

CHR

*The National
Academies of*

SCIENCES
ENGINEERING
MEDICINE



Year in Review

2020

COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

*The National
Academies of* | SCIENCES
ENGINEERING
MEDICINE

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ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

The Committee on Human Rights (CHR), created 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 15 members](#) drawn from the membership of the three Academies and appointed by the Academies' presidents, including the foreign/international 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 and other convenings. 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.

The CHR is staffed by: Rebecca Everly, Director; Patricia Evers, Deputy Director; Tracy Sahay, Program Officer; and Ana Deros, Senior Program Assistant.

MEMBERSHIP

Chair

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Columbia University

Vice Chair

Mary Jane West-Eberhard

Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute/
University of Costa Rica

Chris Beyrer

Johns Hopkins University

John Carlson

Yale University

Christine Cassel

University of California, San Francisco

Michael Clegg

University of California, Irvine

Carlos Del Rio

NAM Foreign Secretary

Vanessa Northington Gamble

The George Washington University

John Hildebrand

NAS Foreign Secretary

John Kassakian

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Michael Katz

Columbia University/Stanford University

Anthony Leggett

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Elaine Oran

Texas A&M University

Elsa Reichmanis

Lehigh University

James Tien

NAE International Secretary

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

The global challenges that we have faced during this difficult year have underscored the many and varied connections between human rights and science, technology, and health. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the response to the pandemic, have presented serious human rights difficulties alongside the more widely recognized scientific and medical challenges. Such difficulties have ranged from the use of COVID-19 as justification for squashing peaceful dissent to the societal inequities that the pandemic has revealed and exacerbated. Similarly, our ongoing reckoning with systemic racism has highlighted the pervasiveness of inequality, and the need for the scientific, engineering, and medical communities to help advance racial justice.

As a human rights body operating within the U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, and as the

Secretariat for an international consortium of honorary scientific societies (i.e., the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies, IHRN), the CHR is well-poised to explore and help address these multi-dimensional challenges. This Annual Report provides an overview of CHR's recent efforts, including its advocacy for colleagues targeted for their work battling COVID-19 and its creation of extensive web-based resources to help clarify the pandemic's human rights dimensions. The CHR aims to build on this work, particularly by promoting human rights-based approaches throughout the National Academy complex.

On behalf of all of the members of the CHR, I would like to express my appreciation for the support provided to our Committee by the Academies' leadership, the more than 1,500 Academy members who actively support the CHR's work as CHR Correspondents, and the more than 90 national academies participating in the IHRN. The CHR looks forward to continued collaboration on human rights issues in the coming year.

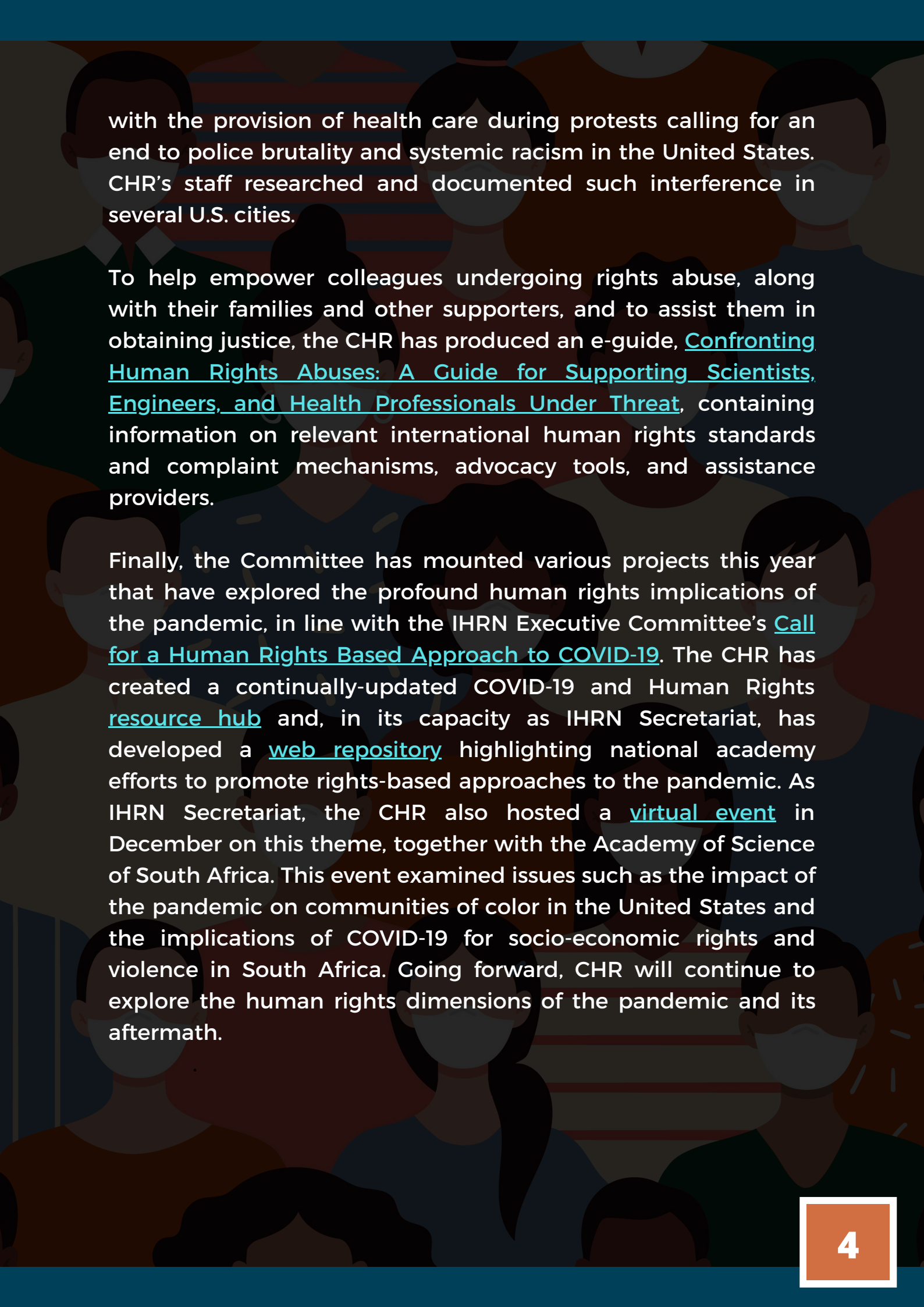
**- DR. MARTIN CHALFIE,
CHR CHAIR (NAS/NAM)**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A core aspect of the CHR's work is its support of scientists, engineers, and health professionals targeted for repression as a consequence of their professional activities or exercise of other internationally protected rights and freedoms. In 2020, the CHR has advocated privately for 79 colleagues under threat in the Middle East and North Africa, Europe and Eurasia, the Americas, and Asia, including through outreach to government officials and submissions to human rights complaint mechanisms. Over the course of the year, 14 colleagues in Bahrain, Hong Kong, