

COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

CHR

*The National
Academies of*

SCIENCES
ENGINEERING
MEDICINE

Year in Review

2019

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

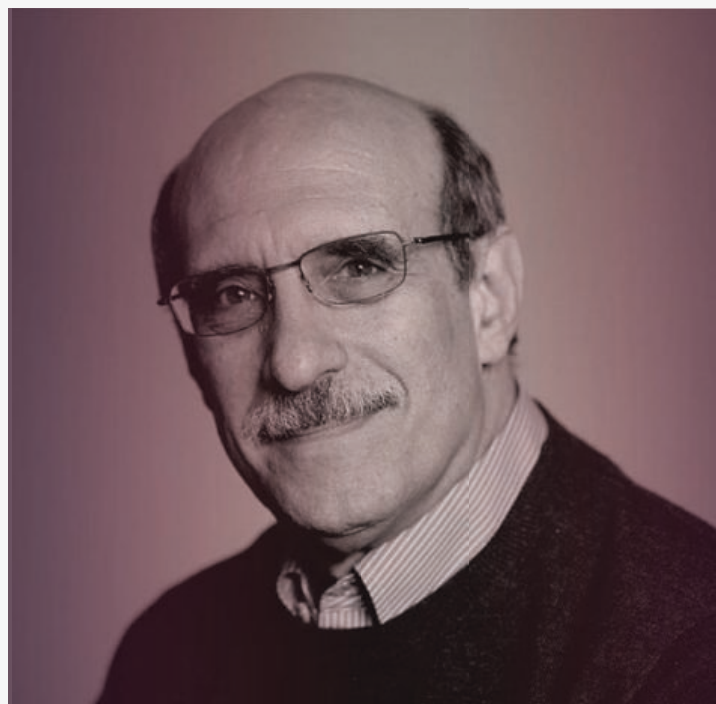
As I approach my fifth year as Chair of the Committee on Human Rights (CHR), I am increasingly convinced of the important role that the scientific, engineering, and medical communities have to play in promoting and protecting human rights. In 2019, sustained advocacy by the CHR and others in support of colleagues suffering serious human rights abuses worldwide has been followed by dramatic improvements in the situation of many colleagues, to include release from prison and mass acquittals. The individuals concerned, and their families, attribute this in part to the tremendous support that they have received from fellow academics and other individuals around the world. During the past year, the CHR, together with CHR Correspondents and national academies participating in the International Human Rights Network, took over 1,500 actions in support of colleagues under threat, to include appeals, private petitions, meetings, and submissions to human rights complaint mechanisms. A Turkish physicist, released from prison following international pressure, described the impact of such pressure: **"I would have been forgotten without all of you...I mean I really would be forgotten."**

The CHR is also increasingly involved in exploring, and raising public awareness about, pressing global challenges involving human rights and science, engineering, and health. Our public symposium series, established in 2017, provides a critical forum for discussion of such challenges. This year's event convened experts for a discussion of human rights-related opportunities and concerns associated with digital technologies, and included discussion of issues such as the targeted digital surveillance of human rights defenders and discrimination in connection with artificial intelligence systems. The CHR continues to explore ways of contributing to the dialogue on these and other matters of widespread human rights concern.

I would like to express my appreciation for your efforts to help ensure realization of human rights throughout the world and look forward to continuing, and intensifying, our work in the coming year.

-MARTIN CHALFIE

CHR CHAIR



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During 2019, the CHR advocated in support of 100 colleagues in the Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East suffering serious human rights abuses as a consequence of their professional work and other internationally protected activities. Many of these colleagues were targeted in connection with broader attacks on medical facilities and institutions of higher education. More than one third of the CHR's cases involved Turkish scientists, engineers, and health professionals, including several Turkish scholars who faced terrorism-related charges for having signed a petition calling for peace in the country's southeastern region. In a major development, the Turkish Constitutional Court ruled in July that the criminal conviction of individuals who signed the "peace petition" violated their right to freedom of expression. The Court's decision paved the way for the acquittal of hundreds of scholars, including colleagues whom the CHR has supported, although many remain unable to return to their academic positions. Other positive developments, discussed in more detail in the pages that follow, include the release from detention of:

- the Vice President of the Sudanese National Academy of Sciences, Muntaser Ibrahim, who came under threat as part of a crackdown on human rights under the former President of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir
- Iranian computer engineer Azita Rafizadeh, who was imprisoned for four years as a result of her involvement, as a professor and administrator, with the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education, a network of academics organized for the purpose of providing a university-level education to Baha'i students
- Cuban physician Eduardo Cardet Concepción, who served more than two years in prison for promoting democracy

The Committee's advocacy in support of these and other individuals, conducted behind the scenes, consisted of letters of appeal, private petitions, meetings with government officials, and formal submissions to human rights complaint bodies. Many of the CHR's 1500 "Correspondents" (members of the U.S. National Academies who have elected to support the CHR's work), as well as members of other national academies, contributed to these advocacy efforts.

In addition, the CHR and Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) established a distance fellowship program that provides at-risk scholars unable to pursue their teaching and/or research with access to online library resources at CMU, as well as connections with CMU scholars in their fields. A pilot of the program was successfully carried out in 2019 with three Turkish scholars, and the CHR is presently exploring possibilities for its expansion.

