By Sigrid Rausing*

I remember St Petersburg in 1991. There were people sitting on the pavement, feet wrapped in rags, selling bleak mementoes from depleted Soviet homes; piles of rusty nails, a few fish laid out on newspaper. It was like the aftermath of war.

It is not so long ago. No wonder that the economic growth of the Putin era has made him popular in his own country. The new Russians were interested in material gain; Putin gave them that, with a dose of nationalism to soften the new authoritarianism. You might say that they won, and that the intellectuals, whose position looked so promising in 1989, lost.

The collective farm in Estonia where I did my anthropological fieldwork was a dismal place in the early 1990s. Poverty, alcoholism and unemployment were the main social themes. There was virtually no heating in the winter of 1993-94, and temperatures dropped to -33°C. Men in their fifties died of blood poisoning and alcoholism, undiagnosed and uncared for.

My book on the collective farm was published in 2004. In it I predicted that the culture of memorials would eventually take off: prison camps would be turned into museums; books would be written, documentaries made. I also wrote about the social amnesia under communism, when memories were no longer transmitted freely between generations. In the Soviet era the pre-Soviet past was forgotten, and in the immediate post-Soviet era, it seemed to me, the Soviet past was also in danger of being forgotten. 'Thus the revolution that caused the end of the Soviet Union,' I wrote, 'has also brought with it a temporary amnesia about the Soviet years.'

I thought of it as temporary, because I believed that civil society would soon begin to generate countless memorial initiatives. The problem was that real democracy didn't last long, at least not in Russia.

In December last year, the offices of Memorial, the most important NGO dedicated to documenting the human rights atrocities of Stalinism, were raided. Thirty hard drives containing 20 years of interviews and archival material about the Gulag and post-Stalinist political persecution were confiscated. Irina Flige, the director of Memorial, called it a "war over memory": whitewashing Stalin in order to justify the new authoritarianism.

The *Financial Times* reported recently that Gleb Pavlovsky, a Putin-friendly political scientist, had written a piece attacking Memorial and claiming, ominously, that Russia was vulnerable to "foreign projections" of its history. "Russia," he wrote, "not having a memory policy, has become defenseless before defamatory projections and aggressive phobias." No memory policy, indeed. No national Gulag Museum, no official attempt to mark the mass graves, no open access to secret police files. The future I imagined did not happen.

This is part of the context of political violence in Russia. The Committee to Protect Journalists estimates that at least 49 journalists have been killed in Russia since 1992. Only in Iraq and Algeria is it more dangerous to be a journalist. The latest victims of violence, Stanislav Markelov, the lawyer representing *Novaya Gazeta*, and Anastasiya Baburova, a trainee journalist at the same newspaper, were shot dead in central Moscow, in broad daylight, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January this year. Markelov had just announced that he was filing an appeal with the European Court of Human Rights against Yuri Budanov's early release. Budanov, a former colonel of the Russian army, had been imprisoned for the murder of a young Chechen woman, Elsa Kungayeva, in 2000, following her arrest. She was violently beaten, raped and sodomised before she was killed. Three of Budanov's subordinates were allegedly responsible for the assault, but charges against them were dropped. Budanov is a hero of the Russian nationalist right.

On the 13th of January, Umar Israilov, an opponent of Chechnya's president, Ramzan Kadyrov, was shot dead in Vienna, again in broad daylight. In 2006, he had filed a complaint, which had lapsed, against Russia at the European Court of Human Rights about abduction and torture under Kadyrov's regime, claiming that Kadyrov himself had tortured him. There are many other victims. Here are a few:

Igor Domnikov, *Novaya Gazeta* reporter, was attacked and died from head injuries in 2000.

Yuri Shchekochikhin, deputy editor of *Novaya Gazeta*, died in 2003, allegedly from a "rare allergy". The hospital authorities have refused to grant access to his medical records, even to his family.

Paul Klebnikov, the American-Russian journalist, was shot in Moscow in 2004, a year after publishing a book about a Chechen warlord, and publishing lists of oligarchs in the Russian *Forbes*.

Anna Politkovskaya, Russia's most famous journalist, was killed on 7 October 2006. She was working on an investigation into torture in Kadyrov's prisons.

In 2008, Magomed Yevloyev, owner of the Ingushetia.ru website, which reported on human rights abuses during counter-terrorist operations in Ingushetia, was killed in a police car, according to Human Rights Watch.

Mikhail Beketov, the editor of a local newspaper, who had run a campaign to save a section of forest outside Moscow from development, was left unconscious, his skull fractured and leg broken, on 13 November 2008. His leg and several fingers had to be amputated because of frostbite. Previously, his dog had been shot dead as a warning.

The FSB, or rogue elements within it; ultra-nationalists, Chechen henchmen and corrupt Mafia-style businessmen form a circle of violence. As long as the state remains silent, or issues only half-hearted responses, there will be no change. It is so easy to kill people, and so difficult to eradicate a culture of violence once it takes hold. Even Putin may eventually come to regret it. He is playing a dangerous game with the future - and past - of his country. ■

# BELARUS

THE GUARDIAN, OCTOBER 2012

*By Sigrid Rausing*

**O**n 23 September there were elections in Belarus. President Lukashenko's supporters won every seat. Alexander Lukashenko, formerly a state farm director, has been in power since 1994, presiding over the last dictatorship in Europe.

I was there in the early summer, to visit Chernobyl. We stayed mainly on the Ukrainian side, but had received permission to enter the "alienated zone" in Belarus. So much of the former Soviet Union feels depopulated and abandoned compared with the west, but near the Chernobyl zone that feeling gradually intensifies. We drove for hours along empty roads lined with birch and pine, abandoned houses dotting the landscape. On the Ukrainian side old men and women worked on small plots, raking hay into stacks. Some people have drifted back into the zone, but there are no young people there, and there won't be for hundreds, maybe thousands, of years to come: the radiation is too dangerous.

Eventually we reached the border between Ukraine and Belarus. Our permission to enter the "alienated zone" in Belarus had been rescinded, and I went on alone to the capital, Minsk, a five-hour drive on a straight road through endless forests and past vast collective farm fields, a landscape so relentlessly flat, so unchanging from beginning to end, that only an autocratic centralising regime could have produced it.

Most of Minsk was destroyed in the war; it is now an entirely modern city. Modern architecture in the west is so piecemeal in comparison – a mixture of individual buildings with no obvious relationship to each other, or uninspired housing districts for the

poor. Minsk, by contrast, is a city that only could have emerged from total war and in a political system of excessive state control, a vision of a dystopian future.

That evening I met Andrei Sannikov and his wife, journalist Iryna Kahlip. He was the presidential candidate who was imprisoned after the crackdown in December 2010, following the presidential elections. He was sentenced to five years but was released, after international pressure, 16 months later. Iryna received a suspended sentence and is still under curfew. The police come to check on them every night, sometimes several times a night.

We met in the home of friends in an anonymous block of flats. The small lift carried us creakily upwards; a woman looked at us curiously. We sat in the small kitchen. Andrei spoke of his imprisonment, and his fading hope for democracy. He had black shadows under his eyes; Iryna, also, looked so tired. I was tired too. None of us could eat much of the Russian feast in front of us, though we did drink the Georgian wine. Quite soon they had to leave to be back in their own flat in time for the curfew.

I also went on to a rehearsal at the Belarus Free Theatre, the dissident Belarussian theatre group. Their headquarters were a tiny suburban house. Inside two modest rooms had been thrown into one – the owner smashed down the internal wall with a sledgehammer to give the company more space. The actors rehearsed their piece; a dance of dictatorship with no lines, only hums, and sudden, discordant, screams. I talked to some of the performers afterwards. They were young, engaged and alternative – we might have been in Berlin or New York, but we were in Minsk, a place where their work placed them at risk.

The group's founders, Natalia Kaliada and Nikolai Khalezin, are political refugees in London. It was easy to forget the political reality, but later, after they showed me what was left of old Minsk – a handful of buildings only survived the war – a nebulous political fear descended on me. Late night in my hotel room I was thinking about the epic sweep of the Soviet repression, the hope after 1989, fading with the post-Soviet political violence; beatings, abductions, and murder. I thought, most of all, of Oleg Bebenin, Sannikov's

press secretary and close friend, the founder of Charter 97, who was found hanged at his *dacha* in 2010, with unexplained bruises on his hand, chest, and back. We had talked about him earlier. It's so easy, Sannikov said, for the state to kill people: "They threatened me too. I had no reason not to believe them."

In 1999 Gennady Karpenko, the leader of the opposition, died, either of a cerebral haemorrhage, or of poison. Jury Zacharanka, the former minister of internal affairs who had joined the opposition, disappeared the same year. So did Victor Gonchar, opposition politician, and Anatol Krasouski, a businessman who was with him that evening. A year later cameraman Dmitriy Zavadski disappeared. They are all presumed dead, victims of Lukashenko's regime. The owner of the flat where we met, a man in his 60s, kissed my hand as we left. He had told us earlier about being beaten near the entrance of the block, not so long ago. "Don't bother to call the police," one of his attackers said. "We are the police." ■



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Chernobyl, Summer 2012 © SIGRID RAUSING



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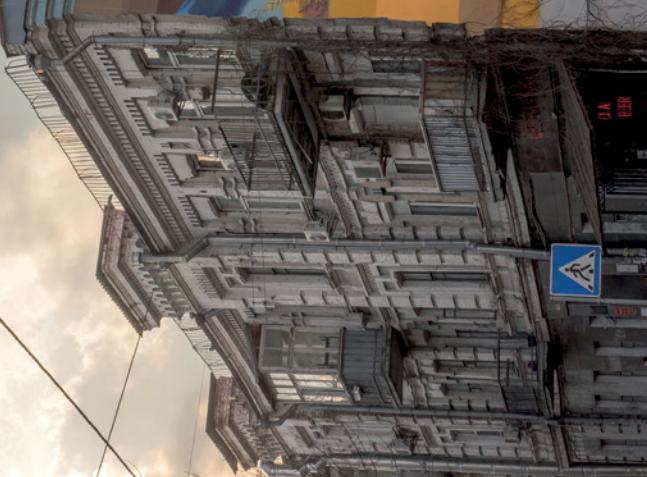
Chernobyl, Summer 2012 © SIGRID RAUSING

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One thing that has stuck with me is the Trust's response to emergencies and crackdowns on human rights. From Covid-19 to the Taliban taking power in Afghanistan, from Russia's invasion of Ukraine to the devastating conflict in Sudan, the Trust has helped grantees on the frontline to: helped domestic violence survivors during Covid-19; negotiate the evacuation and relocation of Afghan journalists and cultural actors threatened by the Taliban takeover in 2021; provide humanitarian assistance and resettlement support to civilians affected by Russia's invasion of Ukraine; and establish safe spaces for women and girls to access medical, psychosocial and legal aid in the midst of widespread sexual violence during Sudan's armed conflict.

Bénédicte Goderiaux  
SRT Senior Programme Officer for Open Societies

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In his review of Bertrand Russell's 1938 book on power, George Orwell notes the widespread confidence in "the idea that common sense always wins in the end. And yet," he continues, "the peculiar horror of the present moment is that we cannot be sure that this is so."

Orwell's response was to double-down on common sense. It is the response, too, in our own time, of the Sigrid Rausing Trust. For 30 years, Sigrid and her Trust have been a haven for the simple, straightforward support of modest work that defends and advances human rights, conservation, and creativity, guided principally by common sense.

I first met Sigrid on a visit to London in January 2012 with Aryeh Neier, as I was preparing to succeed Aryeh as president of the Open Society Foundations. Despite the obvious differences between OSF and SRT, the two philanthropies were partners in the support of the same human rights organisations in many parts of the world. From that first conversation in Sigrid's kitchen and in the months that followed, I came especially to admire one particular feature of the Trust's philanthropic practice: its vision for a healthy relationship between donor and grantee. From grantees, the Trust expected simple, forthright, concise, timely communication and thoughtful work that advanced the interests of people who had been wronged. For its part, the Trust offered general support, often continuing for a decade, and occasionally even longer.

The Trust itself maintained a tiny staff by the standards of international philanthropy, and reporting requirements were kept to a minimum. The relationship focused on the work, not on the bureaucracy surrounding it or on credit. The debates at board meetings were about the value of that work to its beneficiaries, not about the purported contribution of grantees to the strategies of their donors. At its best, the work of grantees was designed and performed with modesty and common sense, and the Trust supported its grantees in the same spirit.

Over my own forty years working on rights and justice in the nonprofit sector worldwide, I have spent most of my time with large philanthropies. The strategies of large donors generally attempt to achieve results commensurate with their large donations; but it is the outsized impact of a handful of small philanthropies that I have most admired. There is no single formula by which these modest philanthropies come to shape the fields in which they work. Some do it through personal relationships, some do it through intellectual leadership; but few do it as successfully as SRT has done, relying principally on common sense.

Chris Stone  
Former Trustee of SRT

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# THE DEATH OF A DREAM

COLUMN FOR THE NEW STATESMAN, JUNE 2009

*By Sigrid Rausing*

**S**weden has become globally symbolic of the welfare state: high taxes, social policies for equality, sexual education and liberation. Part of that symbolic status was a peculiar national and collective narcissism: one way or another, most Swedes, and not only intellectuals or cultural critics, were preoccupied with trying to understand the social-democratic model and culture in which we lived. And no wonder. What happened between 1932 and 1976, the 44 years of unbroken Social Democratic Party rule, was, in the end, so unusual, and so revolutionary.

Andrew Brown's book *Fishing in Utopia* (Granta) has won the Orwell Prize for political writing this year. It is an autobiographical account of living in Sweden in the late 1970s. Andrew, the child of diplomats and the product of private schooling, was, he says, entirely convinced at the time that Sweden represented the inevitable future. Nevertheless, going to live in Social Democratic Sweden and getting a manual job in a small pallet-making factory in the provinces was not a common journey for men of his background. Think of Bruce Chatwin in Sudan, or Rory Stewart in Afghanistan: those are the natural, and healing, stamping grounds for British travel writers.

Andrew's journey is all the more exotic precisely because it is so understated, and takes him to a destination that is wrenchingly dull and lonely: "square, with shops set into the shabby concrete round two sides. There was a Konsum, a shoe shop, a florist, and an employment exchange." "Faced with all this sterile silence my hair grew ragged and my beard grew melancholy; when I walked to the shops, some of the children would call after me, 'Jesus'."

Fishing became Andrew's salvation, a relief from the repressively respectable silence in the poor little settlement where he lived. "I had no idea," he says, "as, I would say, most people living in Stockholm would have no idea, of what life in the provinces was actually like. Fantastic rigidity, deep, backbone respectability. That was an enormous shock to me."

Fishing is described in his book as not only meditative, but also faintly mystical, as though all the spiritual urges in Sweden are really pagan, located in the rivers and forest lakes, the skies and the rocks. Andrew (genuinely) wanted to understand the fish (some of the best parts of the book really are about fishing), but he also wanted to understand the Swedes, and the Swedish project, *Folkhemmet*, the Social Democratic term for the nation as the "home of the people".

The Social Democrats remained in power for 44 years, between 1932 and 1976. Their policies included high taxes, centralised wage agreements, union power (linked to the party), employment security, safety in the workplace, support for women, environmental protection and third-way neutrality. They built a million new flats, to defeat, once and for all, rural poverty. The cottages of the rural poor were abandoned or became the second homes of the comfortably off, and general affluence and equality succeeded poverty and hierarchy.

They were genuinely interested in creating a fairer society, and, in many ways, did so, but they also created a society of conformity and concrete, state surveillance (the clandestine monitoring of communists was to become a national scandal) and joyless, mediocre schools. Maj Sjövall and Per Wahlöö wrote bleak and dystopian bestselling thrillers, the murderers always capitalists, distanced from ordinary people and ordinary decency. People shuffled forward in endless queues at Systembolaget, the state-monopoly alcohol outlet. The blacklisted alcoholics sat outside, soliciting people to buy them vodka. Rock bands sang about materialism and alienation, prostitution and addiction.

One of the pivots of the liberal critique of Social Democratic Sweden was the idea that the state took excessive numbers of children into care, and that at least a part of the state constituted, in effect,

a repressive machinery where individual rights were potentially sacrificed to powerful social norms. The story of children taken into care was internationalised, unwittingly, by Andrew, who was by then working as a journalist: his story about one particular case bounced from a piece in the Daily Mail (mothers weeping, soulless bureaucrats), to Private Eye (jokes about Sweden), to Der Spiegel (“Swedish children’s Gulag”, an investigation based on six cases). Later, Andrew returned to the original case and concluded that the state had been right to take this particular boy, “Child A”, into care, and that the mother was in fact a psychopathic fantasist who posed a real danger to the child.

But consider this: Sweden in the 1980s seriously considered forcible quarantine for HIV-positive people. Between 1935 and 1976 about 60,000 Swedes – all poor – were victims of coerced sterilisation: travellers, the mentally subnormal, girls considered promiscuous, petty thieves and vagrants. That, too, was ultimately part of the *Folkhemmet* project.

