It has been a busy, productive year for the Committee on Human Rights (CHR) as we have worked to expand our advocacy in support of colleagues under threat and promote dialogue on pressing human rights issues related to science, technology, and medicine. I am pleased to report that, over the course of the past year, 25 colleagues on whose cases the CHR has worked have been released from detention and/or are no longer facing criminal charges. Dr. Merera Gudina is an example. Dr. Merera is an Ethiopian political scientist who was arrested in November 2016 and subsequently charged with national security offenses after testifying before the European Parliament about human rights in the country. In January of 2018, after over a year in prison, all charges against Dr. Merera were dropped, and he was released. The positive developments in Dr. Merera’s case, and the other 24 mentioned cases, have come in the wake of international pressure, including appeals from the CHR and many Academy members. Although four of the individuals concerned were released only after serving their full prison sentences, they saw steady improvement in their conditions of confinement following international expressions of concern.

Unfortunately, we continue to receive news of scientists, engineers, and health professionals suffering human rights abuses for practicing their professions or otherwise exercising internationally protected rights. We learn about many such situations from members of the Academies and the wider academic community, and we frequently consult with Academy members concerning cases related to their fields. Currently, the CHR is following 74 cases involving serious violations of colleagues’ human rights, and taking responsive actions that include, as appropriate, letters of appeal, meetings with government (including embassy) officials, and use of international and regional human rights complaint mechanisms. This year, we began submitting case information to various African human rights mechanisms, including the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders of the African Commission on Human & Peoples’ Rights, in cases concerning two imprisoned engineers. Both of these individuals have since been freed.

Along with this ongoing advocacy, the CHR hosted its first public symposium on December 7-8, 2017—Protecting the Rights of Individuals Fleeing Conflict: The Role of Scientists, Engineers, and Health Professionals. This inspiring event brought together scholars, including refugee scholars; representatives from UN agencies, the World Bank, and other international bodies; human rights organizations; and research and policy institutions. Discussion focused on efforts to address systematic challenges faced by displaced persons and to assist refugee scholars and scientists seeking to reestablish their careers in exile. We hope that this will be the first of many CHR symposia examining pressing human rights issues related to science, engineering, and medicine. We encourage you to view the highlights video and webcast of the symposium on the Committee on Human Rights website.
The year ahead promises to be exciting. In addition to our continued advocacy efforts, including embassy visits, we are preparing a human rights guidebook for at-risk colleagues and their families with the assistance of law students from Columbia University, developing online resource materials on human rights for academics, and planning observer missions to countries with significant human rights-related trials. As the Secretariat of the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies (H.R. Network), and with the support of the Richard Lounsbery Foundation, the CHR is producing a resource guide on human rights for national academies worldwide that should be finished within the next few months. We hope to distribute this guide at the 13th biennial meeting of the H.R. Network, which we are organizing with the Korean Academy of Science and Technology. The theme of the meeting, to be held in Seoul from October 25-27, 2018, is Science and the Right to Development.

If you have not already elected to become a “CHR Correspondent,” I strongly urge you to do so. Correspondents receive periodic e-mail updates from the CHR about urgent cases and issues and information about opportunities to participate in the CHR’s activities. I also urge Correspondents to help in appealing for colleagues in need by using the online system that CHR has created for this purpose (a link to the online system is included in all CHR e-mail alerts on cases). With this online system, it takes only a few minutes to have customized letters of appeal sent to you for mailing and less than one minute to add your name to a joint appeal letter signed by members of the CHR and other concerned members of the National Academies. From our contact with colleagues who have been released from prison, and their families, we know how meaningful they find the support provided by Academy members.

Finally, we welcome your questions and your suggestions about how the CHR can be an even more effective voice for human rights within the Academies.

With best wishes,

Dr. Martin Chalfie (NAS/NAM)
CHR Chair

“Those who spoke up for me during my ordeal, they are my friends...I felt I am worthy of living to so many people that I don’t know.”

Political scientist released in December 2017 after an enforced disappearance
About CHR

The Committee on Human Rights (CHR), created by NAS members in 1976, is a standing membership committee of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), National Academy of Engineering (NAE), and National Academy of Medicine (NAM). The CHR is composed of 14 members drawn from the membership of 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. More than 1,500 members of the three Academies are CHR Correspondents, who receive regular information on the committee’s activities—including periodic “Action Alerts” concerning urgent human rights cases. Correspondents are encouraged to write appeals to relevant government officials concerning such cases.

The CHR also raises awareness concerning the links between science, technology, health, and human rights, including through briefings for Academy members. The CHR serves as the Secretariat of the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies (H.R. Network), which brings together more than 80 academies and scholarly societies to address shared science and human rights concerns.
February 2017 – Individuals protest the detention of a Sudanese engineer at the Embassy of Sudan in Ireland. [Photo: Erin Kilbride / Front Line Defenders]

February 2018 – Iranian Baha’i leader and engineer Saeid Rezaie reunites with his wife after nearly 10 years in prison.
Positive Case Developments

Over the course of the past year, the CHR, together with many CHR Correspondents and national academies participating in the H.R. Network, has taken hundreds of actions in support of colleagues under threat (appeals, petitions, meetings, submissions to human rights complaint mechanisms). During this period, 25 colleagues have been released from prisons and/or are no longer facing criminal charges in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Iran, Sudan, and Turkey. Additionally, the conditions of confinement of several other colleagues have improved. Click on the images below for more information on selected cases.