As part of the CHR's efforts to raise public awareness about human rights issues with a connection to science, engineering, and medicine, the Committee held its second biennial symposium in September. This event, which reached an audience of more than 300 people in person and via webcast, brought together experts to discuss rights-related opportunities and challenges related to digital technologies and to explore ways of leveraging such technologies in a manner that helps protect rights. Other CHR events held in 2019 include a briefing for Academy members on serious human rights concerns involving members of China's Uyghur community and a lecture on the use of forensic science to identify missing migrants along the U.S.-Mexico-Central America corridor. Throughout 2019, in recognition of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 2018, the Committee shared stories of scientists, engineers, and health professionals who have leveraged their skills and expertise to help advance human rights and dignity around the world. Among the individuals featured in this campaign were several Academy members, including Mary-Claire King and her groundbreaking development of mitochondrial DNA sequencing to identify children kidnapped during a period of state-sponsored violence and rights abuse in Argentina.

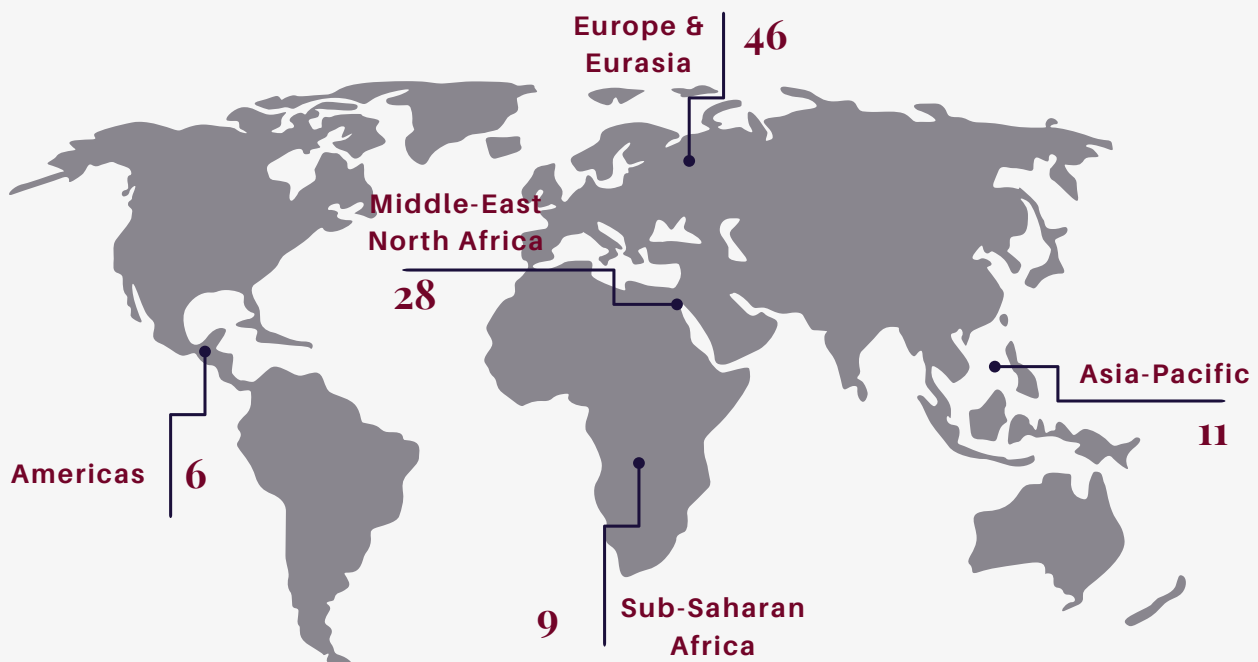
The CHR serves as the Secretariat of the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies (IHRN), a consortium of honorary societies in the sciences, engineering, and medicine that work to defend the fundamental rights of colleagues worldwide and to support scholarly institutions under threat. To date, more than 90 academies have participated in the IHRN's activities, and it continues to expand with the recent inclusion of academies in Nicaragua and the Czech Republic. During 2019, the IHRN's Executive Committee—composed of academy representatives from 12 countries—together with academies participating in the IHRN, spoke out against unfair trials, arbitrary detention, torture, and other severe forms of ill-treatment involving numerous members of the global scientific community. In March, the Executive Committee issued a public statement condemning targeted attacks on colleagues and other individuals in Sudan under former President al-Bashir. It also issued a public statement in July expressing its concern about the Hungarian National Academy's adoption of a bill that increased government control over the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' research institutes, emphasizing that the proposed changes to the relationship between the government and the Academy infringed upon the core principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy underpinning the scientific enterprise.



ADVOCACY AND ASSISTANCE

CASE STATISTICS

In 2019 the CHR worked on **100** cases involving colleagues in the Middle East and North Africa, Europe and Eurasia, the Asia-Pacific region, the Americas, and sub-Saharan Africa. Of these colleagues, **49%** were scientists, **14%** were engineers, and **37%** were health professionals.


36

Ongoing Judicial Proceedings


23

Imprisoned


13

Released


9

Detained


6

Acquitted


5

Released Conditionally


3

Travel Ban


2

Disappeared


2

Citizenship Revoked/Deported


1

Convicted in Absentia

ADVOCACY THROUGH INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS

The CHR has long submitted substantial case briefs based on international human rights law to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In addition to its ongoing use of UNESCO's procedure, the CHR has continued to make use of a number of other U.N. human rights complaint processes during the past year.