In the mid-1980s the banking sector was extensively deregulated in Sweden, which led to a period of rapid credit expansion, followed by a spectacular bust in 1990. After that, everything changed. Crime statistics, particularly rape, have gone up, and immigrant alienation is palpable in some areas. “The very strong sense I was getting in Gothenburg recently,” Andrew says, “was that the central government is forcing policies on the regions that they don’t want, in particular polices about asylum-seekers, and that the nationalists will get seats in the next election, which is very frightening. The thing that really frightens me is that it would lead to a more violent politics – street battles between immigrant youths, anti-fascist action and pro-nationalists. Once politics gets turned into an affair for teenage gangs it’s hard to drag it back from that.”

It is not impossible. While Sweden generally is thought of as a peaceful society, there have been episodes of violence. In February 1986, Olof Palme, the prime minister, was shot dead on the street as he was walking home from the cinema with his wife. In 2003, Anna Lindh, the minister for foreign affairs, was stabbed to death at

NK, Sweden's equivalent of Harrods. Like Olof Palme, she was not protected by bodyguards at the time of her attack.

In 1989, neo-Nazis murdered a trade union activist and two policemen, in separate incidents. The same year, neo-Nazi car bombs blinded a policeman and almost killed a journalist. The three founders of the far-right organisation NRA committed an armed bank robbery in 1999. They wounded two policemen and then shot them dead at close range, in what became known as the "Malexander murders". And these were no innocents: one of them had already been indicted for war crimes in Bosnia, one of the many amateur mercenaries drawn to those killing fields.

In a bizarre twist, it turned out that one of the others, Tony Olsson, had been given permission from prison to take part in a rehearsal for a play, entitled 7:3, by one of Sweden's most famous playwrights, Lars Norén, about the neo-Nazi movement. The name derives from a paragraph in the prison code about prisoners likely to attempt escape; Olsson duly did escape from the theatre, and went on to commit robbery and murder. The "actors" in the play were actual neo-Nazis, given neo-Nazi lines. It was put on at the National Theatre.

It is hard to imagine a similar scenario in Britain. Nor would one expect neo-Nazis to complain on national TV about the lack of rehabilitation facilities for Nazis. Only in Sweden is the political belief system so normative that people on the extreme right themselves believe that they are acting out individual pathologies.

The northern European path of peace, openness and minimal security led, ultimately, to the death of one prime minister, one foreign minister and two policemen, with many others wounded. Unlike in Germany, Denmark and Italy, the terrorists of Sweden were from the right, not the left. That meant that they had no real connections with groups like the Baader-Meinhof Gang and the IRA, or with Palestinian groups. They were linked only to other neo-Nazis, crazy white-power zealots from Germany, Russia and the Anglo-Saxon world.

I talk to Andrew about the shock of the Palme murder. "In a way," he says, "I was more shocked by the quite stupefying incompetence of the police afterwards." The police investigation initially focused

almost exclusively on the Kurds, and included the illegal surveillance of Kurdish immigrants. It is almost certain that the PKK had nothing to do with it, and that the real culprit was Christer Pettersson, a drug addict with a history of violence who was convicted of the murder, though later released on a technicality.

Many eminent people in Sweden, however, believe that the murder was planned by apartheid South Africa. Eugene de Kock, the policeman in charge of the infamous Vlakplaas, where dozens of anti-apartheid activists were tortured and killed, has publicly stated that Craig Williamson, a South African spy who had special links to Sweden, did it. And it may well be so. The struggle against apartheid was one of Palme's causes, and Sweden donated millions of dollars to the ANC via the International University Exchange Fund (infiltrated by Williamson) and other channels. Though we may never know for sure.

"The Social Democrats now," Andrew says, "have a reputation as extremely boring technocrats, but they did understand politics as theatre. It was perhaps when the theatre went out of it that it went wrong." Or perhaps it went wrong – or right – when the opposition finally got its act together and formed a viable coalition. When you look back at Swedish elections since 1932, it is striking how even the results are. The Social Democrats won every election from 1932 to 1976, comfortably fluctuating between 40 and 54 per cent of the votes. In 1976, their share of the vote decreased by less than 1 per cent, but the new liberal-conservative coalition broke the hegemony.

I recently found stuffed in my bookcase an old edition of Palme's speeches and articles from 1968 to 1974. They are not, on the whole, a pleasure to read. His speech to the party congress in 1969, for example, is 20 pages long, stilted and intense. His address to the Social Democratic Youth Organisation in 1972 is 15 pages long. He must have bored the party into submission. And yet his speeches about the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, or the American bombing of Hanoi, are genuinely moving.

The cultural history of Sweden is always written with reference to *Folkhemmet*, and popular notions of Sweden are permanently steeped in ideas of sexual liberation, equality and affluence, with a dash of dystopian gloom added by crime writers such as Stieg Larsson or Henning Mankell. Perhaps now the time has come to write something based on other terms of reference, though what that would be, I have no idea. Fishing might be a good place to start. ■

# THE CODE FOR CONSPIRACY

COLUMN FOR THE NEW STATESMAN, APRIL 2009

*by Sigrid Rausing*

**O**n 3 January 2009, the MP George Galloway spoke in Trafalgar Square. ‘Brothers and sisters,’ he began. ‘Comrades and friends. Salaam alaikum. Peace be upon you. [...]

In April and May of 1943 the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto were surrounded by barbed-wire fences, by the occupiers of Poland, and they faced a choice, in the words of the song of the partisans: they could die on their knees or they could live for ever. And they chose to rise up against their occupiers, to use their bodies as weapons . . . Today, the Palestinian people in Gaza are the new Warsaw Ghetto, and those who are murdering them are the equivalent of those who murdered the Jews in Warsaw in 1943.’

Mr Galloway and his supporters, and probably most people in this country, are rightly angry about Israel’s recent bombardment of Gaza. As many as 1,400 people were killed, women as well as children. Forty per cent of Gaza’s homes were destroyed, and people were deprived of food, water and medicines. The Israeli (and Egyptian) blockade, which in effect kept a million and a half people locked in, has been unethical and politically senseless. Hamas won power through the ballot box; Israel, Egypt and Fatah need to negotiate with them.

But Gaza is not like the Warsaw Ghetto. The Israeli soldiers are not like the Nazis. The claim of moral equivalence is dangerous, not because it exaggerates the horror of Gaza (the reality of that bombardment was probably worse than we can really imagine), but because it minimises the horror of the Holocaust.

Before the war, Warsaw's Jewish population numbered about 350,000 and was the second-largest Jewish community in the world, after New York's. The population of the ghetto, at its height, due to enforced deportations into the ghetto, was about 445,000 people, in just over two square miles. From 1940 to mid-1942, approximately 83,000 of the people detained there died of starvation or disease. In the summer of 1942, an estimated 300,000 Jews were deported from the ghetto, mainly to the Treblinka extermination camp. More than 10,000 people were murdered during the deportations; meanwhile, 35,000 people were granted permission to remain in the ghetto, and an additional 20,000 or so stayed in hiding.

In October 1942, *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler gave the order to liquidate the ghetto and deport all Jews to concentration camps.

On 18 January 1943 a small number of resistance fighters, armed with pistols, hid in a column of deportees and fought the German guards. Most were killed. Deportations, however, were temporarily suspended.

On 19 April 1943, on the Eve of Passover, the SS and the police resumed deportations. This was the signal for armed uprising. Mordecai Anielewicz led the first battle, in which 12 Germans were killed or wounded. By the third day, SS General Jürgen Stroop ordered that every building in the ghetto be destroyed. Anielewicz was killed on 8 May.

By June 1943, the ghetto was destroyed: not a house was left standing. The survivors of the uprising were sent to Treblinka and Majdanek, where all but a few thousand perished.

George Galloway was not alone in his Holocaust comparisons. Here are some *New Statesman* readers' comments posted on the website during the Gaza bombardment:

“Why does the israeli jewish zionists TERRORIST thug regime keep terrorising palestinians, with their horrific genocidal bombardment over and over”;

“... the Gaza Concentration Camp realities”;  
“... apartheid Israel killed about 1,340 Occupied Palestinians in its Gaza Concentration Camp”;

“why don’t the Jews move to Texas, it would solve all problems”.

This is a conflict played out in the realm of words and symbolism.

The Hamas Charter obsessively refers to the Zionist conspiracy and freely compares Israelis to the Nazis. British liberals may note the distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, but they should recognise that “Zionist conspiracy” is common code for “Jewish conspiracy”.

In the Arab world, anti-Semitism is tolerated, and often publicly expressed. Here are some quotes from the Egyptian cleric Muhammad Hussein Ya’qoub, delivering a speech on al-Rahma TV on 17 January this year:

“You must believe that we will fight, defeat and annihilate them, until not a single Jew remains on the face of the earth.”

“As for you Jews – the curse of Allah upon you. The curse of Allah upon you, whose ancestors were apes and pigs.”

The quotes above are taken from the Middle East Media Research Institute, which publicises Muslim anti-Semitism. It’s real and destructive. It also fuels Israeli nationalism.

We know the narrative of anti-Semitism, but do we know the narratives of racism against Palestinians in Israel? It's there, and ugly, yet we barely know how to talk about it outside the clichés of anti-Zionism.

There is, however, a lively human rights movement within Israel itself, which is establishing a common language for discrimination against Palestinians: B'Tselem, Sikkuy, the Public Committee against Torture in Israel and many other civil society groups are working to advocate Palestinian rights. They transcend the incendiary metaphors of genocide in this conflict, all of which helps to build peace.

There will never be peace in the Middle East until the Palestinians confront the anti-Semitism that they now openly encourage, and which many British pro-Palestinian groups and international funding agencies tacitly accept. They must acknowledge the reality and pain of the Holocaust. The Israelis must also acknowledge Palestinian suffering, the loss of life, land and livelihoods, and the present discrimination against Palestinians within Israel.

There will probably never be an agreed Palestinian/Israeli version of history, but mutual acknowledgement of historical and present suffering seem to me a necessary precondition of peace. ■

# AUSCHWITZ

THE PARIS REVIEW, FEBRUARY 2019

*By Sigrid Rausing*

A few years ago, I went to Poland with our friend Margo Picken. Margo was Amnesty's observer at the UN when Eric met her in 1973. She is a veteran of human rights; I have been engaged with human rights for most of my adult life, and yet neither of us had ever been to Auschwitz.

Our driver from Krakow pointed out the entrance, past a modest snack bar and some other buildings. We joined a line of people for airport style security, got tickets, headsets and receivers, and found ourselves in a group of fifteen or so people. We waited outside for our guide, the stickers on our coats – 'English' – identifying our group. It was autumn. The trees were bare of leaves, and it was cold and damp. Our guide, a young woman, arrived, and we walked towards the entrance under the terrible sign over the gate, *Arbeit Macht Frei*. The camp orchestra used to play just inside the entrance, by the side of one of the barracks.

Mordecai Lichtenstein, a survivor, called Auschwitz 1 a 'show camp' in his testimony to the Jewish Central Information Office in May 1945, and perhaps it was, at one time: rows of two-storey Polish army barracks, built in the 1920s and '30s. Tiled stoves in large rooms. The prisoners slept on the floor, on straw and coarse canvas. There were washrooms, and rows of lavatories. The kapos, the block bosses, had their own small rooms, with a narrow single bed, a chair, and a table.

We walked upstairs in one of the barracks; an ordinary municipal staircase hollowed out by millions of feet walking up these steps towards exhibitions of human hair, shoes, glasses, leather suitcases.

There's a textile on display, too, an unfinished greyish brown blanket or rug, woven from human hair. It has been proven to contain traces of Zyklon B, our guide says, speaking from a script that she has memorised. Her clear high voice comes through the headsets, along with a faint echo of other guides. Other groups, other people, push towards us; thousands of people walk through these rooms every day. There is so much you don't learn at Auschwitz – they spare us, and maybe they have to spare us. The guide's script is a rhythmical incantation to remember, but there are not many details, other than numbers – so and so many kilometres of fencing, so and so many barracks. So and so many calories per day, so and so many dead.

There are Zyklon B crystals in a glass case. A pile of tins, some opened with a circular cut through the top. I wondered how they did it, how they opened the cans, with what instrument. They wore gasmasks, I suppose.

I want to describe the next thing. Writing, I blank on the word and pause for nearly a minute before it comes: gallows. It was a simple construction: a square metal pole welded or screwed onto two metal uprights, '...like a frame for beating carpets', Victor Klemperer wrote in his diary after visiting Auschwitz in 1952. It was not tall. How tall was it? Less than two and a half metres I would guess. Perhaps five or six metres in length. Klemperer's guide, a former prisoner, told him that Hoess, the notorious camp commandant, was hanged at the camp entrance after liberation, not on the mass gallows: 'He couldn't be allowed to die in the same place as our comrades.'

A shuttle bus takes us to Birkenau a few minutes away. The road is lined with birches and poplars. The railway line ran into this camp, a dead-end track without platform or station. A cattle truck is on display, a carriage of the kind that used to transport animals. Almost all the deported Hungarian Jews were brought here in those kinds of carriages: the gas chambers and crematoria and burning pits were kept running until the Hungarian Jews were dead and burnt to ash.

The sun disappears between dark clouds; suddenly we are walking in gusts of rain. I am cold; Margo lends me her jacket and insists that I keep it on.

By the side of the 1947 monument to the victims is what is left of the gas chamber. The camp guards blew it up before liberation. Nearby is a rectangular pond, where the ashes from the crematoria were dumped.

We walk back into the camp of Birkenau to the wooden barracks and the three-tiered bunks we know from photographs; emaciated faces turned towards cameras.

There was a punishment block where people were sometimes locked up for days without food or water before they were gassed. They must have seen all the trains from here, and the long lines of people walking up towards the gas chamber. Barking dogs, coarse shouts, cracking whips.

The river – is it the Vistula? – runs not far behind; there is a sense of marshy wetland about Birkenau, a flat expanse.

Silence.

Just outside the electrified fence strung on cement uprights curving faintly inwards are low watch towers, spaced at regular intervals.

We are at the very centre of the Nazi empire, in every sense. At least 1.1 million people, transported from east and west and north and south, were murdered here. 70–75,000 of the victims were ethnic Poles; 20–27,000 were Roma; 10–15,000 were Soviet prisoners of war. Some thousands of other prisoners had no specified ethnicity. The rest, the overwhelming majority, were Jews, nearly half of whom were Hungarian citizens, murdered in the spring of 1944.

★

We had coffee with the deputy director of the Auschwitz Museum in the former SS canteen. Coffee and a plate of biscuits. The museum staff work in these rooms. The director lives in the commandant's villa. We drive back through the little town of Oświęcim. It carries on in its terrible normalcy, its music festival and McDonald's, its railway lines and roundabouts. And yet, how could it be otherwise? That normalcy is life.

Groups of elderly Germans sit in a synagogue in Krakow, sadness etched on their faces. There are cemeteries, a bookshop, faint Hebrew lettering on buildings here and there; dying remnants of a culture long since gone. In 1957 the prohibition on emigration was lifted for Jews, and a wave of survivors departed, mostly those who had no official position in communist Poland. Many others were forced out in the anti-Zionist purges of 1968, that thinly veiled communist re-invention of antisemitism. At the time of our visit, a Jewish presence had re-established itself in Poland, but in September of 2018 antisemitism too was on the rise: public insinuations about names and backgrounds and the persistent notion that Jewishness and patriotism are incompatible; that Jewishness is a foreign element. The idea that Polish sacrifices have been sidelined, and that museums, including Auschwitz, must draw more attention to 'Polish martyrs'.

At the flea-market a few streets away impoverished people sell old things; a palimpsest of eras, a puzzle of remains. What does it all add up to? Enduring life, perhaps. Some tired faces, light blue eyes, red hands, black shoes worn grey. Someone looks at the sky and asks, will it rain? Two old men lean together, gossiping. A Ukrainian woman sells old plates, smiles politely, blows on cold hands.

Over the next few days, the memory of Auschwitz grew inside me. I was haunted by the kapo's room and the blanket of hair, that unfinished thick grey-brown fabric in a glass case. They reminded me of displays in ethnographic open-air museums, that late 19th century northern European movement to chronicle what was being lost to modernity – there was an uncanny echo of other representations and descriptions: here is the bed and the chair, the tin tableware and the kitchen stove. This is how the people knitted. Here are the rugs, there the blankets. This is how they wove.

How long will the shoes last, and the hair, before it all turns to dust?

How long will the staircases of Auschwitz last before they are worn down by shoes, one foot in front of the other?

Auschwitz is both a memorial and an open-air museum, a place in which to remember and a place in which to learn. The mechanical phrases of our guide, the repeated reminders that we are here to

learn and remember so that this may never happen again, were unexpectedly comforting: I was relieved to hear that lifeless script; relieved to have my headset, to be, in that sense, alone and protected from the objects on display in the rooms we walked through; to be one of many in the line of people slowly walking past the punishment cells and the dank locked spaces where people were killed. Like ghosts of the future, grotesquely embodied shadows of those who came before us, we were divided by language and stickers on our coats.

Afterwards I wanted to burn my clothes, shower and wash my hair and throw away my shoes. I wanted to get rid of every trace of Auschwitz on my skin. ■

# ‘A HARDENING CLIMATE: FUNDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN REPRESSIVE SOCIETIES’

TALK TO THE FRONTLINE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN  
DUBLIN, 2015

*By Sigrid Rausing*

I am an anthropologist by training, and one of the themes I focused on in my PhD was the question of memory in the former Soviet Union. Human rights too has a culture, and a memory. I want to discuss tonight whether that culture is under threat, and if so, from what. Is the climate, in fact, hardening?