Ethiopian scientific colleagues (pictured from left to right with two associates)

- Atnaf Berahane: computer scientist
- Natnael Feleke: economist
- Befeqadu Hailu: computer scientist
- Abel Wabella: mechanical engineer

- Vahid Tizfahm: Iranian optometrist
- Saeid Rezaie: mechanical engineer
- Mahvash Sabet: Iranian psychologist
- Mubashar Hasan: Bangladeshi political scientist

- Mudawi Ibrahim Adam: Sudanese engineer
- Merera Gudina: Ethiopian political scientist
- Fariba Kamalabadi: Iranian psychologist
- İştar Gözaydın: Turkish political scientist

No photo available
Dr. Mudawi is an engineer, a prominent human rights advocate, and founder of the Sudan Social Development Organization (SUDO), a nongovernmental organization that promotes human rights and development initiatives relating to water, sanitation, and health in Sudan. He has been recognized internationally for his human rights promotion and humanitarian efforts, but repeatedly jailed for this work in Sudan. After nearly nine months in detention on spurious national security-related charges, he was among several prisoners granted a pardon by Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir on August 29, 2017.

The CHR and the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies (H.R. Network) have actively worked on Dr. Mudawi’s case following his latest detention and advocated for his release with high-level Sudanese officials, international bodies, and other government actors.

**Selected Actions Taken:**

- Appeals to 15 members of the U.S. Congress, including Chairpersons and Ranking Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; the House Committee on Foreign Affairs; the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission; the Sub-Committee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations; the Senate Human Rights Caucus; the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women’s Issues; and the Sudan and South Sudan Caucus (05/26/17)
- Case submission to Mr. Lawrence Murugu Mute, Commissioner Rapporteur for the Human Rights Situation in the Sudan and Chairperson of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture in Africa, African Commission on Human & Peoples’ Rights (05/23/17)
- Joint letter of appeal from 104 members of the National Academies to the Sudanese President and Minister of Justice (03/10/17)
- CHR Action Alert: Sudanese engineer arbitrarily detained (03/01/17)
- H.R. Network Action Alert: Sudanese engineer arbitrarily detained (03/01/17)
- Appeal from CHR Chairman to the Sudanese President and Minister of Justice (12/21/16)
Case Updates

The CHR is currently working on 74 cases spanning the Middle East and North Africa, Europe and Eurasia, Asia, the Americas, and sub-Saharan Africa. Of its current cases, 49% are scientists, 31% are health professionals, and 20% are engineers.

- Middle East and North Africa: 26 cases
- Europe and Eurasia: 35 cases
- Asia-Pacific: 9 cases
- Sub-Saharan Africa: 1 case
- Americas: 3 cases

- 30 cases in Ongoing Judicial Proceedings
- 22 cases in Imprisoned (post-conviction)
- 12 cases in Detained (pre-conviction)
- 2 cases in Released Conditionally
- 2 cases in Citizenship Revoked/Deported
- 2 cases in Disappeared
- 1 case in Under Criminal Investigation
- 1 case in Convicted in Absentia
- 1 case in Under House Arrest
- 1 case in Appealing Notice of Intent to Deny Asylum
The infographics below provide a professional and regional breakdown of our current* and resolved cases and types of abuse suffered by colleagues. Click on the images below or visit http://www.nationalacademies.org/humanrights/.

*as of March 2018

The academic and scientific community’s support for prisoners cannot be ignored by governments and powers in charge of the imprisonment. Such support also puts great public and ethical pressure on them, because it does not bear any political motivations. That kind of support is by... impartial cognizant people who just care about human rights and a brighter future for all mankind.

Family member of physicist and former prisoner of conscience
On May 1, 2017, during the NAS Annual Meeting, the CHR held a breakfast briefing, led by CHR Chair Martin Chalfie, to highlight issues surrounding digital security and human rights.

Guest speaker John Scott-Railton of The Citizen Lab (Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto) spoke to NAS members about the use of digital surveillance and technologies to target human rights activists and other members of civil society worldwide. For the past decade, The Citizen Lab has tracked abuse of the Internet to threaten these actors through surveillance and digital intrusions. Governments are typical perpetrators, enabled by weak laws and supplied by the growing global market for digital surveillance, intrusion, and filtering technologies. Citizen Lab researchers engage directly with the victims of these operations and, in a recent high-profile case, helped deter a cyber-attack against an Emirati scientific colleague whose case the CHR is following. Scott-Railton provided an overview of the state of digital threats against civil society drawn from The Citizen Lab’s peer-reviewed and mixed-methods research.