In 2019, the CHR prepared case briefs concerning four colleagues—in Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam—that are being examined by UNESCO's Committee on Conventions and Recommendations. Because the Committee's review process is repeated every six months, it allows for sustained, indirect dialogue between the CHR and high-level officials of the governments concerned. Of the 79 admissible cases submitted to UNESCO by the CHR and academics in the International Human Rights Network over the past 29 years, 71 have been resolved successfully, and 4 of the colleagues whose cases are ongoing have seen certain positive developments.

The CHR also submitted information on 14 cases involving colleagues from China, Greece, Hong Kong, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey to a variety of other U.N. mechanisms, including the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur (SR) on the right to health; the SR on the independence of judges and lawyers; the SR on peaceful assembly and association; the SR on human rights defenders; the SR on torture; the SR on extrajudicial executions; the SR on promoting human rights while countering terrorism; the SR on human rights in Iran; the SR on freedom of religion; the SR on education; and the SR on minority issues.

Last year, the CHR entered into a formal arrangement with Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher, a global law firm, in which law associates assist the Committee in preparing case submissions to international human rights complaint bodies. The firm provided assistance on three cases in 2019 and will continue to provide support in the coming year.



CASE DEVELOPMENTS: **TURKEY**

Over the past four years, the CHR has appealed for justice in support of dozens of professional colleagues in Turkey who have been targeted for exercising the right to freedom of expression and other internationally recognized rights, including colleagues subjected to criminal proceedings for having criticized Turkish military operations in Syria and in the Kurdish majority southeastern region of Turkey.

Turkish Medical Association - Central Council Members

The Turkish Medical Association (TMA) issued a statement in January 2018 expressing concern about the adverse public health effects of Turkey's military operation in Afrin, Syria and calling for peace. Within a few days, the TMA's main office in Ankara was raided by police, and the 11 members of the TMA's Central Council were taken into custody. While they were released from detention a few days later, legal proceedings were brought against them for allegedly "propagandizing for a terrorist organization" and "inciting the public to enmity and hatred." In May 2019, all 11 Central Council members were convicted and sentenced to two 10-month sentences—one for issuing the 2018 statement and the second in connection with a TMA peace statement made in 2016.

The TMA Council members have appealed their conviction. In addition to bringing legal proceedings against the Council members, the Turkish government has also taken steps to prevent them from practicing medicine in the public sector.



Academics for Peace

Since September 2019, hundreds of Turkish academics—including many professional colleagues—have been acquitted of terrorism-related charges brought against them for having signed a petition in early 2016 calling for an end to the military campaign in the majority



Kurdish southeastern region of Turkey. The scholars who signed the petition are often referred to as the “Academics for Peace”; many were summarily forced out of their university positions, prevented from traveling outside the country, and criminally prosecuted. In a landmark decision issued in July 2019, Turkey’s Constitutional Court ruled that the conviction of 10 Academics for Peace, for having signed the peace petition, violated their right to freedom of expression. This ruling created a path to justice for the many Academics for Peace subjected to criminal proceedings. Although hundreds of peace petition signatories have received acquittals since the Constitutional Court ruling, many remain unable to return to their academic work. In late 2019, the Academics for Peace issued a public statement calling for the reinstatement of academics forced out of their university positions and the removal of restrictions on their passports.

Füsun Üstel

Professor Füsun Üstel—a Turkish political scientist and Academic for Peace convicted and imprisoned as a result of having signed the petition calling for peace in southeastern Turkey, was one of 10 Academics for Peace who brought a case to the Turkish Constitutional Court. On July 22, 2019, just a few days before the Court issued a decision finding the scholars’ conviction in violation of their right to freedom of expression, she was released from prison, having served 2 ½ months of a 15-month sentence. The remainder of her sentence was suspended.



Serkan Golge

On May 29, 2019, Dr. Serkan Golge, a physicist and dual U.S.-Turkish citizen, was released from Iskenderun Prison in Turkey, after nearly three years in detention. Dr. Golge was taken into custody on July 23, 2016 while visiting family in Turkey. In February 2018, he was convicted on national security-related charges and sentenced to 7.5 years in prison, although no credible evidence was ever presented to support the charges against him. This sentence was later reduced to five years on appeal. At the time of his arrest, he was a resident of Houston, Texas, where he worked as a senior research scientist at the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s (NASA) Johnson Space Center and lived with his wife and two young children, who are also U.S. citizens.

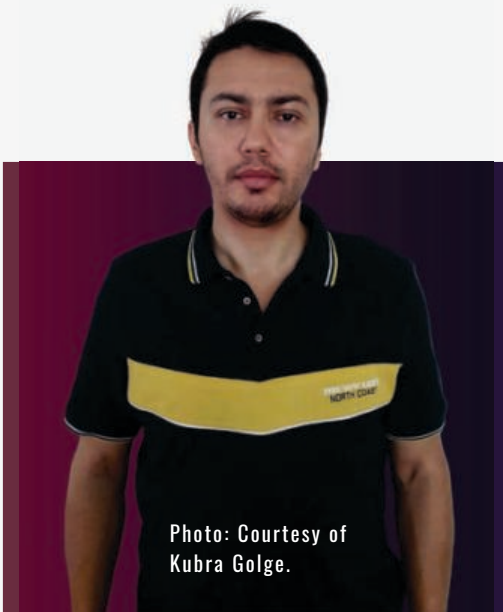


Photo: Courtesy of Kubra Golge.