I won’t go into the origins of human rights here, except to say that one might talk about a battle between the Enlightenment project, focused on the rights of individuals, and the Revolution that came after, based on the dangerous idea that the end justifies the means, which, in combination with the psychological process of de-humanising the ‘other’, has destroyed most, perhaps all, revolutions the world has ever seen.

All state repression justifies violence with reference to means and ends. That is true for the revolutionary movements - Stalinism, Nazism, Fascism, Maoism - and all the local variants of those systems globally. It is also true for the extreme nationalist causes, like the attempted Hutu genocide of the Tutsis and the Serbian atrocities in Bosnia.

To some degree this also goes for democracies or quasi-democracies concerned with a perceived threat; examples are many, ranging from McCarthyism, the American war on terror, Israeli security, the British fight against the Mau Mau and the IRA, and Sri Lankan

atrocities against civilians in the battle to contain the Tamil Tigers.

It may seem provocative to class all these in one category. I grew up with the idea that the Nazi genocide against the Jews was unique and existentially incomprehensible. I no longer hold that view. The process of de-humanisation which ended with the gas chambers has, unfortunately, turned out not to be a unique phenomenon, except in scale and technology. I am thinking, for example, of the Japanese biological warfare experiments on human prisoners on mainland China during the occupation, of the Soviet mass deportations and orchestrated Ukrainian starvation, of Pol Pot's torture chambers and killing fields, and of the Rwandan genocide.

In this talk, I want to add a question mark to the end of my title, to examine whether the climate is in fact hardening. It seems to me that whilst we may live in a more dangerous world than we did twenty years ago, the argument for the rule of law, for good governance, and for human rights has broadly been won. It has become an established part of the dialogue of globalisation. There are, however, several threats to the development or maintenance of democracy and the rule of law.

Terrorism and anti-terrorist measures are serious threats. I don't want to imply a moral equivalence between the two: while terrorists target innocent civilians, states generally target only terror suspects. The nature of terrorism is to provoke the state into a response which usually contains elements of repression. Long dialogues and grass-roots peace activism are needed to over-come it. Even then, as the Irish people know so well, bitter memories of suffering and violence can fuel revivals of armed struggle, spiralling into new conflict.

The other threat we have focused on over the last few years is the retrogressive developments in Russia and its client states. The foreign agent law, i.e. forcing NGO's receiving foreign grants to sign a register of 'foreign agents', corruption, the state's disregard for its social and economic responsibilities, political violence and the encouragement of homophobia are all deeply concerning. President Putin's attempts to de-stabilise the EU by supporting nationalist anti-EU causes are also worrying. Add to that the armed conflict in Ukraine, and the annexation of Crimea, and it seems possible – though not perhaps likely – that Glasnost and Perestroika were in fact only a relatively

brief thaw, which had more in common with Khrushchev's thaw (1953-64) than we could ever have imagined in the early 1990s.

Terrorism and developments in Russia are not in fact unrelated. Historically, Soviet support for terrorist groups is well known. Without that support terrorism as a form of political organisation may not have survived, and indeed one may speculate about the coincidental timing of the end of the First Intifada – approximately 1991 (the Madrid conference) to 1993 (the Oslo Accords) – and the era of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The conflict in Israel had long since become a proxy war, with the Soviet Union providing support for anti-Zionism and Arab client states, and America supporting Israel and its own Arab client states.

The last threat to human rights I want to briefly mention in this introduction is poverty and the threat of anarchy, in the popular sense, and the authoritarian, particularly Chinese, challenge to the narrative of democracy. You might argue that the alleviation of poverty is the *raison d'être* for the Chinese model of state capitalism. The threat of poverty, and the fear of anarchy (failed states and terrorism) can be used as arguments in favour of state capitalism. Environmental destruction, on the other hand, is a very serious argument against it: until China can deal with its environmental catastrophe its government may seem to lack legitimacy even within China. It's interesting that the Chinese documentary about air pollution, *Under the Dome*, has now been banned in China – if you haven't seen it, I highly recommend it.

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I want to start with the issue of responses to terrorism, focusing in particular on America and other democracies.

When democracies resort to repressive means, judicial systems are co-opted, often with questionable legality. This was true, as we now know, of the Bush presidency's justification of torture. The year of 2014 ended with the de-classification and publication of a redacted version of the findings on the CIA's Detention and Interrogation Program by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

The Committee made 20 findings and conclusions, ranging from the ineffectiveness of ‘enhanced interrogation’ to inaccurate CIA claims of effectiveness, concealment of just how brutal the conditions and interrogations were, a failure to record numbers of detainees, a number of management issues, and a reputational risk for the United States. The outsourcing of torture, the surreal point where state torture met the free market, received particular attention in the media: in 2008, external contractors made up 85% of the workforce for detention and interrogation operations of the CIA’s Rendition, Detention, and Interrogation Group. It was big business.

Each of the 20 findings was backed up by comprehensive evidence. None of it was surprising to anyone who had taken note of the expanded powers of the American state in the Patriot Act, passed after 9.11, and the questionable legal arguments paving the way to ‘enhanced interrogations’. But this time the information came from the heart of government itself, not from the civil society organisations and journalists who have drawn attention to this issue since information about the bleak, violent, and de-humanising conditions in CIA black sites and prisons like Abu Ghraib, started seeping out.

What we thought was accepted wisdom about torture – that it produces false intelligence, weakening and ultimately destroying the potential for a human bond with the interrogator – evaporated. Suddenly techniques that had been dormant for some time were resurrected by dubious psychologists, with little oversight or analysis, backed by significant amounts of funding and state power. Many of our grantees - ACLU, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First, Reprieve, Witness to Guantanamo and others - have advocated tirelessly on this issue.

It is important, however, to understand better the history of the CIA and the strange and unexamined science of interrogation. In essence, parts of the US Army cold war training course in how to resist interrogation – SERE (‘survival, evasion, resistance, escape’) - were appropriated and transformed into techniques of conducting interrogation. The methods of SERE, in turn, were based on earlier CIA and Army interrogation manuals.

The debate, so far, has focused, understandably, on the moral

and ethical aspects of torture. But since many people in the US still broadly contend that torture works, and therefore, by implication, that opposition to torture is ‘goofy’ (this word, along with the notion of ‘bad apples’, overly brutal people in an otherwise functioning system, were used again and again by Republican supporters of torture), we must also look at historical theories of interrogation. Only by investigating those theories can we hope to move away from the idea that ethical condemnations of torture are in opposition to cut-to-the-chase instrumentalist no-one-likes-it-but-it works arguments.

It should be emphasised, also, that training in enhanced interrogation techniques was not an exclusively American practice: in November 2010, for instance, the *Guardian* reported on leaks from the UK army base Chicksands. UK soldiers, they reported, may face war crimes trials, and the Ministry of Defence was unable to explain why interrogators were trained in techniques that appeared to breach the Geneva conventions, including threats, sensory deprivation, and enforced nakedness. Training materials for interrogators focused on provoking humiliation, insecurity, disorientation, exhaustion, anxiety, and fear.

Nor were these techniques confined to the UK and US: Israeli human rights organisations have brought many successful legal challenges to particular aspects of the techniques used in interrogations of terror suspects there. Democracies faced with terror threats typically develop codes and manuals of interrogation, to protect practitioners and the state from criticism and/or prosecution. In addition, America’s programme of extraordinary renditions, in which Britain and other countries were complicit, allowed them to gain intelligence – whether it was good or not is hard to judge – via torture at a distance.

Dianne Feinstein ends her foreword to the Senate Report of last year: ‘This and future Administrations should use this Study to guide future programs, correct past mistakes, increase oversight of CIA representations to policymakers, and ensure coercive interrogation practices are not used by our government again.’

But we have been here before. The language, and the sentiments expressed, are very similar to the Church Committee’s fourteen

reports on CIA activities in 1975-6, which ranged from mass surveillance of post and telegrams and telephone conversations to assassinations (and attempted assassinations) of foreign leaders. Then, as now, a bitter split between left and right, critics and defenders of the CIA, emerged. Then, as now, the reports called for ‘never again’.

I want to add a comment. All leads on torture seem to point to America. The reason for that is not that American human rights abuses were worse than anywhere else – they were not. It’s simply that we know more about it, because of the strong American tradition of investigative journalism and a free press.

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The war on terror may be unwinnable. Like Trotsky’s idea of permanent revolution, or George Orwell’s dystopian novel *1984*, we may live in a permanent war on terror. Islamist terror, growing out of the anti-colonial movement in Algeria and other countries to focus on anti-Zionism, fuelled by the extreme brutality of numerous Arab police states, the atrocities in Bosnia and Chechnya, and now Syria, seems all but uncontrollable now. The ideas and traditions of terrorism are a complex mix of anti-colonialism, anti-Zionism, socialism, dissidence, a wish to re-establish the Caliphate and Sharia law, and the de-humanisation of people perceived to be the enemy, as well as ordinary people perceived as representative of the enemy culture. It is, also, an anarchic youth movement spreading across all continents, whose members are not afraid to kill, and not afraid to die. Much as they claim adherence to Islam, they have no respect, and perhaps not much knowledge, for law or for tradition. Their violence, mixed and shown as music videos, seems to need no justification, only choreography and media expertise.

An adherence to human rights, and the liberal tradition, holds that in terms of civil and political rights, the end can never justify the means. The Russian revolutionaries used to say that to make an omelette you have to break eggs, or that when you fell trees, chips will fly. They had

little regard for individual human life, seen as a liberal bourgeois pre-occupation. The families they destroyed, and the individuals they sent to their death, were more or less de-humanised. Vassily Grossman, in his book *Everything Flows* writes about the Ukrainian mass starvation, orchestrated by Soviet officials, making the point that the kulaks, and later the starving peasants, were barely regarded as humans: ‘They’d convinced themselves that the kulaks were evil, that it was best not even to touch them. They would not even sit down to eat with one of ‘those parasites’. The kulaks’ towels were unclean, their children were disgusting, their young women were worse than lice. The activists looked on those who were being dispossessed as if they were cattle, or swine. Everything about the kulaks was vile – they were vile in themselves, and they had no souls, and they stank, and they were full of sexual diseases, and worst of all, they were enemies of the people and exploiters of the labour of others.’<sup>14</sup>

Human rights abuses can only occur in a climate of de-humanisation. In the history of Nazi Germany and Rwanda’s genocide de-humanisation was a central focus, but it was there in the Soviet Union, in Maoist China, in Pol Pot’s Kampuchea, in apartheid South Africa, and in many other places. We have made tremendous progress in the global dialogue about de-humanisation, not least in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and psychoanalytic research and group practice around truth and reconciliation, which commonly include thoughts on reparative justice and practice on the one hand, and the process of de-humanisation on the other.

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<sup>14</sup> Vassily Grossman *Everything Flows* p. 126 Cf also Konstantin Paustovsky’s memoir, *The Story of a Life*: ‘That must have been the first time I saw a classic example of a kulak woman – greedy, spiteful, petty, mean and intent on flaunting her wealth, which wasn’t much except when viewed amid the general ruin and poverty. Ukraine was full of ruthless, arrogant kulaks in those days. Women ready to strangle their own fathers if there was a bit of profit to be had, while their ‘darling sons’ joined Makhno or Zeleny or some other ataman’s bandit gang and, without batting an eyelid, buried people alive, smashed children’s skulls with the butts of their rifles, and cut strips of skin from the backs of Jews and Red Army men to make trophies.’

So, has the climate hardened? Is it more difficult now to fund human rights in repressive societies than it was when we began, twenty years ago?

Well, it is, and it isn't. In 1995 it didn't occur to me that funding human rights would ever feel like a dangerous or risky pursuit. In retrospect that feels like a safer era. Our grantees, and particularly human rights defenders, probably face more dangers now than they did then, as do journalists in conflict zones and repressive countries. Many areas of the world are much more unsafe than they were twenty years ago. Non-state actors are more active, and more violent, and it is hard to unravel their relationship with states. We are also instantly aware of the dangers: organisations like the Committee to Protect Journalists keep records, and the television news frequently show amateur footage of violence. Frontline Defenders reports that over 130 human rights defenders were killed or died in detention in the first ten months of 2014, surprisingly 101 of them in the Americas. Judging from the news one would have guessed differently.

The fact that LGBT rights have become a significant fault-line between democracies and authoritarian states was not perhaps quite predictable, but now we will know to watch out for signs of homophobia: it is a symptom of a deeper malaise, a disregard for individual human rights and a societal lack of solidarity and compassion. We are seeing new homophobic legislation in Africa and the repressive parts of the former Soviet Union. Gay rights in Russia have become a symbol for the 'decadent West'. As we all know, the Orthodox church in Russia, and American evangelical groups in Africa, promote homophobia. Because gay liberation is so relatively recent even in our societies it's an easy prejudice to ignite.

There is also a backlash against women's rights, much of which is based upon 'traditional values' arguments. The concept of the universality of human rights is being undermined by states and groups that reject them as 'Western' and not applicable to their own cultures. That's not new. But now, across continents women's freedom and autonomy over their bodies are being challenged. Fundamentalist arguments are used to justify violence and discrimination but also to block the progress of laws at national and international level. This has been most

evident in the annual meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women during which an alliance of states has consistently tried to push back on hard won gains related to women's reproductive rights.

I am concerned, also, by the spread of the Foreign Agent laws in different legislations, and the increasing difficulty in funding human rights in countries where advocacy is most needed, like Russia, or Egypt. Here is an incomplete list of countries that have recently considered or introduced versions of foreign agent laws and restriction of foreign funding of NGOs: Ecuador, Venezuela, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Jordan, Belarus, Egypt, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Yemen, Ethiopia, Bolivia, Israel, Algeria, India, Russia, and Kirghizstan. Ukraine introduced it, but has since repealed it.

I am also concerned by the cavalier UK media attitude to the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, and criticisms of the British Human Rights Act. It is very moving to hear human rights activists in countries like Georgia and Armenia talk about the court with such faith and hope. They are situated in between an increasingly authoritarian Russia, and a Europe that doesn't quite believe in its own principles. I would like end by reminding us of those principles.

I am a publisher, and I believe in language. The language of the EU is surprisingly moving:

'Respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values, which are set out in Article I-2, are common to the Member States. Moreover, the societies of the Member States are characterised by pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men. Any European State wishing to become a member of the Union must respect these values in order to be considered eligible for admission. Secondly, failure

by a Member State to respect these values may lead to the suspension of that Member State's rights deriving from membership of the Union (Article I-59).<sup>15</sup>

We don't make enough of the language and the grandeur of the vision of the EU, or indeed of human rights. We focus on legal interpretations of principles, but perhaps we should spend more time considering the message itself: dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and equality.

I started out this talk asking whether the climate for funding human rights has hardened. I argued that the evidence is ambiguous: the situation for human rights defenders in some countries is undoubtedly more dangerous now than it was twenty years ago. On the other hand, the creaky and bureaucratic super-structure of the international community, and the language of good governance, of human rights and the rule of law, seems to me to be solidly established in the world. There is widespread, though variable, awareness of the dangers of de-humanisation.

I hope that security, freedom, and prosperity will follow. ■

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<sup>15</sup> Member states and the rule of law: dealing with a breach of EU values 2015

# GEORGIA AND ARMENIA,

THE GUARDIAN, APRIL 2013

*By Sigrid Rausing*

I recently travelled to Georgia and Armenia to meet human rights groups. After two days in Georgia, we drove east, the hilly landscape gradually turning mountainous, sheep and cattle tended by shepherds in littered, post-Soviet villages. The road followed a small river, plastic trash snagging on rocks and branches. This could have been a landscape of extraordinary beauty - instead it was depleted and scarred by nearly a century of bad or indifferent governance.

Crossing the border into Armenia, the river was still there, the litter now older, almost indistinguishable from the brown water and grey rock. There were remnants of the Soviet state - giant concrete chutes channeling water from the steep mountains, occasional blocks of flats, like the rubbish, taking on the colour of the dark earth. In one valley ruins from the earthquake in 1988 stood like archaeological remains. Every village we drove through was half abandoned - the falling down houses haphazardly mended with metal sheets or planks of wood. Whole families move if they can, otherwise women and children remain while the men join the migrant labour force in Russia, sending meagre remittances home. I know there were children in these villages, because occasionally laundry - the only colour in this bleak world - hung from wires, drying in the still dusk. We saw no people, and no shops. We saw no other cars.

In Britain we sometimes forget the harsh reality behind the talk of human rights in transitional states. Human rights language is the same the world over, bland and institutional. Thus in Georgia many groups talked about "prison reform". The issue in fact was the widespread use of torture, revealed when secret footage was released of detainees

raped with broom handles or burned with cigarettes, guards looking on, indifferent to the screams. The victims were ordinary criminals; this was part of police and prison routine. After the release of the footage, thousands of people took to the streets and the Minister for Corrections had to resign. 16 out of 17 prison directors were fired. Some claim the footage was staged; no one, however, disputes that those things went on.