Collaborating on Human Rights Investigations: Fire Research and Forensic Science

At the CHR’s May 2017 semiannual meeting, Professor José Torero—the John L. Bryan Chair in Fire Protection Engineering and Director of the Center for Disaster Resilience at the University of Maryland—spoke to members about his efforts to help protect human rights through the investigation of several high-profile fires. He emphasized the need for human rights organizations and institutions to better understand the science behind human rights investigations and the added value scientists can provide through their technical analyses. Dr. Torero also discussed the importance of establishing verifiable scientific facts in criminal investigations and elaborated on how engineering and a range of scientific disciplines are critical components of forensic fire investigations.
I send you my greetings and eternal gratitude for the extraordinary work that you, and the committee that you preside over with such dignity, undertook during my imprisonment... You engaged in a titanic struggle, repeatedly submitting requests for my definitive release... For all of those humanitarian actions, I send, from the depths of my heart, my warmest thanks to all of the people who, together with you, did everything possible (and impossible) so that my release could become a reality.

Engineer released from prison after serving 8 years of a 20-year sentence for his peaceful expression of dissent.
On December 7-8, 2017, the CHR gathered leading scholars and practitioners for a symposium on Protecting the Rights of Individuals Fleeing Conflict: The Role of Scientists, Engineers, and Health Professionals.

The CHR intends for this event to be the first of a series of symposia on important topics involving science, engineering, health, and human rights. The 2017 symposium, which was also webcast live, brought together scholars, including academics who themselves have fled their countries; representatives from UN agencies, the World Bank, and other international bodies; human rights organizations; and research and policy institutions, for a discussion on how scientists, health professionals, and engineers can help to address the challenges faced by refugees and other forcibly displaced persons.

Symposium participants examined scientific, technological, and medical developments currently being used to provide support for refugees and other displaced persons, including the benefits and potential drawbacks of such developments. Participants also discussed the ongoing, urgent needs of individuals who have fled their homes, as well as efforts to provide targeted assistance for scholar refugees seeking to reestablish their careers in exile. For more information about the event, please click here.

The symposium also featured a screening of the documentary film, Science in Exile. Produced by the World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) and directed by Italian filmmaker Nicole Leghissa, the film follows the struggles of displaced scientists forced to flee Syria, Yemen, and Iraq, as they seek safety and the opportunity to continue making valuable scientific contributions in their adopted homes. For more information and to view the trailer, please click here.
The CHR has long submitted substantial case briefs based on international human rights law to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Over the past year, in addition to continuing its use of UNESCO’s procedure, the CHR has made use of several other U.N. human rights complaint processes, as well as African regional mechanisms. This work has been accomplished with the pro bono assistance of Columbia University law students.

The CHR has prepared case briefs concerning nine colleagues—in the Middle East North Africa and East Asia regions—that are currently being examined by UNESCO’s Committee on Conventions and Recommendations. Because the Committee’s review process is repeated every six months, it allows for a continuing, albeit indirect, dialogue between the CHR and high-level officials of the governments concerned. (Of the 78 admissible cases submitted to UNESCO by the CHR and participants in the H.R. Network over the past 27 years, 67 have been resolved successfully, and 8 of the colleagues whose cases are ongoing have seen positive developments (including improvements in conditions of confinement and granting of medical leave)).

The CHR has also submitted approximately two dozen cases regarding colleagues from Iran, Sudan, 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 peaceful assembly and association; the SR on human rights defenders; the SR on torture; the SR on extrajudicial executions; the SR on human rights in Iran; and the Independent Expert on the human rights situation in Sudan. Finally, the CHR submitted cases of two engineers to complaint mechanisms of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.
The International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies (H.R. Network)—created with the assistance of the CHR in 1993 and for which the CHR serves as secretariat—addresses issues of science and human rights from an international perspective. The H.R. Network, in which over 80 academies have participated, 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. The H.R. Network also raises global awareness about the connections between human rights and science, engineering, and medicine. The CHR, as the secretariat for the H.R. Network, issues regular alerts to H.R. Network-participating academies concerning urgent cases involving scientists, engineers, and health professionals under threat as a result of their legitimate professional work or other peaceful activities. The H.R. Network’s Executive Committee, composed of academy members from 12 countries, also periodically issues public statements on topical issues of global concern, such as gender discrimination in higher education and threats to scientific freedom. H.R. Network-participating academies assist in disseminating the Executive Committee’s statements, and many academies use the alerts and statements as a starting point for their own advocacy (with each academy acting at its own discretion). The CHR as secretariat is currently working on a guide and webinar, funded by the Lounsbery Foundation, to encourage academies to become even more active on human rights issues.

The H.R. Network holds biennial meetings on science and human rights themes. The thirteenth biennial meeting will be held in South Korea, hosted by the Korean Academy of Science and Technology (KAST) from October 25 thru October 27, 2018. The theme of the meeting will be “Science and the Right to Development”.

Programs and other information concerning previous meetings of the H.R. Network can be found here.
Your support allows the Committee to enhance its role as the voice of human rights for the three Academies.

If you are a member of the National Academies, consider becoming a CHR Correspondent by emailing CHR at chr@nas.edu.

You can make a secure online gift at https://www8.nationalacademies.org/AcademyGiving/, or by contacting CHR via phone or email.