CASE DEVELOPMENTS: IRAN

Persecution of Baha'i Scholars

The Baha'is—the largest non-Muslim religious minority in Iran—have long faced severe forms of discrimination and harassment in the country, including obstacles to enrollment in Iran's universities, and expulsion from them. In 1987, the Baha'i community created the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) to provide a university-level education to Baha'i students denied access to higher education. A network of academics teach BIHE classes on a voluntary basis, online and sometimes in their homes. Many of these educators are Baha'i professors, themselves forced out of university positions because of their faith. BIHE degrees have been recognized by a considerable number of higher education institutions outside of Iran but, throughout the BIHE's existence, the Iranian government has attempted to dismantle the institute through raids, confiscation of computer equipment and educational materials, and arrests of BIHE professors and administrators.

Over the years, the CHR has advocated in support of more than a dozen Iranian Baha'i professional colleagues targeted for their work with the BIHE—including Azita Rafizadeh, a computer engineer. In mid-2011, Iranian authorities raided the homes of more than three dozen Baha'is associated with the BIHE, including that of Ms. Rafizadeh and her husband—both then BIHE professors—confiscating religious items, books, and other belongings. After years of harassment, including being interrogated about their work with the BIHE and unsuccessfully pressured to sign a statement pledging to give up their academic work, Ms. Rafizadeh and her husband were charged, separately, with “membership in the illegal and misguided Baha'i group with the aim of acting against national security through illegal activities at the BIHE educational institute.” Following proceedings that failed to meet international fair trial standards, Ms. Rafizadeh was convicted and sentenced to four years in prison. Summoned to begin serving her sentence in October 2015, she was held in Tehran's Evin Prison, where conditions are known to be harsh. Because she and her husband were both imprisoned, and they did not have a family member able to take care of their young son, he was placed in a foster home.

On October 9, 2019, Ms. Rafizadeh was released from prison and reunited with her son.



Azita Rafizadeh, with her son, shortly after her release from prison.

CASE DEVELOPMENTS: SUDAN

Protests against political and economic conditions erupted in Sudan in December 2018, and were met with disproportionate, and frequently deadly, force by Sudanese authorities against peaceful demonstrators into 2019. The CHR spoke out against rights abuses in the country—including the widespread attacks on medical facilities and personnel in the country, and the detention of health professionals as punishment for their care of injured protesters. The Committee also condemned raids on institutions of research and higher education in Sudan and the arrest of scholars seen as supporting political change, including Dr. Muntaser Ibrahim, Vice President of the Sudanese National Academy of Sciences and a professor in the University of Khartoum's Department of Microbiology and Institute of Endemic Diseases. Following intense domestic and international pressure, many detained colleagues were released. Some, including Dr. Ibrahim, remained in detention until the transition of power in Sudan that led to the ouster of President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019.

For CHR video interviews with Shaza Elmahdi of the Sudanese American Physicians Association and Michael Payne of Physicians for Human Rights, who discuss their organizations' efforts to respond to the human rights crackdown in Sudan and attacks on medical neutrality, [visit the CHR website](#).

Muntaser Ibrahim

Sudanese scientist Muntaser Ibrahim, an internationally respected geneticist and cancer researcher, was detained by Sudanese security forces on February 21, 2019 before he was to present then President al-Bashir with a proposal for peace in the country, supported by hundreds of faculty members at the University of Khartoum. Held at the Security Forces' Political Detention Center in Bahri, Khartoum, where conditions are known to be extremely harsh, Dr. Ibrahim was one of a number of political prisoners [released in April 2019](#).

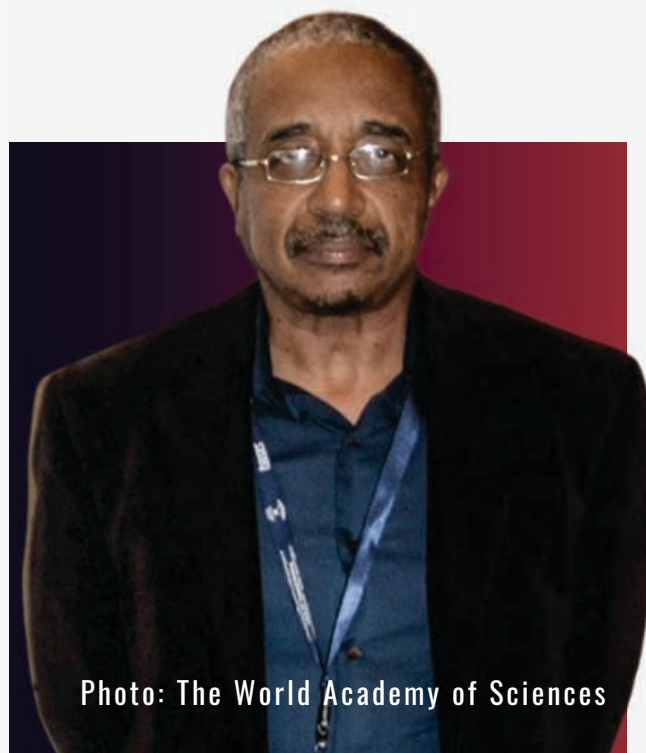


Photo: The World Academy of Sciences



The detention of scientists and scholars for the peaceful expression of their views is contrary to the most fundamental principles of international human rights, and devastating for scientific research and progress.