Other groups talked about “corruption” and “transparency”. Here is one case: an Armenian shopkeeper was visited by tax officials, demanding a bribe. He refused and took them to court. Several years and many court cases later he won his case, but by now the same tax officials have so terrorised his suppliers that he can’t stay in business. In Armenia campaigners talked about “hospital reform”. Many people with learning disabilities are institutionalised in mental hospitals. Even if you are let out, once in the system you can be committed at any time in the future by a doctor’s order.

The human rights activists (some former dissidents) we met steadfastly rely on, and believe in, the European court of human rights in Strasbourg, despite the fact that tens of thousands of cases are languishing there in a seemingly permanent backlog. It’s all they have.

European solidarity is an empty concept to most British people, at least judging from the media. But democracy and the rule of law on the margins of Europe matter to all of us. Georgia and Armenia, and fourteen other nations, are in talks with the EU under the European neighbourhood policy. It offers a degree of economic integration in return for a commitment to democracy and human rights, the rule of law, market economy principles and sustainable development. Free trade for good governance: it’s a win-win deal.

In Georgia and Armenia, however, so long after the fall of the Soviet Union, the state is still weak and occasionally thuggish, the economies are largely oligarchical, and there is a lack of watchdog institutes – that function is almost entirely given over to civil society. As in all former Soviet republics, there is a history of institutional brutality and indifference lingering on in the army, the prisons, hospitals and orphanages.

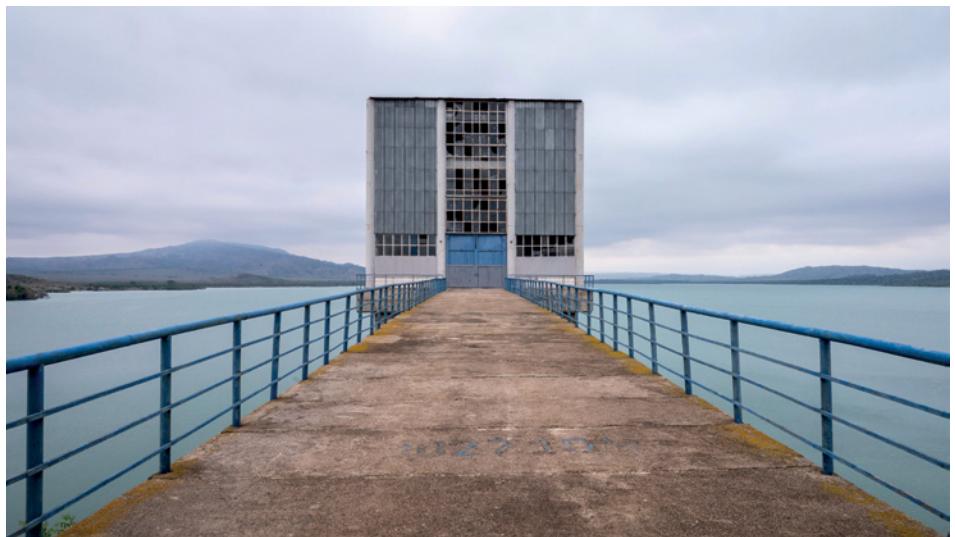
And yet people in Yerevan, the capital, talked hopefully of an

Armenian spring. Serge Sarkisian, the president (and Putin ally), won a second term in the recent election, but not with anything like the Soviet-style 90% majority the pollsters had suggested. Significant numbers of ballot papers had been spoiled. (The fact that one candidate, a former dissident, was shot and wounded in January may have contributed to voter disaffection.) The main opposition candidate, the American-born Raffi Hovannisian (37% of the vote), held a shadow swearing-in ceremony on 9 April.

In this region, as in any other, individuals come and go, and sometimes, as we have seen in Georgia, good people turn bad. European integration is the best bet for good governance. The alternative for Armenia is Russia, where NGOs receiving foreign funding are now required to register as “foreign agents”. European trade agreements and human rights requirements must be better than that, for them and for us. ■



Armenia Georgia border signs in Bagratashen ©DOR SHABASHEWITZ, CREATIVE COMMONS



Dali Mountain Reservoir, Georgia, 2023 © TOM LEE



Mount Ararat Yerevan skyline, 2014 © SEROUJ OURISHIAN, CREATIVE COMMONS



Shepherd, Georgia Steppe, 2023 © TOM LEE





Armenia, 2023 © TOM LEE

# ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

From its earliest years, SRT took the position that human rights and environmental justice are deeply interconnected. Long before environmental protection became a mainstream philanthropic priority, the Trust was funding groundbreaking work in environmental accountability and conservation—often ahead of the curve.

The Trust's early grants to organisations like EarthRights International and the Blacksmith Institute (now Pure Earth) in 2001 demonstrate a commitment to communities living at the intersection of environmental degradation and human rights violations. EarthRights combined legal action with grassroots activism to defend the rights of people affected by extractive industries, while Pure Earth tackled toxic pollution in some of the world's most contaminated environments. Support for the European Environmental Bureau, a large federation of environmental organisations, helped establish The Zero Mercury campaign, aiming to curb highly toxic mercury pollution, particularly exports of mercury and mercury waste to countries where regulation was lacking.



Villagers being forced from their homes, the Doe V Unocal case, Myanmar, ca 1995 © EARTHRIGHTS INTERNATIONAL

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EarthRights has always been a small, scrappy organization that tends to “punch above its weight” – both in terms of the David and Goliath cases it takes on, but also compared to other NGOs in the field. With little time to market our work, we’re often overlooked by funders.

The Sigrid Rausing Trust was different. They recognized that our case at the time, Doe v. Unocal, meant investing not only in winning in court, but also in the court of public opinion and in the streets (or in this case, the Burmese jungle, where our clients were). SRT also invested for the long-term, essential for the kind of “system-changing” work that we do.

In our first Trust grant period (2001-05), we won the Doe v. Unocal settlement. This changed legal history by becoming the first case in which a corporation had to pay for human rights abuses occurring outside its home country, closing the legal loophole that allowed corporations to evade legal responsibilities, even for rape, torture and forced labour, simply by going to another country.

Doe v. Unocal, and the cases that came after it (Wiwa v. Shell, Maynas v. Occidental, Doe v. Chiquita and others) sent the clear message to corporations that no matter where they operated, they could not

hide from the laws that protect fundamental human rights. It also gave hope to communities all over the world who were experiencing these kinds of abuses. If some of the poorest people, living under the worst military dictatorships, could challenge one of the most powerful industries – a US oil company – on its home turf and WIN, then others could, too. We can never know how many abuses were prevented because corporations were afraid of being sued. But we do know that the threat of punishment, legal liability, reputational risk, and the implications of all of these for the bottom line, led corporations to change their practices in new ways that still continue today.

Commitment to ideals such as justice, and shifting power from corporate rights to human rights, means that you need to be in it for the long haul. Most of our cases take around 10 years from beginning to end, and it's hard to commit to clients and communities if you're not sure of your ability to sustain the work over its duration. The Trust's long-term support made those commitments possible, and the world is a different place because of it.

Ka Hsaw Wa & Katie Redford  
Co-founders of EarthRights

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In 2005, funds from the Sigrid Rausing Trust enabled the European Environmental Bureau and the Mercury Policy Project to launch the Zero Mercury Campaign. We, in turn, formed the Zero Mercury Working Group. Today, the Working Group is an international coalition of more than 110 public interest, environmental and health NGOs from over 55 countries. Through it, we strive to end the supply, demand and emissions of mercury from all human-made sources, with the goal of reducing mercury to a minimum in the global environment.

Our greatest success while being supported by the Trust was the adoption of the 2008 EU Mercury regulation on banning exports of metallic mercury and certain mercury compounds, and the safe storage of metallic mercury. The EU had been the main exporter of mercury to countries where regulations around its use were lax or non-existent. The regulation made sure that metallic mercury was not available on the world market. The USA followed two years later, adopting a mercury export ban. These two bans had global repercussions,

sending a strong signal on the dangers of mercury, and the firm decision that trade, use, emissions and exposure needed to be reduced and, where possible, eliminated.

The Trust's support gave us financial security for many years, setting the stage for an even bigger success. By 2013, there was virtually no aspect of global mercury policy that we hadn't influenced. The NGOs involved achieved results beyond even their own expectations. Chief among those was the adoption of the landmark Minamata Convention in 2013 aimed at protecting human health and the environment from mercury pollution. Among others, it addresses emissions from artisanal and small-scale gold mining – the largest source of mercury pollution in the world. It also provides controls over a myriad of mercury-added products, the manufacture, import and export of which will be totally banned after 2020.

Elena Lymberidi-Settimo  
Project Manager, the Zero Mercury Campaign

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Early grants to Global Witness further highlighted the Trust's focus on exposing corruption and environmental destruction linked to natural resource exploitation. Global Witness' investigations into timber, oil, and mineral industries have driven policy reform and held powerful actors accountable for environmental and human rights abuses.

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When the Trust started funding Global Witness in 2001, we were still a small organisation. We straddled the environmental and human rights fields but didn't neatly fall into either of them, so funding was a struggle in the early days. Support from the Trust was transformational: it was among the first significant multi-year grants we received and was also core funding. This enabled us to grow the organisation, take on more campaigns and gave us the security to plan ahead.

One of our greatest campaign successes – which earned us a co-nomination for the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize – was our work exposing how blood diamonds were fuelling wars in West Africa. This led to the 2003 Kimberley Process, a government-led scheme to prevent 'conflict diamonds' entering the market.

Our campaigns can take years to come to fruition, our enemies are powerful, and legal attack is an ever-present risk. The Trust's unrestricted funding gave us the flexibility to move fast, the capacity to devote the necessary resources to the issues and the confidence that we could face the threats from our adversaries. Global Witness would be a very different and depleted beast today without the Trust's early support.

Patrick Alley  
Co-founder & Executive Director of Global Witness

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The Trust also supported the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) and International Rivers, two influential voices challenging corporate and governmental impunity in environmental matters. These organisations not only provided legal expertise but also empowered communities to resist destructive projects through research, litigation, and advocacy.

In recent years, the Trust has expanded its environmental programme to include biodiversity conservation, looking for partnerships with local communities and regionally grounded organisations. This reflects a broader shift in global conservation from models that seek to impose a barrier to local communities to one that values indigenous rights, cultural knowledge, and local stewardship.

In Kyrgyzstan, the Trust has funded Camp Alatoo, an NGO that works with rural communities to sustainably manage protected areas. Their work builds resilience in both human and ecological systems, using participatory tools to resolve land-use conflicts and conserve mountain ecosystems.

Similarly, in Kazakhstan, the Trust supports the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK), the 2024 winner of the Earthshot Prize. ACBK leads efforts to preserve steppe ecosystems and endangered species, such as the saiga antelope, while building community support and advancing science-based conservation practices.

These conservation grants reflect the Trust's commitment to environmental justice as part of a broader human rights framework—recognising that protecting ecosystems also means protecting the rights, livelihoods, and cultural heritage of the people who depend on them.

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Working with the Sigrid Rausing Trust has been an immense privilege. Without the need for fanfare, the Trust has quietly gone about gathering a singular group of partners, united by their courage, rigour and desire to keep making small and big changes for the better. On a personal level, I am grateful for the opportunity of getting to sit with so many incredible people, learning about new regions and struggles firsthand and hopefully contributing in some small way to the collective endeavour.

Tom Lee  
SRT Programme Manager, Environment

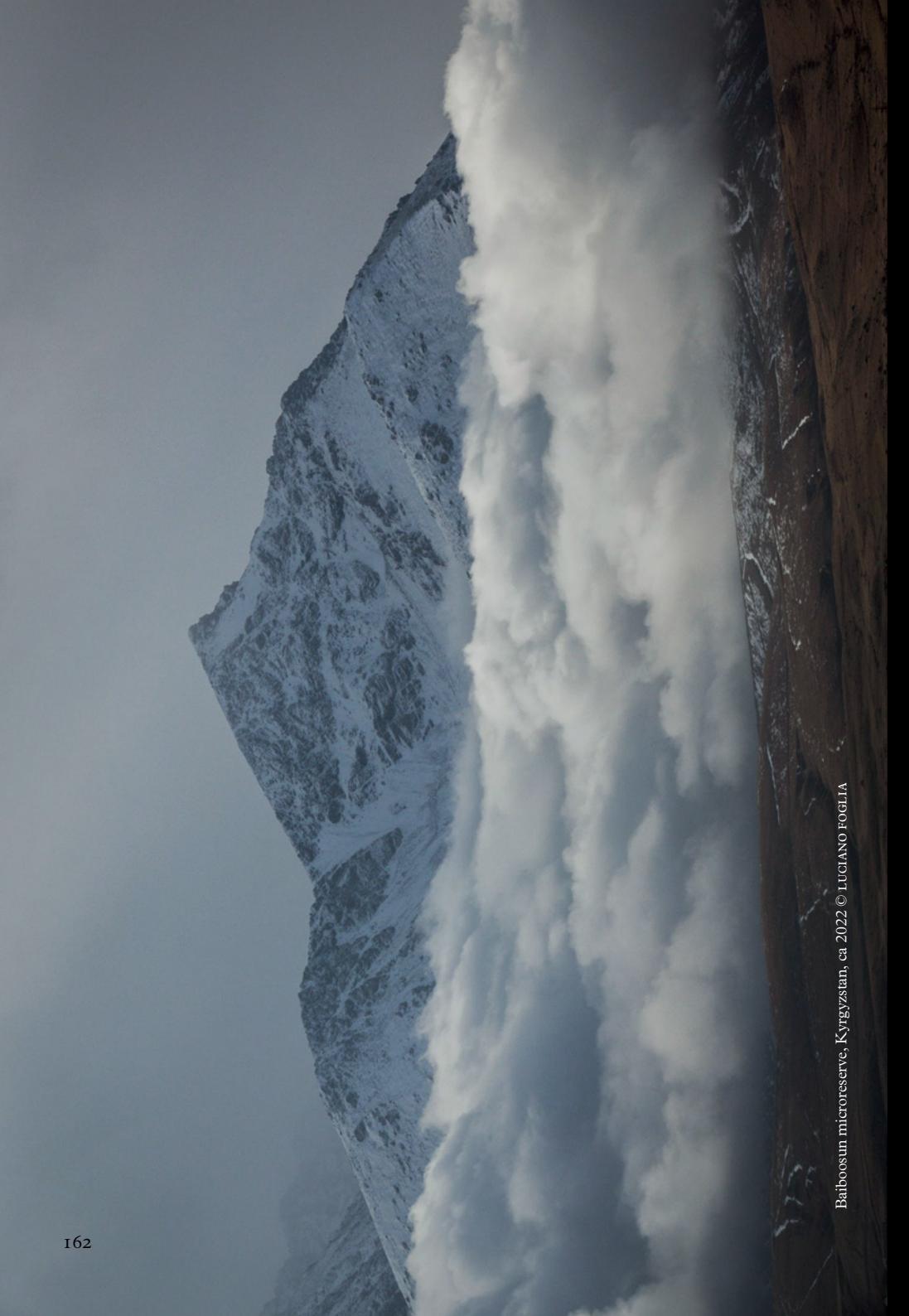
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Moroccan Biodiversity and Livelihoods Association seed harvesters in the Atlas Mountains, Morocco, 2024 © MOROCCAN BIODIVERSITY AND LIVELIHOODS ASSOCIATION



Saiga antelope and calves, Kazakhstan, 2022 © DANIEL ROSENGREN / ACBK







La Oroya, Peru — Residents endured generations of toxic contamination, 2017. In a landmark case, Peru was held responsible for violating their rights after a legal challenge by the Inter-American Association for Environmental Defense

© MITCHELL GILBERT / AIDA



The Lesotho Highlands Water Project diverts water from Lesotho's mountains to South Africa's Gauteng province - Africa's largest dam scheme. Local communities, facing displacement and lost livelihoods, are supported by the Seinoli Legal Centre, 2017 © TOM LEE



Ranger, Baiboosun Reserve, Kyrgyzstan, ca 2022 © CAMP ALATOOS

# ON THE STEPPE

COLUMN FOR THE NEW STATESMAN, FEBRUARY 2021

*By Sigrid Rausing*

Just before Christmas 2020, the Russian Duma passed a number of amendments tightening its notorious “Foreign Agent” law, which targets civil society groups receiving charitable funding from abroad. The label “foreign agent” can now be applied to individuals as well as to groups. People have to report any foreign funding and disclose their foreign agent status in reports and other publications. Any organisation on the foreign agent list has to submit its planned activities to the justice ministry. Failure to register as a foreign agent is now potentially punishable by prison, not just a fine. “Foreign influence” on education has also been banned, and restrictions on mass assembly have been extended to single person protests.

These new laws represent the most significant restrictions on Russian civil society since the Foreign Agent law of 2012, and the Undesirable Organisations law of 2015. Vladimir Putin’s corrupt and repressive regime is creaking, but there have been protests elsewhere in the region, too – most notably, of course, in Belarus. The reaction has been two-fold: arrests and state violence on the one hand; legal changes on the other, legitimising repressive measures through law. A legal framework for authoritarianism is quietly solidifying across many countries in the former Soviet zone, not least in the Stans, the vast and sparsely populated countries strategically situated between China to the east, Russia to the north and west, and Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the south.