MARTIN CHALFIE

CHR Chair

Prominent Sudanese Geneticist Freed from Prison as Dictator Ousted, [Nature](#) (April 17, 2019)



URGENT ONGOING CASES

Below are updates on selected urgent cases involving professional colleagues. Academy members interested in providing support for these individuals can contact the Committee at chr@nas.edu.

Ahmadreza Djalali

Dr. Djalali, a disaster medicine specialist and dual Iranian-Swedish citizen, was arrested in April 2016 while visiting Iran, at the invitation of the University of Tehran and Shiraz University, to take part in a series of workshops about best practices in disaster medicine. In October 2017, following proceedings that failed to meet international fair trial standards—including the use of confessions coerced under extreme duress as evidence against him—Dr. Djalali was convicted on spurious national security-related charges and sentenced to death by Iran's Revolutionary Court. Since then, his sentence has been upheld by the Supreme Court in summary and secret proceedings held without the knowledge or participation of his defense lawyer. U.N. human rights experts have raised serious due process concerns regarding Dr. Djalali's trial and have publicly appealed for an annulment of his death sentence. His health has deteriorated significantly, in large part as a result of his harsh conditions of confinement. He currently suffers from gallstones, severe abdominal pain, and possible bone marrow-related problems for which he is not receiving adequate medical care. U.N. human rights experts have issued several public statements expressing concern that the Iranian government has subjected Dr. Djalali to periods of isolation and has denied him medical care, noting that his "unsafe and unsanitary detention conditions" further jeopardize "[his] physical and mental integrity."



Tashpolat Tiyp

Tashpolat Tiyp, a Uyghur geographer, was abruptly dismissed, without explanation, from his post as President of Xinjiang University in March 2017. A short time later, he was forcibly disappeared and was reportedly brought to trial in secret proceedings and convicted on charges of separatism, for which he was given a suspended death sentence. To the best of our knowledge, he had no access to legal counsel and his place of detention remains unknown. Despite the Chinese government's denial of Mr. Tiyp's sentence, in December 2019, several U.N. rights experts expressed their alarm over Mr. Tiyp's situation, noting that "The uncertainty regarding the charges against Mr. Tiyp, the conditions of his trial, and his sentencing are matters of particular concern, especially if the information that he was sentenced to death is correct."



Abduljalil al-Singace

Professor al-Singace is a longtime professor of mechanical engineering at the University of Bahrain and a prominent human rights defender in the country. As director and spokesperson of the Human Rights Bureau of a leading opposition prodemocracy organization, he was outspoken in his peaceful criticism of a number of Bahraini government policies. In the midst of a government crackdown on protesters in early 2011, Professor al-Singace was among more than a dozen opposition leaders arrested and charged with alleged national security-related

crimes, including “setting up terror groups to topple the royal regime.” While held in pre-trial detention, he was allegedly tortured. Three months after his arrest, in a military trial that did not meet fundamental due process standards, Professor al-Singace was sentenced to life in prison. Reliable reports indicate that no credible evidence was presented to support the charges against him. The court’s ruling was upheld on appeal in 2013. After almost nine years in prison under difficult conditions of confinement, Professor al-Singace continues to be refused regular access to needed medical care for longstanding ailments—including sickle cell disease and post-polio syndrome. Over the past two years his conditions have become increasingly onerous. He has been denied needed medicines for more than a year, his scheduled appointments with medical specialists are often cancelled for no apparent reason, his access to the prison canteen to buy personal items is sporadic, and he is rarely allowed access to fresh air.

Andreas Georgiou

Greek economist Andreas Georgiou, who currently lives in the United States, faces several ongoing criminal and civil charges in Greece for carrying out his professional work as Greece’s chief national statistician from 2010-2015. In August 2010, after a two-decade career at the International Monetary Fund, Dr. Georgiou returned to Greece to lead the country’s newly-formed independent statistical office, ELSTAT. (It replaced the country’s former statistical office that had been found by the European Commission to have severely underreported its official debt and deficit figures for a number of years.) In October 2010, after implementing new procedures in line with European Union (EU) statistical standards, Dr. Georgiou submitted revised 2009 figures to the EU statistical office that raised Greece’s deficit by 1.8 percent. Although the EU verified the accuracy and reliability of his figures and removed the “reservations” it had previously placed on Greece’s national statistics, his reporting of the revised figures led to him being targeted for allegedly causing economic problems in the country. Dr. Georgiou was subsequently subjected to severe harassment, including threats to his physical safety and calls for his execution. In May 2019, after facing proceedings three times on the identical charge of conspiring to artificially inflate Greece’s deficit, he was acquitted. Two additional related cases against him continue to make their way through the courts.





Huang Qi

Mr. Huang—a Chinese computer engineer and founder of the human rights monitoring website, 64 Tianwang—was placed in detention in late November 2016. He was subsequently charged with disclosing state secrets in connection with a police document he had posted online that reportedly ordered authorities to suppress his journalistic activities. It is our understanding that the document was not “secret” at the time of publication and was likely used as a pretext to arrest Mr. Huang for his peaceful human rights work. In

July 2019, Mr. Huang was convicted in proceedings that failed to meet international fair trial standards and sentenced to 12 years in prison. U.N. human rights experts have determined that his detention stemmed from the exercise of his internationally protected rights and that he was denied a free and fair trial. Due process violations in his case include incommunicado detention and lack of access to legal counsel for extended periods. U.N. experts have also expressed concern about reports that Mr. Huang has been subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment, including for the purpose of extracting confessions. The CHR’s concern for his well-being is heightened because he suffers from several serious illnesses—including advanced kidney ailments, hydrocephalus, and rheumatic heart disease—for which we understand he has been denied critical medical care.

CHR-Carnegie Mellon University Distance Fellowship Program

In collaboration with Carnegie Mellon University (CMU), the CHR has established a distance fellowship program for at-risk scholars unable to pursue their teaching and/or research. The program provides fellows with CMU Affiliate status for an anticipated term of two years, which includes the same online library access as faculty located at the university. Fellows are also connected with CMU scholars in their fields. The concept of a remote fellows program was conceived by NAS members Baruch Fischhoff and Granger Morgan, who are CMU faculty members and CHR Correspondents.

A pilot of the Distance Fellows Program was successfully carried out in 2019 with three Turkish scholars: Dr. Ali Basaran, a physicist; Dr. Ali Rıza Güngen, a political scientist; and Dr. Hediya Aslı Davas, a medical doctor and public health expert. Dr. Basaran received his Ph.D. from the University of California San Diego in 2014 and subsequently returned to Turkey to conduct research in his own lab and teach. Dr. Güngen received his Ph.D. in political science and public administration from Middle East Technical University in 2012 and works in political economics. Dr. Davas earned her M.D. in 1997 from the University of Istanbul and her Ph.D. in public health from the University of Ege in 2005 and taught in the University's Department of Public Health. Drs. Basaran, Güngen, and Davas were among hundreds of Turkish academics who were summarily dismissed from their universities in 2016 and 2017, prevented from traveling outside of the country, and faced criminal investigation/prosecution as a result of their peaceful exercise of internationally protected rights. While proceedings against all three of the scholars have now been dropped, they, along with hundreds of other dismissed academics in Turkey, have not been reinstated at their universities. Despite these difficult challenges, the fellows report that their affiliate status with CMU, including remote access to the university's library resources, has helped make it possible for them to publish scholarly work in their fields during the first year of the distance program.

Given the success of the Distance Fellows one-year pilot, the CHR is presently exploring possibilities for its expansion. Faculty members interested in exploring the possibility of hosting a distance fellow at their universities should contact the CHR at 202-334-3043 or chr@nas.edu for further information about the program.

Ali Basaran



Ali Rıza Güngen



Hediya Aslı Davas



AWARENESS RAISING ACTIVITIES

UDHR 70TH ANNIVERSARY CAMPAIGN

To celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the CHR shared [stories](#) of scientists, engineers, and health professionals who have used their expertise to promote and protect human rights. These stories highlight the many exciting ways in which science, engineering, and medicine can help to advance human dignity worldwide.

Among the stories featured in the CHR campaign is that of Mary-Claire King's [groundbreaking development of mitochondrial DNA sequencing](#) to identify children kidnapped during a period of state-sponsored violence and rights abuse in Argentina. The CHR's campaign also highlighted the work of human rights organizations that use science and technology in the service of human rights, including Human Rights Data Analysis Group and its [use of statistical analysis](#) to promote accountability for atrocities committed during the Sri Lankan civil war.



Dr. Mary-Claire King (left) with Estella Carlotto (right) and Nelida Gomez (center) of Argentina, soon after introducing the detection of mitochondrial DNA differences to the project of reuniting families.

***NAS Annual Meeting Lecture:* Identifying the Missing: Forensic Anthropology in Support of Human Rights**

The CHR briefing during the April NAS Annual Meeting highlighted the work of forensic anthropologist Mercedes Doretti, co-founder of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF), and her team, to identify missing migrants along the U.S.-Mexico-Central America corridor using the DNA of family members. Doretti discussed how she and her colleagues use forensic science to investigate and document human rights abuses, including by recovering and identifying the remains of victims of rights abuses, returning the remains to their relatives, and providing evidence in court proceedings. Through this work, the EAAF seeks to bring human rights violations to light and to support the search for truth, justice, and reparations for victims and their families. [Read a Q&A](#) with Mercedes Doretti about her work on the CHR website.



The need to locate the remains of and find out what has happened to a loved one in itself demonstrates an inherent denial of human rights. Our team promotes the **rights to truth and justice** in particular, as the evidence we collect can be used to identify the remains of a victim and to determine their cause and manner of death.

MERCEDES DORETTI



Photo: MacArthur Foundation

NAM Annual Meeting Lecture: Examining Human Rights Abuses in Xinjiang, China



The CHR's lunch briefing during the October NAM Annual Meeting addressed widespread global concerns regarding the persecution of Turkic Muslim peoples in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in northwest China. Nury Turkel, Board Chair of the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) - a human rights research, reporting, and advocacy organization - and UHRP's Chinese Outreach Coordinator, Zubayra Shamseden, presented credible reports of mass detentions, mental and physical abuse, and other serious human rights abuses in the region.

International human rights experts, government officials in many countries, respected non-governmental organizations, and independent journalists have highlighted increasingly repressive governmental measures against Uyghurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang. The Co-Rapporteur for China on the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, for instance, has raised concern about "numerous and credible reports that, in the name of combating 'religious extremism' and maintaining 'social stability'," the region has been turned into something resembling a massive internment camp "shrouded in secrecy, a 'no rights zone'." This expert, along with many others, has expressed alarm that Uyghurs and other individuals identified as Muslim are being treated as enemies of the state based on their ethno-religious identity.