Kazakhstan in the north is the dominant country in the region, with a population of some 18.7 million people. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev gained power in March 2019 after Nursultan Nazarbayev’s

30-year authoritarian rule. Kazakhstan's oil and mineral reserves have led to a great deal of interest in the country, and contributed to a huge wage gap between old sectors, such as state universities, and new ones. Putin has offended Kazakh nationalists in the past, but Kazakhstan, alongside Belarus, was one of three founding members of the Russian-dominated free trade zone, the Eurasian Economic Union, in 2014. Kazakhstan also supports the US war on terror, and USAID runs a multi-million-dollar programme promoting the rule of law.

The question of the Chinese repression of the Uighurs is the most delicate foreign relations issue for Kazakhstan – the Uighurs are related to the Kazakhs, and there is a Kazakh community in China, too. But the Kazakh authorities do not want to offend their powerful neighbour. Serikzhan Bilash, the vociferous Uighur activist in exile in Kazakhstan, left for Istanbul last September following a campaign of intimidation, culminating in house arrest.

I was in Kazakhstan in the autumn of 2019 to meet civil rights groups in the country. I was travelling with the human rights expert Jonathan Cooper, who was also teaching a British Embassy-sponsored course on human rights in the military, together with Christine Chinkin from the London School of Economics – the kind of initiative which, incidentally, Dominic Raab has just imperilled by cutting the modest embassy aid budget. The students were senior military officers, including generals, from the countries of the region, and they were learning about the international body of law regulating military conduct.

The course was held in Nur-Sultan, the new and shining capital of Kazakhstan that used to be known as Astana, built by President Nazarbayev. I had no meetings on my first day and walked along the river. Old men sat fishing by the concrete riverbank; still figures staring into the water. I saw no dogs, and few children. The air was so dry my skin felt like paper as I walked.

The city is built on the steppe, and after a day or two we drove out on to the endless unfenced flatness. Horses bred for meat grazed on the verge of the road and, every once in a while, we passed some decrepit settlement, a former collective farm. Ragged steppe eagles

perched on wooden electricity poles by the road; there were no trees, or only a few planted around the villages. Our destination was a lake in a conservation region; a body of water on land so flat that the boundary between land and water was a liminal space; a wet zone of rough grass, mud and broken twigs, maybe brought by the wind, maybe spread by tractor to bind the soil. There were swans and cormorants on the lake, and the wind, according to the conservationist who was with us, was warmer than it should have been. Grey sky met land in a vast disk, horizon to horizon.

We had lunch at a guest house on a former collective farm, in a basic Soviet one-storey house. A puppy threw itself at us, inviting play. Like the swans and the cormorants, it evoked familiarity in this otherwise alien landscape. Our host, too, was faintly familiar: a woman in her sixties, I suppose, with gold teeth, who served a national dish of horsemeat and lamb in a broth. The ranger at the reserve, Tatar by origin and presumably from a deported family, told us he misses the Soviet times. Our host agreed. What do they miss? The sense of solidarity, they said. People helped each other, and there was always something happening, too. Cultural programmes, exchanges, visits – all that is gone. They miss being part of a mission to build a better society. The ranger's grandmother, he said, served tea to Lenin and Trotsky in Leningrad; now he is here, in this forgotten post-Soviet space.

The conservationist translated. Her own grandparents had been deported, she told us later, one couple from Belarus, the other from Ukraine. One of her grandmothers had eventually received some small compensation. She was seven years old when she was brought to the steppe. Her family and fellow deportees dug holes in the ground for temporary shelter. Four children out of nine died of dysentery. I thought, as she spoke, of Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, of Lara's daughter who knew nothing of her parents, embodying, like our guide, the legacy of revolution and chaos. Many of the people with backgrounds like hers have already left for Russia or Germany. There is not much political space left in Kazakhstan for non-native Kazakhs, but she is staying, engaged in the mission to build a better world through conservation.

About an hour away from the collective farm, alone on the empty

land, stood a miniature 16th-century mosque. It had been destroyed in Soviet times and was then rebuilt; a shoddy post-Soviet construction, a small square room, white-washed and empty. Some barely noticeable faint mounds on the steppe outside were old graves, the conservationist said. The grey steppe merged with the sky many miles away. Three miles, the conservationist informed us: as far as the human eye can see.

On the way back to Nur-Sultan we stopped at the site of a 1930s labour camp for deported women and children, mainly wives of well-known men – scientists and others, who had already been caught up in the whirlwind. There was a museum, and a monument to the victims of persecution. On the side was a train wagon, originally intended for cattle. Mannequins in dark and dusty bourgeois clothes sat on rough benches inside. A group of Kazakh schoolchildren, perhaps related to the villagers near the camp who had sometimes – we learn inside the museum – handed the prisoners bread through the fence, pointed at the stiff figures inside. There are dioramas of the camp in the museum – a winter scene and a summer scene – and photographs of the inmates. There is a replica of the office of the commander, too, with a high stool where the women sat for interrogations. There is a prisoners' room with a stove; lists of names and tragic mortality figures.

Before the era of this camp, there was famine in Kazakhstan. Between 1930 and 1933, one third of all grain was requisitioned by the Soviet authorities and one third of the population, mostly nomads, died of hunger or fled, with many dying on the road. In 1926 there were 3.6 million ethnic Kazakhs in Kazakhstan, according to the census. By 1939, the figure fell to 2.3 million.

Russian immigrants, imperial settlers and industrial workers, followed by waves of deported prisoners under Stalin, changed the ethnic composition of the country. In the 1930s most of the deportees were kulaks, traumatised small-holders, accused of resisting collectivisation or hiding grain.

During the war, certain ethnic groups became subject to collective deportations: Volga Germans, Poles, Crimean Tatars, Kalmyks, Koreans, Finns and others. The occupation of the Baltic

states brought Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians. Few people were deported as individuals: even members of the party accused of plotting and sabotage were actual or imagined members of targeted groups, ranging from Social Revolutionaries to Trotskyites.

A golden rough-legged buzzard circled overhead on our way back to the city. It was dusk, and a cloud of rooks were returning home, turning and wheeling like a flock of 10,000 heavy black starlings. But returning where in this flat, dry land without footholds or shelter? They must have made a home for themselves somewhere, as did some of the released prisoners after Stalin's death, the people who remained on the steppe either because they were banned from returning to their home countries, or because their homes and families were gone.

★

Communism seems a brutal form of government to miss, and yet, what do they have now, the people on the steppe? They have mobile phones and the internet. They can access images and video from around the world, but what do they have in their own world? The English language newspaper in Kazakhstan – still named the *Astana Times* – was all good news when I read it over breakfast at our hotel: a trade agreement with Rwanda; irrigation projects; Asian cooperation; broadband expansion. Jewellery designers make women feel unique with “affordable luxury” products, read one headline.

Perhaps it needs to be said that the people of the steppe can't afford to shop in the gleaming Nur-Sultan malls. They have the sky and the flat earth, horses and chickens and sheep. It's true they don't have to live with the pollution of Almaty – it hit the back of my throat like a pungent claw the morning we stepped off the train, and this was before the brown coal power stations had been turned on for the winter. Almaty, formerly known as Alma-Ata, is the old capital, a city of two million people. When the brown coal burns, the smog trapped by the mountains descends on the city like a toxic lid. We asked why the city still burned notoriously polluting brown coal. “I have heard,” one of the human rights lawyers at this civil society dinner said ironically, “it is only a rumour, mind you, but I have *heard* that corruption is an issue.”

Things look very different now. Unrest connected with perceived vote rigging is spreading through the region. Last autumn, there were serious protests in Kyrgyzstan, culminating in a state of emergency, resignations and the annulment of the election results. It's too early to say what will happen in Russia, following the events around opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

News of the demonstrations and arrests in Belarus were not broadcast on Kazakh state television, but they were much discussed on social media in Kazakhstan: news of this kind can no longer be repressed. How many people will have watched the clip of Navalny ally Anastasia Vasilyeva, the head of a doctors' union, defiantly play Beethoven as police searched her flat? She has been detained for breaching Covid rules – a convenient new framework for repressive regimes.

In the past few weeks, several Kazakh civil society groups have been called in to the tax authorities and accused of errors in reporting grants from donors abroad dating from 2018 and 2019.

Why the tax authorities? In 2016 Kazakhstan attached the Law on Payments to the tax code, adding onerous reporting requirements for civil society organisations and individuals who are funded from charities abroad. All publications receiving foreign grants must be labelled as such. The Law on Payments future-proofed Kazakh authoritarianism, and wasn't used until November last year, when 13 civil society organisations were investigated. Seven of them signed a public letter of protest.

On 15 January, the election-monitoring group Echo was fined and suspended for three months. The youth group Erkendik Kanaty, which is also engaged in election monitoring, was fined. On 25 January, the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law was fined and suspended for three months. The group had submitted thousands of pages of documents, and the tax authorities found four discrepancies – minor errors – in the papers. The bureau now risks losing its office and some of its staff. The International Legal Initiative was fined, too, and suspended for three months. Two other groups, the Legal Media Center, and MediaNet, have been summoned to local tax offices.

We had travelled by night train from Nur-Sultan to Almaty, a

14-hour journey. I woke at dawn, and watched the strange beauty of the steppe for hours. Every now and then we passed a small village, loose horses grazing the thin grass. Mostly the land was empty. I thought of the two old people – the Tatar man and the Kazakh woman – we had met on the former collective farm; their nostalgia for the Soviet Union; the forgotten famine, camps and deportations.

Perhaps the longing for political meaning never really dies: the disenchanted world can be re-enchanted in a moment, for better or for worse. Re-enchantment is easier, perhaps, for the extreme right and left – the mythologies of nativism and revolution make for powerful narratives. Liberalism, on the other hand, is often associated with laissez-faire economics, a lack of social and environmental regulation and runaway wage polarity. Human rights can get mired in legalistic language and acronyms.

I admire Alexei Navalny for his courage, but for me, the scene of Anastasia Vasilyeva playing Beethoven to the police was an act of re-enchanted liberal defiance. ■





Museum for deported women and children, Kazakhstan. Original train wagon with mannequins of deported women, 2021 © SIGRID RAUSING



Diorama in the museum for deported women and children, 2021 © SIGRID RAUSING

# JONATHAN COOPER (1962-2021)

THE LAW REVIEW, 2021

*By Sigrid Rausing*

Jonathan was a trustee of the Sigrid Rausing Trust for two terms, six years altogether. His tenure coincided with an expansion of the Trust's work, and the development of a range of focus regions, broadly encompassing the Former Soviet Union, the Balkans, North Africa, and three countries in sub-Saharan African. Our main focus was, and remains, human rights, but we also fund in the fields of women's rights, LGBT, xenophobia, transparency, and conservation. All our trustees have their own areas of interest, both in terms of what we fund, and in terms of how we fund. Jonathan's great mantra was governance – many of the organisations we funded in remote areas did not have developed governance structures, most importantly a board with the power to hire and dismiss the executive. Jonathan's view was that groups should have functioning boards, and he brought the issue up with great regularity, both at board meetings and on email.

In retrospect, I think he was right to expect and demand high governance standards of our grantees. My own view at the time was more anthropological – I believed that a group could carry out good work in its own way, whatever governance structure they had in place, and that our demand for 'good governance' concealed a hidden process of globalisation, if not colonisation, but I now think my cultural relativism was not helpful to our grantees. For one thing, it deprived them of the training they might have had in dealing with more stringent funding bodies. For another, now that communication is easier, and whistle-blowers are proliferating, it's becoming increasingly obvious that independent boards really are essential for grant-giving organisations – with a board, you simply hand over

to that body the responsibility to investigate claims and judge the organisation on whether the process is professionally handled. If the board is not doing its job, the grant should be suspended. In the absence of a board, due diligence becomes more complicated.

Jonathan had a broad knowledge of human rights law and landmarks, but he had other attributes, too, that made him an excellent grant-maker: he was enthusiastic and diligent, but more than that, he was benign - a philanthropist in the true meaning of the word. He welcomed change, and growth, and enjoyed debate and bringing people together.

A few years ago, we travelled together in Kazakhstan. Jonathan was teaching human rights law to generals in the Stans, together with Professor Christine Chinkin, and I was meeting grantees and observing the country. One memorable evening, destined for the night train to Almaty, we arrived at the wrong station in Nur Sultan. We hurtled across the city in a taxi with no headlights and blaring music, and made the train, just, drinking Uzbek vodka (a gift from the generals) and watching the steppe through the night. 'How is your heart', I asked him as we hurried through the station searching for the right platform. 'It's fine', he said. 'My heart is absolutely fine'.

For this piece, I looked at some of the hundreds of emails Jonathan sent me over these years. I wish I hadn't, in a way, because I soon felt overwhelmed with sadness looking over those messages, and understanding better the loss of Jonathan, not just to me and all his other friends, but to the human rights movement. We regularly get requests between grants cycles to step in and help individual people, often refugees or scholars at risk. Jonathan was always willing to help - to listen, to read, to organise events and engage others. I remember his practical engagement, his dedication to human rights and LGBT solidarity, and his sound advice. If you needed a human rights legal contact anywhere in the world, Jonathan would get it, and quite often the people he recommended would be someone he had worked with in some capacity or other.

I didn't really want him to leave the Trust, but our own practices had changed. We ourselves had become more stringent in terms of Trustee terms and other processes. I delayed his departure for a bit,

but Jonathan persevered. ‘In my heart’, he wrote, ‘I don’t want to leave, but I know that it’s best to. I’ve loved the global vision that the Trust has given me, and I’ve thoroughly enjoyed working with my co-trustees. And it’s a pleasure watching you in action. But the rotation of trustees goes to the heart of good governance. It’s in the Trust’s best interests that I move on. If you think it would assist the Trust for me to stay on during this transition, can we set a date for when I’ll leave?’

We did set a date. July 2018.

I told him he would be a hard act to follow, and he was. ■



Jonathan Cooper, 1962-2021

# LONGSTANDING PARTNERS

**B**ellingcat utilizes open-source investigations to uncover stories related to conflicts, corruption, and the rise of extremist movements. It was founded in 2015 as an international collective of researchers, investigators and citizen journalists. Through the identification, collection, archiving and analysis of information found on the internet, Bellingcat conducts investigations on topics that range from the conduct of parties in conflict to corruption and the rise of the far right in Eastern Europe.

Bellingcat unmasked GRU Agents (Russian Intelligence officers) in the 2018 Salisbury Poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal. The group also exposed Russia's role in Alexei Navalny's 2020 poisoning. Using phone metadata, travel records, and other public data, they exposed a team of operatives who had closely monitored Navalny prior to the attack. The investigation led to significant international attention and sanctions against those implicated.

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At a time of rising disinformation and repression of independent media I'm proud to have been part of the Trust's increasing support to public interest journalism, particularly in Europe and Eurasia. Our support has included funding medical and safety equipment to reporters on the frontline in Ukraine, legal funds to secure the release of a prominent Turkish writer from prison and much-valued core support to impactful media in fragile democracies such as Direkt 36 in Hungary, TV8 in Moldova and KRIK in Serbia.

Janek Lasocki  
SRT Senior Programme Officer for Open Societies

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We are sincerely grateful to the Sigrid Rausing Trust for having supported us so generously over the last years. SRT was one of the first funders to believe in the importance of our work and their support has been fundamental to Bellingcat's development over the years. It allowed us to grow from a small, volunteer-driven project into a global organisation pioneering open-source investigations. Their funding didn't just help us build capacity; it gave us the space to experiment, take risks, and set new standards for what civil society can achieve in the digital age.

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Eliot Higgins  
Founder and Creative Director of Bellingcat

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Sigrid Rausing Trust was one of the first major donors who believed in Bellingcat's work and gave us unrestricted (core) funding. SRT was also the first donor who really understood the potential, but also the challenges of open-source investigative research and publications and especially the intersection with journalism, tech and community. A very good example was Fabien's guidance very early on to establish clear editorial standards and principles, as well as principles for ethical data collection. This guidance and funding resulted in setting up a strong editorial team at our organisation which massively improved the quality of the publications. Thank you for the continuous support, critical questions, guidance to professionalize and become even better and for the trust in our work!

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Dessi Lange-Damianova  
Chief Operating Officer, Bellingcat

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Hope not Hate monitors far right and other forms of extremism in Britain. Established in 1992, the group uses research, education and public engagement to challenge mistrust and racism, helping to build communities that are inclusive, celebrate shared identities and are resilient to communal hostility.

The group has been instrumental in exposing and countering far-right groups, including the British National Party (BNP), the English Defence League (EDL), and more recently, online extremist networks. Through extensive investigations and public awareness campaigns, it has disrupted hate groups' recruitment efforts and weakened their influence in the UK.

The Trust also funds the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). whose investigative journalism exposes global corruption networks.

Founded in 2006, OCCRP is a network of more than 24 non-profit investigative centres, over 160 journalists, and major news centres. It conducts transnational investigative reporting and promotes technology-based approaches to exposing organised crime and corruption worldwide.

OCCRP has been involved in several high-level international investigations. One such example was Cyprus Confidential, a consortium of journalists that revealed in 2023 extensive evidence of corruption and money-laundering in Cyprus. Evidence showed that assets of hundreds of millions of Euros belonging to anti-democratic individuals had been transferred through six Cypriot financial service providers, including funds from sanctioned Russian oligarchs in the wake of Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. OCCRP also contributed to the 2021 Pegasus Project, international research that revealed certain governments' espionage on journalists, opposition politicians, activists, business-people and others using the private Pegasus spyware developed by the Israeli technology and cyber-arms company NSO Group.



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On behalf of everyone at Hope not Hate I'd like to congratulate the Sigrid Rausing Trust on reaching this important 30-year milestone. We are just one of many organisations that have benefited from the generosity of the Trust and the support provided by its staff over the past decade.

SRT funding has provided us core organisational support. It has allowed me and the others in the senior team to focus our energies on building the organisation and delivering on our vital work in communities up and down the country. In addition to supporting part of my own salary, the SRT grant has allowed us to employ an Operations and Development worker who has ensured that staff are properly supported, we are compliant with all regulatory authorities and have the best working practices and policies in place. Given the difficult nature of our work, ensuring the well-being and safety of our staff has been absolutely essential.

With the world more precarious than ever and the forces of division and hatred increasingly confident, we are thankful for working with SRT in its quest to build a fairer and more equal society.

Nick Lowles  
Director, hope not hate

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The Sigrid Rausing Trust has supported not only OCCRP but also many of the leading independent media centres in our network. Its stable support for our field for over a decade has been critical in the generational fight against state capture and the undermining of democracy through corruption. The Trust has helped those fighting this battle feel more safe and secure, making the challenges our reporters face more manageable. When I think of those few donors who have been with OCCRP for a number of years, SRT stands out not only for its steadfast support, but for its flexibility and willingness to listen and back new approaches. It is rare to have donors work as true partners — and friends. We consider SRT and the people there to be an important part of our success over the years.

Drew Sullivan

Co-Founder and Publisher, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)

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## THE CHAIR'S FUND

In the Chair's Fund, there is flexibility to support a small number of charitable organisations whose work is outside the focus of our thematic programmes, but which meets the Trust's wider philanthropic remit. This includes medical research.

Another area where the Trust has been able to have impact through the Chair's Fund grants, is that of literacy. English PEN, founded in 1921, is one of the world's oldest human rights organisations. It champions the freedom to write and to read around the world by supporting writers at risk and campaigning for freedom of expression nationally and internationally.

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When I think of SRT, I think of an appetite and willingness to be bold, transformative and values-led – responding to where funding is most needed; proudly supporting issues that are considered sensitive because they deal with fundamental rights; committing to geographies that are considered less relevant because they are far away and not in the daily news; and providing long-term general support that shows trust and helps organisations thrive.

Long may it continue. Congratulations!

Mabel van Oranje  
Former Trustee

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The support of the Trust has enabled UCL to establish a Neurogenetic Therapies Programme which provides an innovative platform for our researchers to advance – at scale and pace – treatments for neurodegenerative diseases.

The unrestricted nature of the funding streamlines processes and promotes the rapid adoption of promising, scientifically robust projects with real potential to change the neurology landscape.

Rapid developments in gene-based research that were a major factor in the UK Government's decision in 2024 to provide £49.9 million in new funding for a UK-wide network for dementia clinical trials, to be led by UCL academic Professor Cath Mummery.

That is a remarkable illustration of how visionary philanthropy can propel us to new heights in a field which is in the midst of a scientific revolution, with increasing translation of research into clinical treatments and approval of the first disease-modifying therapies for Alzheimer's disease.

And our work with the Sigrid Rausing Trust is not only for the here and now: the Trust's support for the Mary Douglas Research Scholarships at UCL allows us to nurture the next generation of anthropologists, opening the door for the brightest minds to create and refine their own knowledge for decades to come.

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Dr Michael Spence  
President and Provost, UCL

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In a year marked by escalating global crises, freedom of expression – and the essential connection between literature and human rights – has never been more critical, nor more under threat. Freedom of expression remains one of the first casualties of conflict – as the founders of PEN knew well, and as we continue to see today. English PEN remains determined in our defence of this essential right and, in response to turmoil across the world, we continue to engage in urgent campaigning efforts. Support from the Sigrid Rausing Trust has been critical in helping us to deliver our mission, including supporting individual writers at risk and campaigning for wider, national issues freedom of expression, creating platforms to amplify the diversity of voices of writers and readers who may otherwise be marginalised, and developing strategic intervention opportunities to encourage diversity in the literary landscape.

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Daniel Gorman  
Director, English PEN

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Managing the Chair's Fund, I have been lucky to work with a range of exceptional and impactful groups: Team Domenica's support of young people with learning disabilities; Ikamva Labantu's steady, wholistic care for the Khayelitsha community in Cape Town; 30 Birds Foundation's persistent, heroic pursuit of education for Afghan girls; and Doctors without Borders (MSF), which dares to deliver medical care in the world's most dangerous contexts. Yet, for me, the tiniest example holds the most promise – stem cells housed in UCL's neuroscience labs. These may be key to new, ground-breaking treatments for Alzheimer's Disease and other forms of dementia. They offer long-awaited hope for patients, and present a potent example of the difference the Trust's grant-making can make. Agile and unbound, philanthropy has the power to unlock potential across a range of themes. I'm interested in what our Chair and Trustees will choose to focus on next, and I'm grateful to work with them and with such inspiring groups.

Robin Nobel  
SRT Programme Manager for Chair's Gifts

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## THE ARTS

The Trust created a programme for Art, originally guest-curated by Ruthie Rogers, and later rolled into our regular programmes.

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It is without exaggeration that I say that 32° East would not be where it is without the Sigrid Rausing Trust. Receiving multi-year unrestricted funding gave us the freedom to be ambitious and dream big. Our building, the first purpose-built art centre in Kampala, Uganda would not exist in its current form without the support of the Trust. With this funding we were able to think long-term, be laser focused on our vision, and receive the gift of saying no to other project-based funding that would have diverted time and energy away from our goal.

Their funding over the years has also made me an advocate for a different kind of relationship with funders, because I now know what is possible when grantees are given the necessary resources to achieve their goals.

Teesa Bahana  
32° East, Uganda

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Art studios in 32 Degrees East, Uganda, ca 2023 © 32 DEGREES EAST

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I have looked with admiration and respect at the Sigrid Rausing Trust and the work they do – on human rights, freedom of expression and access to justice. Issues always which have always been relevant, but never more so than now. In 2018 the Trust approached me to act as guest curator for a year on a new programme for the arts in the Trust: on the basis that whether music, film, writing or dance, the arts are a human right, showing us the world in a new way. At the time, I was living in Mexico and so based research on the United States and South America. Together with Teresa Drace-Francis, the Trust's Senior Programme Officer for Arts, I looked for projects led by artists, building new kinds of spaces for communities to be together and imagining new political and social realities.

In Mexico, Alfonso Cuaron, director of *Y tu mama tambien* and *Roma*, introduced us to Ambulante, an organisation training women and indigenous communities to tell their own stories on film.

We met Las Nietas de Nono in Puerto Rico: two self-taught sisters who have taken over a school closed by the US government, building a community of artistic exchange. They grow indigenous plants for cooking and medicinal traditions, working with all generations from children to grandmothers. Here is what they said:

‘The support of the Sigrid Rausing Trust strengthened our community’s efforts to recover after the devastating Hurricane María and the abrupt closure of public schools in Puerto Rico— both of which occurred in the same year and had overwhelming effects. The trust they placed in the community to respond to this crisis with dignity and to establish a project centered on art, health,

culture, and the environment—one that truly met the needs of the people—gave us the momentum to continue imagining and nurturing processes of social transformation.

In New York City the Centre for Urban Pedagogy collaborates with designers, educators, advocates, students, and communities to make educational tools demystifying complex policy and - e.g., beautiful posters to put under refugees' doors informing them of their rights. The tools created are used by organisers and educators all over New York City and beyond to help their constituents advocate for their own community needs.

We discovered Utah Diné Bikéyah, an organisation working with five indigenous groups trying to protect the sacred ancestral lands of indigenous communities in the state of Utah, including Bears' Ears, home to five tribes: Navajo, Hopi, Zuni, Ute Mountain Ute, and Uintah Ouray Ute.

The actress Anna Deveare Smith's Pipeline Project, helps young women living in poverty across the US to tell their stories through theatre. These are just a few of the projects we supported during this time.

Attending the meetings of the Trust, discussing issues of funding, grants and expanding into new areas was a privilege, listening to compelling reports from people on the ground in Latvia, Lebanon, Ukraine or Uganda. Most of all, the true privilege was watching Sigrid Rausing at work: curious, rigorous, principled and always focused on the people who were carrying out the work of her vision for a fair society and a better world.”

Ruthie Rogers  
Former Trustee

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## CRITICISM

The Trust has been criticised from time to time by the conservative press, as Sigrid Rausing's letter to the Sunday Times below shows. The longstanding attempt to undermine international courts and the legal framework of human rights agreements has not, unfortunately, gone away.

Sunday Times November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Dear Sir,

Re: 'Human Rights Queen Spends £20m a year fighting cases', November 20th, 2011

Nicholas Hellen's article states that I am 'lavishing £20m a year on lawyers and groups committed to protecting the primacy of the European Court of Human Rights over British law'. That is wrong, as he knows. My support for the groups that he describes in his article represent only a small part of the annual budget for the Trust – our programmes and grantees are clearly stated on our website. He cites large grants without explaining that those grants are either 3-year grants, or the total amount of grants awarded to organisations over a number of years.

Contrary to the implication in his article, Hellen is also aware, because I told him so, that I support the reform of the European Court of Human Rights, and the UK government's role in the reform process.

In this context, he particularly singles out our grants to Interights and mentions 3 of their cases. All are important, but the last one, that of Abu Zubaydah, a Guantanamo detainee, is particularly so – it concerns the responsibility of Lithuania for his detention, torture and ill treatment at a secret detention centre in that country. Hellen goes on to say that ‘Strasbourg’s power in Britain could be curbed by the government, however’. He cites Ken Clarke, justice secretary, who has stated that the court is about to be reformed so that it handles only, ‘serious human rights issues of the kind that require an international court’. The Zubaydah case, however, is of international importance, and would certainly be heard, even in a reformed court of human rights.

We have just lived through a decade of the War on Terror, when human rights and the Geneva Convention were flouted repeatedly. It is worth remembering that probably hundreds of Iraqi detainees were tortured to death by Americans – we may never get the true picture of what happened in the fog of war. We know enough, however, to know that it was illegal and immoral. Britain, too, is culpable – quite how much we don’t yet know. Treating human rights as irritating bureaucratic obstacles to British democracy is demeaning to the victims of human rights abuses everywhere and trivialises the European effort to uphold human rights globally.



The Trust has also been criticised from the left, most recently (2025) by South African journalist Gillian Schutte, in connection with the case of sexual harassment against Judge President Selby Mbenenge. Schutte claims, without any evidence, that groups working against sexual harassment and corruption in South Africa were in fact part of a co-ordinated liberal donor conspiracy aiming for political control:

‘GroundUp, Daily Maverick, News24, and amaBhungane operate within an interconnected media ecosystem sustained by powerful donor networks including Open Society Foundations, Luminate (Pierre Omidyar’s so-called democracy franchise), the Sigrid Rausing Trust, the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust, and USAID-linked programmes. These institutions have long histories of advancing soft-power agendas under the guise of civil society strengthening. Between 2016 and 2018, this ecosystem mobilised a highly selective anti-corruption narrative to delegitimise the Zuma administration, executing what increasingly appears to have been a donor-orchestrated regime-change operation. The strategic use of corruption discourse under the banner of constitutional defence allowed donor media and NGO actors to entrench liberal hegemony while masking deeper geopolitical interests.’<sup>16</sup>

The idea that SRT’s funding was part of a concerted effort to execute regime change is obviously a false conspiracy theory. The staff and Trustees had no such conversations with other funders, or indeed with anyone. But the question of how far charitable foundations should influence policy is complex. What does ‘public interest’ – the

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<sup>16</sup> Gillian Schutte ‘Five Truths in Lawfare and the Weaponisation of the Judicial Conduct Tribunal of Judge President Selby Mbenenge’ Weekend Argus July 4, 2025

ultimate *raison d'être* for the lenient taxes on charitable funds - look like in an era when opinion on every issue, from migration or the preservation of nature to fluoride in the water or access to vaccines is politically divisive? We talk about being guided by the evidence, but science won't necessarily help us frame the questions. Is fluoride in the water a right or an imposition? That depends on your point of view not only of the benefit or toxicity of that substance, but also on the role of government itself.

Human rights groups tend to be critical of governments. They have traditionally seen their role as holding governments to account, not fixing problems. From time to time, they have therefore become associated with opposition politicians in various countries. Severely repressive societies like Iran or North Korea have no political opposition or human rights groups within their borders. Those groups or parties - in so far as they exist at all- are in exile, funded from abroad. Many illiberal, corrupt or authoritarian democracies, however, do still have a legal and fiscal niche for human rights groups, however precarious. Individual human rights defenders and members of such groups risk prison and/or political violence, while the groups themselves risk being registered as a foreign agent or dissolution.

The niche for such groups in fragile democracies was usually established within the last twenty or thirty years and often has no great support from the population. That was not the case in South Africa, where a lively civil society was of long duration, despite political repression in the apartheid era. The human rights community in South Africa is firmly guided by the Constitution and the rule of law, not opposition politics. In other countries, however, human rights groups, funded from abroad, may be deemed by critics to have effectively become an opposition, with little support from within. In the US, all political movements rely on a charitable hinterland of churches and community groups. In that scenario, charitable foundations sometimes fund work strongly associated with the opposition (or indeed the ruling party), raising questions about political impartiality, an issue both for the IRS and for the public. But the same is true in most countries. Charitable trusts need a strong moral compass to navigate questions of democratic accountability,

maintain legitimacy and – ultimately - justify generous tax benefits. Impartiality - not always easy to maintain in an increasingly polarised society - is essential to that process.

In the case of South Africa or any other fragile democracy, funding independent media to investigate corruption can certainly be made to look like a ‘regime-change operation’ when the government in question is held to account for corrupt practices, but exposing malpractice and corruption is clearly still in the public interest, as long as editorial independence is maintained.

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SRT’s grant contracts contain strong clauses prohibiting our grantees from publishing material promoting or glorifying political violence. If they do, we consider the contract breached. Following the Hamas atrocities on October 7<sup>th</sup>, we cancelled a handful of grants for breach of contract on the grounds that they had published material celebrating the attacks in the name of political solidarity. Those groups, some of which had emerged from the Arab spring, were not advocating for human rights – they were celebrating the Palestinian armed struggle, targeting civilians, using any means at their disposal.

Even if our own contracts had not contained these clauses, Charity Commission guidance prohibits any UK charity from supporting groups promoting such materials:

To comply with the law, including counter-terrorism legislation and criminal law, you must ensure your charity’s activities do not: promote unlawful violence or hatred on the grounds of race, religion or sexual orientation; encourage or glorify terrorism; or incite criminal acts or public order offences.

The cancellations were, of course, controversial. Sigrid Rausing explains her reasoning in more detail in the paper below. ■

# HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE CELEBRATION OF RESISTANCE

*By Sigrid Rausing*

I founded a charitable trust nearly 30 years ago, working on issues such as torture, conditions of detention, refugees and scholars at risk, freedom of expression, LGBT rights, and sexual violence in conflict. We fund other causes, too, but human rights is our oldest programme, and our staff and board's area of expertise. We enter into long-term partnerships with our grantees, based on trust and shared values. Language – the only way to gauge those values – is important to us: we ask for clarity and brevity in funding applications and reports, and mistrust inflated mission and vision statements. More importantly, we have strong clauses in our grant contracts requiring grantees to abstain from using incendiary language that may promote violence.

From time to time, we check our grantees' websites and social media accounts. After the October 7th atrocities, a handful – only five out of some 400 – had posted disturbing material. A group working on social and economic rights in Tunisia expressed 'pride' in the Hamas action. Another one called for 'support for the guerrilla Palestinian people in their war against the Zionist entity', which, they said, '... was shaken due to the action of the Palestinian resistance [...] invading the occupied lands and Zionist settlements'. A media group in Lebanon described the Hamas action as 'resistance' to 'colonisation', referred to the murdered civilians as 'settlers' and dismissed Israeli information about the Hamas' atrocities as 'lies'. The outlier, if only in terms of geography, was a women's group in Canada that almost immediately termed Israel's actions 'genocidal' and described the country as a 'settler colonialist white-supremacist

state'. The statement ended with an echo of UN resolutions, an affirmation of '...the right of all oppressed peoples to self-determine their resistance', a phrase which, given the context of the piece, in our view condoned the Hamas atrocities.

Atrocities of civilians is clearly contrary to human rights and international humanitarian law, and we cancelled the grants to the groups in question. It wasn't a hard decision to make, but it drew criticism from activists in the US who seemed to have wilfully misunderstood what we did and why. Here is Vu Le, philanthropy critic, on LinkedIn:

Defunding organizations that are speaking up against gen@cide is the worst of all crappy funding practices. I hope The Sigrid Rausing Trust will find its moral compass and courage to stand with grantees who are speaking for Palestinians' human rights and liberation.