Many commentators have pointed to a pattern of enforced disappearances and arbitrary detention of Uyghurs—which reportedly escalated in 2017 with the government's introduction of so-called 're-education' or 'vocational training' camps in the region. In November 2018, six U.N. human rights experts recognized that up to 1 million ethnic Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang, including children, elderly persons, persons with disabilities, and pregnant women, may have been forced into these camps without charge and without access to legal remedies or contact with individuals outside the camps. Such concerns are compounded by reports of widespread surveillance and coerced collection of biodata, including DNA samples, in the wider region under the guise of a public health program.

Business and Human Rights

Massachusetts-based biotechnology company Thermo Fisher Scientific announced in February 2019 that it would no longer sell genetic sequencing equipment in the Chinese region of Xinjiang—referencing "Thermo Fisher's values, ethics code and policies." Thermo Fisher's decision followed expressions of concern, including from the CHR, about possible use of its equipment by Xinjiang authorities to engage in mass surveillance of the region's Uyghur minority population.

CHR SYMPOSIUM

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

On September 18, 2019, the CHR hosted a symposium, [Human Rights and Digital Technologies](#), that brought together experts in the fields of human rights and technology to examine the challenges associated with the collection and use of digital data and to explore ways of leveraging digital innovation in a manner that helps protect internationally recognized human rights. Digital technologies have expanded opportunities for individuals and organizations to mobilize, document, and advocate, including around human rights and humanitarian crises; however, with these opportunities come certain concerns, including in relation to protecting privacy and securing sensitive data.

The symposium addressed topics such as the relevance of human rights norms for digital information collection and analysis and the implications of artificial intelligence decision-making systems for human rights. The convening, the second in a series of biennial symposia on important topics involving science, engineering, health, and human rights, reached an audience of more than 300 individuals in person and via webcast. Recordings of the symposium sessions, along with a [Proceedings-in-Brief](#) can be accessed on the [CHR's website](#). The Winter 2019 Issue of the National Academy of Engineering journal, *The Bridge*, also contains a [summary of the event](#).



The symposium was followed by a [private workshop](#) held on September 19, 2019, which brought together human rights defenders, computer scientists and engineers, and other relevant actors to further discuss human rights challenges related to digital technologies. Discussion topics included the relationship between digital technologies, social rights and inequality; citizen journalism and content regulation; and digital surveillance of human rights defenders.



THE RELEVANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN A DIGITAL WORLD

In his [keynote address](#), David Kaye (United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression) stressed that international human rights law provides a basis for restraining the worst intrusions and violations of the digital world and promoting its best. However, he stressed that much work needs to be done to move forward a human rights-oriented digital agenda that capitalizes on the benefits of digital technologies to advance human rights, while ensuring that those same technologies do not infringe on rights.



Contemporary and Emerging Challenges: Digital Technologies and Human Rights
Shanthi Kalathil, Alexa Koenig, and Ron Deibert

Human Rights and Digital Technologies



Rights, Discrimination, and Artificial Intelligence
Kristian Lum, Rashida Richardson, Eileen Donahoe,
and Mark Latonero



INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK of Academies and Scholarly Societies

The CHR serves as the Secretariat of the [International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies](#) (IHRN), an international consortium of honorary societies in the sciences, engineering, and medicine with a shared interest in human rights. The IHRN was founded in 1993 to alert national academies to human rights abuses involving fellow scientists and scholars and to equip academies with the tools to provide support in such cases. Today the IHRN advocates in support of professional colleagues suffering human rights abuses, promotes the free exchange of ideas and opinions among scientists and scholars, and supports the independence and autonomy of national academies and scholarly societies worldwide.

In March 2019, the IHRN's Executive Committee, composed of academy members from 12 countries, issued a [public statement](#) condemning human rights abuses by the Sudanese government following popular protests concerning the political and economic situation in the country. Additionally, in July, following the Hungarian National Assembly's adoption of a bill effectively handing over control of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' research institutes to the government, the Executive Committee issued a [public statement](#) expressing concern that the measure infringed upon "the core principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy that underpin the scientific enterprise."



The Hungarian Academy of Sciences

The IHRN also raises global awareness about the connections between human rights and science, engineering, and medicine. To date, the IHRN has held 13 biennial meetings around the world to provide an opportunity for academy members to explore topical science and human rights themes and to share information and strategies on matters of human rights concern. The next meeting of the IHRN will be hosted by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) in Pretoria, South Africa on December 8-9, 2020 and will focus the use of human rights litigation and advocacy to address health disparities.

In 2019, several academies participating in the IHRN hosted events of their own to explore pressing human rights issues. In September the [Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters](#) organized an international conference on [Research and Human Rights](#), which brought together scholars from various disciplines to examine situations in which academic freedom is under attack. The conference highlighted the importance of incorporating a human rights perspective into academic research, in order to enhance research results and enable more responsible solutions to pressing societal challenges. A book featuring essays from the conference speakers will be released next year.

Also in September, the [French Academy of Sciences](#) hosted and co-organized, together with the Human Rights Committee of the [German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina](#), a symposium on the [right to education](#), which is enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The symposium was the 8th in a series of symposia on “Human Rights and Science”, which the Leopoldina’s Human Rights Committee has held since 2010 with representatives of European academies and the wider European scientific community.