Kavita Ramdas, a women's rights activist, lauded this post for its 'unambiguous call for clarity', and said that SRT seemed to have become 'a funding organization that is actually unclear about what it means to stand up for human rights and international law and for all lives, in every part of the world'.

I have been wondering since I saw these posts how these activists and our former grantees understand human rights, a field whose practitioners used to be known, and should be known, for a rigorous adherence to truth and impartiality.

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In the early 1990s the field of human rights was informed primarily by law and by evolving methods of collecting and recording evidence and testimony. It was a movement that elevated impartiality to a principle – the degree to which human rights groups were attacked from both the left and the right was a point of pride. It was also a time for hope: repressing regimes were falling, and countries all

over the world were transitioning to democracy. But the hope for democracy was dimmed by ethnic cleansing and genocide in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and 9/11. The War on Terror followed, including indefinite detention and harsh interrogations of terror suspects.

The hardening of the American right led many to associate human rights with being soft on terror. In Britain, Tony Blair and others were complicit in human rights transgressions through extreme rendition, the practice of transporting terror suspects to countries where torture took place with impunity. They too abandoned the principles of human rights, and the term itself came increasingly to be associated with the hard left of the party, Jeremy Corbyn and the Stop the War coalition, which included groups with ambiguous or even sympathetic stances on terrorism.

That shift to the left transformed the idea – and reputation – of human rights. People sympathetic to Hamas, or, more broadly, the Palestinian cause, often claim that anti-Zionism and antisemitism are distinct, and point to Jewish allies in support of their view, while defenders of Israel see antisemitism and anti-Zionism as essentially the same. Certainly, the rage that Israel uniquely evokes is part of a century of political manipulation, a cold war game of words ensnared in old wars and hate speech. The 1948 Soviet campaign against so-called ‘rootless cosmopolitans’ was openly antisemitic, as was the infamous 1952 so-called Doctors’ Plot. The leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were shot in the cellars of the Lubyanka that same year, accused, *inter alia*, of ‘disloyalty’, ‘bourgeois nationalism’, and ‘cosmopolitanism’. Anti-Zionism and antisemitism were one in the Czechoslovakian anti-Jewish purge culminating in the Slansky trial, which – incidentally – included a charge of collaboration with ‘Zionist-Imperialist’ Americans, a phrase which resonates with the left today. I don’t believe that most of the protestors and campus occupiers who were active last year are personally antisemitic, but it’s hard to find the putative separation between anti-Zionism and antisemitism convincing when the two are so clearly entangled in history.



The War on Terror brought human rights practitioners and terror suspects together. Human rights lawyers and organisations –some of them our grantees - helped terror suspects swept up in the War on Terror. Some were innocent while others were clearly not, but for human rights lawyers the point was more to do with defending the principles of due legal process and a ban on torture (legitimised by President Bush using a dubious loophole) than it was defending the innocent: indeed, one of the human rights points made at that time was that the detainees, guilty or not, could not be tried in the US, because confessions had been forced under torture, and as such were not admissible in American courts.

We haven't, in my view, discussed the legal and ethical transgressions of the War on Terror enough. It proved, if proof were needed, that democracies are not immune to the dirty practice of torture, that ritual merging interrogation and punishment. The CIA contracted psychologists to devise a new playbook for torture - or 'harsh interrogation techniques' as the euphemism had it – much as they had done in the 1950s. Humiliation, sleep deprivation, loud music, hooding, shackling, beatings, confinement in small spaces, electric shocks, threats: these acts are not random, they are learnt and perpetrated by ordinary people. The detainees were deemed illegal combatants (that dubious loophole), and therefore beyond the Geneva convention, in legal limbo.

After Bush, President Obama drew his notorious line in the sand, and nothing much was said after that. The right eventually moved on to immigration as a grievance narrative, then Trans rights. But the support that human rights groups gave to terror suspects may have helped to legitimise a dubious discourse mixing the vocabulary of human rights and social justice with troubling apologies for terrorism and dark anti-Zionist slogans. I am not saying that the terror suspects should have been abandoned. Without human rights lawyers, many would have disappeared into black holes beyond legal reach, and some were innocent victims, sold to CIA operatives in a grisly human trade. Human rights groups exposed systematic torture and indefinite detention, and gave legal advice to men held at Guantanamo Bay and other sites. But the language of human rights seeped into groups

that were not actually committed to the fundamental human rights principle of impartiality, and more comfortable with associated but distinct discourses of social justice, intersectionality, critical race theory, de-colonisation and anti-Zionism.



Politics has shifted, and ideas we once took for granted are slipping through our fingers. The right has abandoned human rights, associating it with judicial over-reach and global-elite media control (criticisms, incidentally, once voiced on the left). Parts of the left, meanwhile, have appropriated the discourse of human rights without fully signing up to all its principles, not least that of political impartiality. The borderline between political groups (that can't receive charitable funding) and civil society groups (that can) has arguably become thinner than it should be.

Meanwhile, the BBC version of impartiality, placing broadcasters in the artificial centre of every argument, without reference to an ethical framework of human rights or seemingly anything at all except occasionally 'British values', is deeply problematic, and has degraded the very idea of what impartiality is. The centre by itself, without its affiliated intellectual history, is nothing but an empty white space.

Impartiality, of course, doesn't guarantee clarity, but a lack of impartiality will almost certainly lead to a degree of obfuscation in the name of ideology. And all ideological language leaches originality, that quality of vividness and the unexpected that makes you take notice of what is actually being said. I carried out research for my PhD on a former collective farm in Estonia in 1993-4, a time of extremely rapid social transformation, and analysed language use and slogans for my thesis. I am still interested in political language, and particularly in how it fragments under pressure into set expressions flagging allegiance. The tired phrases of our former grantees quoted above; 'settler colonialist white-supremacist state' or 'the Zionist entity', are slogans, a form of propaganda that came to be broadly understood as meaningless and/or a source of ironic jokes in the Soviet Union. We get entangled in thorny definitions instead, self-defeating webs of

rigidly patrolled identity politics like the disturbing (if well-meaning) reflections on the degree to which Jews or Israelis are actually ‘white’. Some are and some aren’t, obviously, but we have stooped low indeed if a defence of Israel comes to rest on the degraded premise of racial classification. But then again, the words *settler/colonial/white supremacist* are not intended to reflect reality, exactly— they are a slur, a cut and paste insult lifted from other contexts. ‘As soon as certain topics are raised’, Orwell wrote in his seminal 1946 essay ‘Politics and the English Language’, ‘... [the] prose consists less and less of words chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more and more of phrases tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated hen-house.’

More importantly, the anti-Zionist criticism of Israel makes no distinction between political parties and movements within the country. All Jewish Israelis are deemed equally guilty, a blanket condemnation which judges the work of the political opposition and human rights movement within the country to be essentially meaningless.



The anti-colonial movements, and scholarly attempts to elucidate racism through the lens of colonisation, were (and are) important. But de-colonisation was also part of the Cold War. The Soviet doctrine of national liberation was soon mired in internal debates on tactics and terminology<sup>17</sup> but military and strategic support for the ANC, the PLO, and other groups engaging in so-called armed struggle – at times a euphemism for terrorism – continued, and the slogans of Soviet anti-Zionism clearly live on in segments of the far left focused on the struggle for Palestinian liberation. Other manifestations of this kind of language emerge from right-wing infiltration. Apartheid security police agent Craig Williamson – the man behind the murder of Ruth First, wife of SA Communist Party Joe Slovo, and others – told journalist Jonathan Ancer that he came up with the idea of positing a moral equivalence between Zionism and Apartheid. He and his colleagues knew the Americans wouldn’t like it and that half

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<sup>17</sup> Irina Filatova ‘The ANC and the Soviets’, published on PoliticsWeb in 2011

the Europeans probably wouldn't like it either, alienating them from the anti-racist movement.<sup>18</sup> It didn't quite work out that way, or if it did it was temporary. Earlier anti-Zionist activists had been somewhat discredited by the tarnished moral equivalent between the Star of David and the swastika, making a direct and obviously antisemitic link between Jews and Nazis. The softened version of linking Zionism with apartheid was more palatable, and the idea took off, entrenched, by now, within the UN and other bodies.

The discourse of the national liberation struggle, and the idea, legitimised by successive UN Resolutions, that Israel is an apartheid state, has been part of the Palestinian cause for a very long time. These notions gave credence to the idea of armed struggle, while at the same time quietly cementing the idea that because the cause was just, the Palestinian state-to-be would accord with the values of social justice. Mr Netanyahu's policies, including brutal war, blockades, support for violent settlers on the West Bank and attempts to undermine the judiciary, have been profoundly unjust, and deeply damaging to Israel. Gaza is ruined, and the government may have committed war crimes. But holding Israel to account should not imply a defence of Hamas, just as holding Hamas to account should not imply a defence of Israeli policies. The intensity of the political polarisation has led the right, not only in America, into supporting an ally using brutal methods to defend itself against existential enemies. For parts of the international left, by contrast, the emotional investment in national liberation dogma, and the idealisation – for want of a better word – of Palestinian politics has led some nations, activists, commentators and civil society groups outside Palestine to legitimise, deny or minimise the massacre of civilians on October 7th, a manipulation of the record that is deeply concerning, and contrary to human rights and international law.

It's important because these groups are embedded in a much larger context. The term mood music to describe the cultural context of extremist groups was criticised for a while, but there is no doubt that activists issuing apologies for Hamas are part of a culture of reflex anti-Israeli and anti-normalisation positions. It's probably

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<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Ancer (2022) Spy: Uncovering Craig Williamson

reasonable to speculate that some break out of that culture to harder positions, while others, more mindful of the meaning of human rights and the discipline of donor guidelines, hold back.

Greg Afinogenov, in the context of late 19th century Russian anarchist violence, writes this:

For every terrorist, there was a hanger-on; for every myth, there was a follower shaped by that myth. The number of active revolutionaries at the height of the populist movement in the 1870s and 1880s was at most a few thousand. In a country of eighty million people, they were as isolated from the majority of the population as they were from the ruling class that had produced most of them, but there was a much broader web of sympathiser and donors, often inspired by sensationalist depictions of revolutionaries in the press. Without those sympathisers, there would have been no movement.<sup>19</sup>

That is equally true today, and much of the support for anti-Zionist groups comes from the human rights field, which is now much bigger than it was in the early 1990s. Democratic backsliding and challenges to the rules-based order are taken seriously by donor countries. Britain alone spent some £1.37 billion in aid promoting democracy between 2015 and 2021, supporting causes such as democratic participation, elections, legislatures and political parties, media, human rights and women's rights.<sup>20</sup> Some of the funding goes to the same or similar groups to the ones we support, either directly, or more commonly via sub granters. Many of those groups, in turn, are supported by a wide range of donors, including different agencies within the EU, such as the EIDHR (the European Instrument for

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<sup>19</sup> Greg Afinogenov, 'Thank God for Dynamite': a review of *What Every Radical Should Know about State Repression: a guide for activists* by Victor Serge, and *Revolutionary Philanthropy: aid to political prisoners and exiles in late imperial Russia* by Stuart Finkel. London Review of Books vol 47, no 4, 6 March 2025

<sup>20</sup> [icai.independent.gov.uk](http://icai.independent.gov.uk)

Democracy and Human Rights), or NEAR (Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations). In addition - to mention just a handful - there's foreign aid like Swedish SIDA and aid budgets within governments such as the Norwegian and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or the French, Canadian and other equivalents. There's USAID (now frozen), various UN bodies, the Open Society Institutes, Oxfam Novib, the Rockefellers Brothers' Fund, the Oak Foundation and many others.

Western funding streams in the form of aid and philanthropy have endowed the label 'human rights' with a certain value. I don't mean to imply that human rights work is easy, or unimportant. There has been a resurgence of repression from Russia to China, brutal wars and atrocities, corruption, criminality and state capture. The increase in funding is tempered in many repressive environments by so called foreign agent laws requiring advocacy groups funded from abroad to register as 'foreign agents'. Sanction regimes make funding human rights in repressive nations more difficult than it should be. Defamation laws, including the criminalisation of defaming nations, have also been strengthened in many authoritarian countries. The practice of SLAPPs (Strategic Lawfare Against Public Participation), serial lawsuits issued by repressive states, oligarchs or heads of crime cartels and their associates targeting investigative journalists or activists is now common. In London, certain firms and lawyers have become known for managing the reputations of oligarchs and repressive regimes while others, often working pro bono, defend journalists and activists against unscrupulous lawsuits.

Private philanthropy earmarked for human rights amounted to some \$4.1 billion in 2019, according to the US-based Human Rights Funders Network.<sup>21</sup> Given that western nations have gradually incorporated more and more elements of the human rights paradigm into the strategy of their foreign aid, and given that the UN, too, is organised largely around those themes, human rights could be viewed as a success story. Swedish SIDA, for example, applies what is known as HRBA – a 'human rights-based approach' – to all its funding<sup>22</sup>,

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<sup>21</sup> See Human Rights Funders Network website

<sup>22</sup> See SIDA website

and the EU makes a point of putting good governance, democracy and the rule of law at the centre of their understanding of sustainable development.<sup>23</sup> USAID under President Biden ‘advocate[d] for rights-based approaches across USAID programming to promote inclusive and equitable local participation in decision-making’.<sup>24</sup>

Many left-leaning human rights groups, as we have seen, have moved away from the language of impartiality to a model of solidarity, which led some of them to publish apologies for civilian atrocities. But aid agencies, too, have tweaked the concept of human rights. SIDA, for example, now distinguishes between ‘rights holders’ – those ‘living in poverty and under oppression’ and ‘duty bearers’; ‘those with obligations to respect, protect, promote and fulfil human rights’. The tool PLANET organises the HRBA principles, an acronym for the Participation of rights-holders in all decisions; Links to human rights obligations (standards, recommendations and mechanisms); Accountability (of duty bearers); Non-discrimination and attention to marginalised people; Empowerment and Transparency.<sup>25</sup>

SIDA – and others – pose good questions and apply their experience well. But I do wonder about the distinction between *rights holders* and *duty bearers*, and whether the former term is just another word for poor and marginalised communities. SIDA’s dichotomy between those who hold rights and those who have a duty to uphold them, for all its mild and sensible language somehow sidesteps the key purpose of human rights – to protect all individuals against persecution or neglect perpetrated by states. The worst atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were revolutionary in nature – the Nazi death camps and wider system of concentration camps, the Gulag, the mass starvation of Ukraine, the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge, the Maoist cultural revolution and mass starvation, and the genocide of the Tutsis all targeted people perceived – to varying degrees – to be simultaneously privileged and subhuman. The motivation for systematic mass-murder is fuelled by grievance.

The International Human Rights Funders Network draw

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<sup>23</sup> See [international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu](http://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu) website

<sup>24</sup> See USAID website

<sup>25</sup> See SIDA website

radical conclusions in their analysis of human rights funding. Some 99% of it, they say, is controlled in the North, and 88% of the funds remain there. There is a ‘trust gap’, they argue, by which those with power (funders) apply their biased lens (race, gender, power) to the question of who can be trusted. Hope – for the IHRF – lies in grappling with the systematic power inequalities expressed in philanthropy.<sup>26</sup> Hope – for me – lies in a rigorous approach to language and to politics. But ‘hope’ might be the wrong word. *Realism* is, I think, a better one.

One of the issues of Granta magazine I edited is titled *The Map is not the Territory*. Alfred Korzybski coined the phrase in the early 1930s to illustrate the distinction between perception and reality. ‘A thing is a thing’, I wrote in my introduction, ‘not what is said of that thing: our subjective perception and description of reality are only clumsily and fleetingly aligned with objective reality.’ We perceive and we describe, back and forth, but words are not enough. Even the language of social justice and human rights can widen the distance between image and reality, real life and utopia, until disillusion sets in.



Nothing much happened after our bruising experience on LinkedIn. There were whispers and conversations behind closed doors. Some members of the International Human Rights Funders Network were said to be ‘uncomfortable’ about sharing a platform with us at a conference, so we withdrew – was that a cancellation or did we, in truth, cancel ourselves? We should have held our ground, I now think – we might have persuaded some of them that sympathy with a cause (or a people) can never justify violence against civilians. That clearly applies to both sides of this conflict. But terrorism is always wrong, and politically a dead end or worse. Remember the IRA, the Red Army Faction and others talking themselves into legitimating violence? Remember 9/11, and July 7; the murders at Charlie Hebdo, the murderous assault on Salman Rushdie and all the other Islamist

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<sup>26</sup> See the International Human Rights Funders Network website

attacks over the years? The massacre on October 7 stems from the same murky political tradition, and whatever words Hamas used to legitimise their action as they planned it, they could have been in no doubt that thousands of their own people would likely perish in the Israeli retribution. That, of course, was intentional: to provoke the state into showing its ‘fascist face’ (and attributing blame for the consequences) has always been the strategy of terrorism. The cynicism of that deliberate sacrifice is no cause for celebration. ■

# BELGRADE

OCTOBER 2024

*By Sigrid Rausing*

Belgrade shone at night; the logos of Microsoft and Huawei reflected in the black water of the Danube. By daylight the old town had looked tired and garish, beautiful buildings in need of renovation, graffiti, signs and pop music disfiguring what must once have been beautiful streets; a street and soundscape of weak regulation.