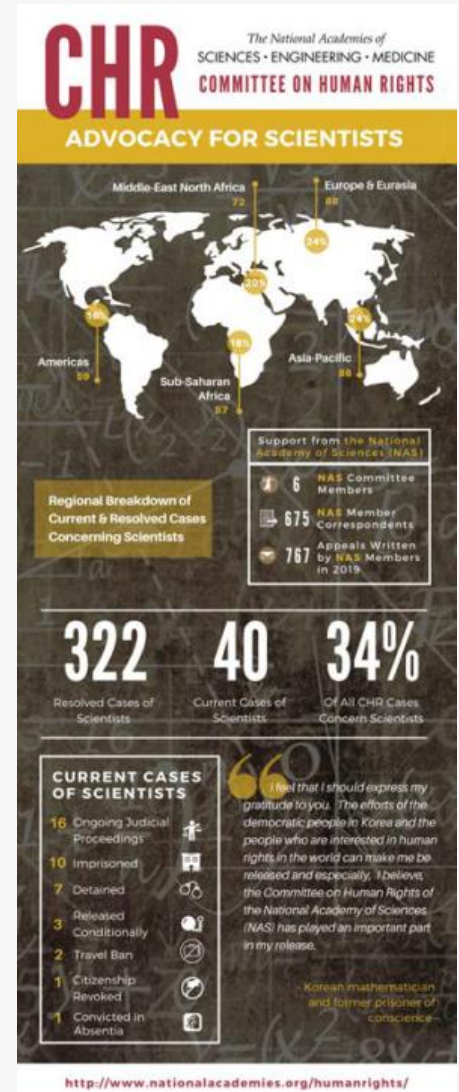
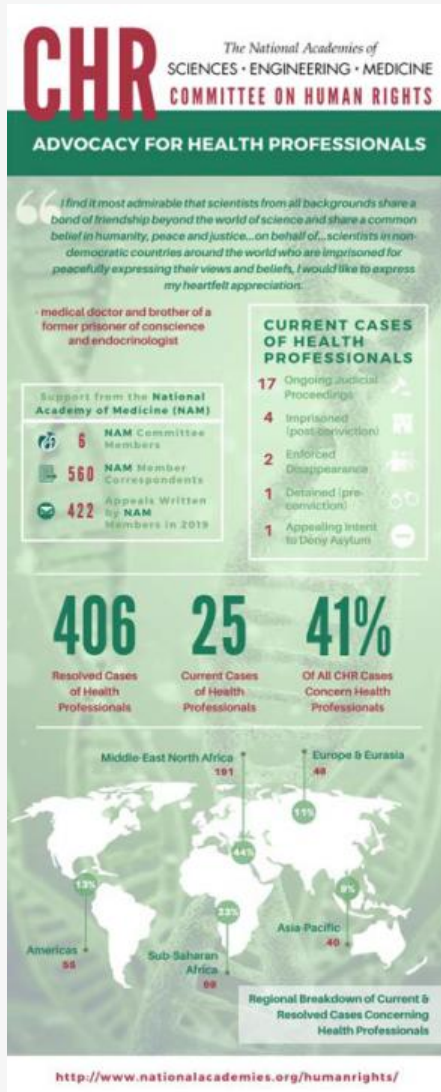


Participants in the September 2019 human rights symposium co-organized by the French Academy of Sciences and the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina.
Photo: © German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina

CHR AT A GLANCE

The infographics below provide a professional and regional breakdown of the CHR's current* and resolved cases. Click on the images below to view enlarged infographics.

*as of December 2019



The support of my professional colleagues, and of the academic community across the world, has been invaluable in securing my freedom...



FORMERLY IMPRISONED MEDICAL DOCTOR



ABOUT US

The Committee on Human Rights (CHR), created by members of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) in 1976, is a standing membership committee of the NAS, National Academy of Engineering (NAE), and National Academy of Medicine (NAM). The CHR is composed of 15 members drawn from the three Academies and appointed by the Academies' presidents, including the foreign secretaries of the NAS, NAE, and NAM who serve as ex officio members.

The Committee advocates in support of scientists, engineers, and health professionals subjected to serious human rights abuses worldwide, including in the United States, with a focus on individuals targeted for their professional activities and/or for having exercised the universally protected right to freedom of expression, which provides a crucial foundation for scientific research and progress. CHR cases involve long-term arbitrary detention, gross violations of the right to fair trial, withdrawal of citizenship without due process, torture, and disappearance, among other serious violations of international human rights law. Alongside the CHR's advocacy, the Committee provides assistance to professional colleagues under threat by linking them to the wider international scientific community and to organizations that provide pro bono legal support and other services.

CHR members, and other members of the Academies, play a distinctive and influential advocacy role as globally respected individuals expressing solidarity with colleagues under threat. Nearly 1,500 members of the three Academies are CHR Correspondents, many of whom regularly take action on urgent human rights cases.

The CHR also raises awareness concerning the links between science, technology, health, and human rights, including through symposia, workshops, and briefings for Academy members. The CHR serves as the Secretariat of the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies (IHRN), which brings together more than 90 academies and scholarly societies to address shared science and human rights concerns.

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HOW YOU CAN HELP

BECOME A CHR CORRESPONDENT

If you are a member of the National Academies interested in receiving updates on our activities and opportunities to assist colleagues under threat, [sign up](#) to become a CHR Correspondent.

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR MAILING LIST

For other individuals interested in learning more about CHR events and activities, please [subscribe to our email list](#).

SUPPORT US

You can make a [secure online gift](#) on the CHR website, or by contacting the CHR via phone or email.

www.nationalacademies.org/humanrights