We met civil society groups, getting the kind of information known as *NGO data*, not entirely fact-checked but probably more or less true; for instance, that 90% of all property in Serbia is bought with cash, or that 25% of all construction is corrupt. That there is state surveillance of activists. That a billion Euros or so disappears every year. That 1.5 million people in Serbia have no access to clean drinking water, and that 25% of the population in mining areas have cancer. Is it all true? Probably, or something like it. So-called illiberal democracies are not dedicated to the public interest. Their governments care about gain, about ‘family values’, xenophobic rhetoric, polling, and foreign investment. Xenophobia would probably be more intense but few migrants – bar hundreds of thousands of Russians – seek permission to remain in Belgrade.

President Vucic has created what is known as a *stabilitocracy*, an autocratic government posing as a force dedicated to stability in a rough neighbourhood, and needing – therefore – certain concessions from pro-democracy nations. Vucic and his Ministers, many of whom have been rehabilitated from the dark Milosevic era, are playing all sides – primarily Russia, the EU, and China. Vucic himself was Minister of Information (1998-2000) during the last years of Milosevic’s reign, and banned, then, foreign TV networks, and



effectively censored the press. He claims to have changed, but the media and judiciary are still largely under state control, though his role model is clearly Orban rather than Putin, leaning more towards Europe than Russia. Activists and journalists do not die or disappear, and civil society has not been banned. It's also true that within the *stabilitocracy* there are so called 'islands of integrity'; officials who remain uncorrupted and create pockets of integrity around them. Islands of integrity spreading to the students.

Rents have doubled or trebled in Belgrade as a result of the Russian influx, and prices are now almost the same as in the West while salaries are much lower, but there seems to be little resentment against the Russians. They have their own business networks and their own stand-up comedians and restaurants and bars, and Serbs and Russians have a long historical, cultural and linguistic relationship.

There are three sensitive subjects in the country: Kosovo, Srebrenica, and Gay Pride.

The Serbian official narrative is that Serbia only ever participated in defensive wars – a manifestly fake narrative written into law. A mass grave of 753 bodies – Albanian Kosovans – was found in the grounds of a Serbian anti-terrorist unit in Belgrade, and more bodies have been found in other sites. They had been moved from Kosovo to Belgrade to avoid international drone detection, and disappeared, hidden, from public consciousness: 'No bodies, no proof', said Milosovic; a quote captured in a transcript.

The four-year siege of Sarajevo is largely ignored in the country, while the 78-day NATO bombing is heavily memorialised. 'We are not a genocidal nation' the new narrative proclaims, meaning, 'we will not accept responsibility for genocide', relying on a UN resolution that emphasises individual, not national, responsibility for genocide. In fact, only some 750 people died in the NATO bombardments, not the 5,000 or so the government claims. And over 100,000 people died in Bosnia Herzegovina. But comparing numbers of dead using words such as 'only' or 'over' is a morally ambiguous project. I am more interested in the

slogans of nationalism, the songs and language that promoted – and continue to promote – violence. ‘Knife, wire, Srebrenica’, is one such saying. ‘Who is saying, who is lying that Serbia is small’, another. And, ‘My father is a war criminal... try to convict him’.

The government, we learn, has created its own fake civil society, with names similar to real groups, and ‘cooperates’ with them. They move people to bolster their vote – some 55,000 were moved at the last election. Justice is delayed – legal complaints can be held up at a so-called ‘pre-research stage’ for months and years. It all seems frighteningly easy, this playbook of authoritarianism and state capture – what can possibly stop them?

The people, I suppose. The students. The ecological protests over the last few years were genuinely grassroots protests, beginning with villagers – grandmothers, they say, beaten by paid thugs- protesting micro-hydro plants destroying the rivers. The Rio Tinto lithium mining has been stopped for now but a court– presumably a Vučić strategy – just judged that the ban itself was unconstitutional, so Rio Tinto can try again. The area, in the name of car batteries and curbing emissions, would become what is known as a ‘sacrifice zone’, an ecological disaster area.

There is still some sort of accession process. But would the EU really want Serbia? It seems unlikely when they can’t even control Hungary. The rule of law is explicit in the EU project, and so is memorialising and understanding the legacy of genocide. In the case of Serbia memorialisation has been outsourced to a beleaguered – but not entirely repressed - civil society, men and women who search archives and records, convene meetings, educate school children and publish reports.

Prosecutions, meanwhile, have stalled; regional cooperation, ditto; reparations, ditto. Nearly 30 years after the Dayton peace agreement (November 1995), denialism and revisionism are growing. Victims in Bosnia demand persecutions, reparations, memorialisation and a promise that this will never happen again, but Bosnia itself is in deep crisis. There is little progress now, other than the fact that children born from rape are (belatedly) recognised. Out of some 20,000 rape victims only 1,000 or so got justice, and stigma around rape is still

an issue. There is less integration between ethnic groups now than at the time of the war, including anti-Serb sentiments in Croatia. Two hundred thousand Serbs were expelled from Croatia and Bosnia in 1995, and the date of ‘Operation Storm’ is a day of celebration there. ‘Our hand will get you even in Serbia’, Croatian nationalists say. ‘Kill the Croat so the Albanian doesn’t have a brother’, Serbian nationalists say.

Back in the day Milosovic asked the heads of organised crime cartels to build paramilitary units, to avoid accountability – brutal criminals who previously carried out robberies in Europe. Vucic is not doing that, but he has, arguably, managed to corrupt the west through heavy subsidies to foreign companies, such as paying all salaries for two years. The EU wants to avoid a regional war, but the tension in the Balkans is palpable. Vucic fuels nationalism, and can bring conflict anywhere and then ‘solve’ it – the old mafia strategy.

Freedom of Information requests used to be good strategy for NGO’s. Now they have to rely on sources and cross border work. Institutions simply ignore FOI requests and use SLAPPS (strategic lawsuits against public participation) regularly to control investigative journalism. Before 2021 the NGO’s used to win all SLAPPS; after that, the judges were changed, and activists started losing. Last autumn a prominent journalist faced a private criminal lawsuit following an investigation of the impartiality of judges – one judge sued on the basis of invasion of privacy. Now the journalist is a criminal defendant, and while a SLAPP means one day in court, a criminal suit means you have to be present every day for weeks. A work trip to Canada had to be postponed, and the journalist is now facing prison or a suspended conditional sentence –the condition being that he could not publish any written material for several years to come. Six embassies, several NGO’s and an EU representative showed up in court to follow the trial. There is such a thing as SLAPP-shaming; the psychological impact for journalists of becoming the story, not investigating the story. Where is hope?

‘I don’t have hope, I have commitment’, one of the people working for an NGO says. ■

PAY GRATEFUL AND EVERLASTING TRIBUTE, TO ALL FOREIGN NATIONALS ACROSS  
RAZEDOUSLY AND PASSIONATELY FOUGHT SIDE BY SIDE WITH THEIR BRITISH CO-  
FOR KING AND COUNTRY, DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR.



ARE YOU  
ONE OF  
KITCHENER'S  
OWN?

# BELFAST

APRIL 2025

*By Sigrid Rausing*

The city feels more Scottish more than Irish - signs and pounds and buses and taxis and British army pride and Empire and Commonwealth pride. The Orange marches will continue, I suppose, and the bonfires, immersed in symbols. The Loyalists may take up arms again. The curse of 800 years of conflict, people say, is a chronic condition by now. Brexit is a disaster because it imposes a border on counties where borders remind people of armed state control, bandits and murder. The Legacy Act is a sore point, and so is Keir Starmer's failure to repeal it.

I understood better after this trip that memorialisation itself can be deeply inflammatory. These are people still capable of throwing bags of shit on children for crossing over to another school. Streets fight streets; communities intimidate their own members, former paramilitaries on both sides turn to drug-running, trafficking, and prostitution. A few people turn to community activism –there's a bit of money in activism too, good money for good work, a pathway to good relations. The women knit in groups and gossip and talk intergenerational trauma under bleak grey skies. Sometimes women from hostile communities meet to talk about matters particular to women in conflict.

There are children on the poor streets, with footballs. A man was mowing a lawn next to a peace wall covered in international solidarity murals. On the other street are signs of glory and empire and photographs of the fallen. Falls and Shankill, the notorious streets

where former prisoners lead groups of tourists to behold the imagery and to hear the stories.

I remember the two women, one an IRA quartermaster, the other the widow of a Catholic man seen as a traitor. The IRA made him into a human bomb, driving - I assume knowingly - to his death. The bomb in his truck was set off by remote control, and many others died with him. His widow hears his voice, hears whispers from behind the wall. She narrates a dramatized version of the story together with the IRA gunrunner, who was saved by a brain haemorrhage from planting a bomb. She would, she says, probably have been shot by the British - the plot had been betrayed by an informer. There is affection between them, a shine of performance and pride. A hard life. But a source of pride, if you get to tell it to an audience and fellow peacebuilders from other communities in conflict; Bosnia, Myanmar, Nepal, Colombia, Israel/Palestine.

They are not optimistic, the people we met. They are honed by conflict, realistic about what they can do, and the impact they can have. But they know each other well and listen with respect and openness. That's not nothing. ■





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Stormont, Belfast © SIGRID RAUSING

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When I joined SRT, I used the first year to read and learn about each of the around 400 grantees we were supporting at the time. This was made easy by the thorough grantee reviews compiled by the staff of the Trust and all the supporting documents and histories that came with the annual review of each grantee as we progressed along the year.

I remember Sunday afternoons as the seasons changed through my office window, sitting at my desk and reading, one by one, about these different grantee organisations across the world. Some big, some small, but all working in different challenging conditions and with different agendas, budgets, objectives and missions. Some I already knew of, but now, with these files, I would know their finances, donors, the make-up of their board, staff, start-up history and hopeful plans, in far more detail. Others I knew nothing about and would turn pages surprised to read about groups in places I'd never been or knew existed, with activists and staff I'd never meet, busy protecting vulnerable people and fighting for rights others wanted to ignore.

Each grantee was a story of human courage and the small collective of people somewhere in the world doing something – sometimes defiant, sometimes small quiet steps on a long journey - determined to fight for justice, or to live safe, dignified lives. Just like reading a collection of short stories every Sunday, I would sometimes find myself crying, or excited and exhilarated, then dumbfounded and shocked. Marvelling at the audacity, bravery, and resilience of people, and by the harshness, brutality and cruelty of nations and systems.

When I got to the end of that year of Sundays, I was most surprised by how happy it had made me to know this work was being done every day, somewhere in the world. In reading those reports and files, I had the privilege of being able know about and to support these people. It gave me a tremendous feeling of hope, and faith in humanity, and still does whenever I think of them. They are, in the pursuit of all their different missions, collectively, the best of what we can be. Kind to one another.

Hosh Ibrahim  
Former Trustee

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**A**s the Sigrid Rausing Trust marks its 30th anniversary, the global human rights landscape faces profound uncertainty. The rise of authoritarian populism, the weakening of international norms and global disinformation have all placed human rights practice and institutions under pressure. Perhaps most starkly, President Trump has put in place a systematic rollback of human rights and environmental priorities—not only in the sharp curtailment of international aid funding, but also domestically. Key US government programs that once supported civil rights, women’s rights, environmental protection and independent media have been dismantled or defunded. This shift has left a vacuum that civil society and independent funders have struggled to fill.

For the Trust, the current context has underscored the urgency of principled, flexible grant-making—particularly in fragile or hostile political environments. For a long time, we have focused on regions particularly hard hit by the US cuts – the former Soviet Union, the Balkans, and Turkey. But the political polarisation has also prompted a turn inward by the Trust, toward human rights challenges closer to home. Across the UK and Europe, rising hate speech, anti-migrant sentiment, democratic backsliding, community division and entrenched inequality have demanded renewed attention.

One area of particular concern is community conflict and injustice. Recent riots in the UK and the growth of extremism here and in the rest of Europe have led the Trust to recognise the importance of strengthening local voices and groups fostering social cohesion, resisting division. SRT has therefore invested in grassroots organisations tackling systemic issues, and building more cohesive communities. Whether in rural South Africa, post-industrial northern England, or in the countries of the former Soviet Union, the Trust’s work affirms a simple but powerful principle: lasting human rights change begins with those most affected.

As it enters its fourth decade, the Trust remains consistent in its commitment to dignity, justice, freedom and core liberal values. The path forward may be uncertain—but the Trust’s values, the commitment of its staff and trustees, and the courage of its grantees, offer a clear direction for what lies ahead.

# AFTERWORD

by *Sigrid Rausing*

**B**ack to where we started - Michael Shuman, and his article in *The Nation*. His critique changed progressive grant-making, transforming the field from – generally - one-year project grants to long-term core grants, with short applications and minimal reporting requirements. Now I wonder if we lost sight, in that process, of what we were funding, and why? Did we allow the groups too much leeway in setting agendas? Who influenced them, in the absence of liberal funders? Was there a drift towards pieties and received wisdom, a performative rather than a substantive approach to change, and a tendency to reproduce the language of other groups and other foundations? A process of globalisation, even, with all its brave and shiny words; its *visions* and its *missions* promising far more than could realistically be done.

Did we lose sight of the most important thing, seeing and analysing the world as it actually is?

For the last couple of years, I have felt a sense of unease. It wasn't just the ugly anti-Zionism of a handful of grantees with their ill-concealed glee at the news of the October 7th civilian massacre. It was bigger than that, and more pervasive - a merger of identity politics with core human rights values. A tendency to move from being active in the world to focusing on internal resilience and self-care. The cancel culture policing of language and views, censoring people for minor slips, rather than focusing on more important issues.

There was a kind of logic to it. If we – progressive philanthropists - were engaged with building organisations, those organisations had to be pure, and we ourselves had to be pure; aware of our power, and respectful of the idea that as funders we were part of the problem, not

the solution. At the same time, if we were concerned with governance, then western-style governance had to be a goal for all groups, whatever own cultural traditions mandated. No wonder it often felt pro forma: so many words and phrases, a dogma of good governance used more for internal policing than for creative thought.

And to what end did all those groups – funders and grantees – perfect themselves? What actually was being achieved? I don't know. We took progress on trust, but frankly the big picture was a bit opaque, because – following Shuman – we didn't ask for detailed reports. We had become very good at assessing groups before giving a grant, but when it came to understanding the work they did, or – more importantly – identifying the problems we wanted to address in the world, we were not so good. When I discovered that none of our trustees could answer the simple question of what grant or group they were most excited about, I realised that a connection between trustees and grantees had been lost. Preoccupied with our own process we had lost sight of who we were funding and why.

Looking back, I think we were derailed by the pandemic, that year of unfathomable illness and death. It was so hard to communicate on screens in the beginning, and then gradually it became easier and easier until real meetings felt like the hard thing.

And then October 7th, and the shocking realisation that a few of our grantees were, in effect, Hamas sympathisers. That knowledge galvanised change. We cancelled grants where our contract had been breached. We restored Trustee control of grant-making, and closed three programmes. We no longer make 3-year grants, and we are halving the numbers of grantees over the next few years, remembering Michael Shuman's most important insight: it's easy, as a grant-maker, to spread yourself too thin, giving too little, as he put it, to too many.

We are re-creating our original culture of cut-to-the-chase flexibility, alongside more trustee travel to meet the groups we fund. We want to simplify our process, and re-motivate our giving. But most of all, I think we need to come back to that most important thing: perceiving and analysing the world as it actually is. At the time of writing, the brutal wars in Gaza and in Ukraine carry on, a nightly

choreography of shells and drone attacks, images of broken buildings, of body bags and firemen, of frenzied grief and stoic despair. Gaza lies in ruins, people scrabbling for food at risk of being killed at sites of distribution. The Russian army use systematic torture and sexual humiliation at their sites of detention, and send wave after wave of expendable young men to the front, many of them freed prisoners or citizens of other countries.

Enough.

Enough. Like a fever, these conflicts must eventually break. Cities will be re-built, the last war-dead will be buried, tribunals will be set up, evidence will be found and heard, books will be written by people trying to establish what actually happened.

I wrote about truth in my last SRT report:

Truth is the implicit lodestar in the human rights endeavour – the patient and meticulous search for evidence, the gathering of facts and testimony.

The work of courts and commissions to address crimes against humanity and reparative justice for victims are all based on the fundamental idea of sorting truth from untruth; fact from denial or exaggeration. If we lose respect for impartiality and truth we lose everything.

Let's not forget truth. And compassion. And hope.

Our grantees fight corruption, discrimination, environmental destruction and abuses of state power. For a long time, it has felt like a losing battle, but in Serbia and Hungary people are marching for freedom. A hundred thousand people marched for Pride this year in Budapest, and for each person present at the march there are probably another ten or twenty or fifty or a hundred who believe in the rights and freedoms the demonstrators marched for.

A note of hope.

Best to end there.

My thanks go to all our staff and Trustees, past and present. Special thanks to Josh Mailman, my inspiration in the early years, and Andrew Puddephatt, who, more than anyone, has helped to shape the ethos of the Trust.

Sigrid Rausing

# THE SIGRID RAUSING TRUST

1995-2025

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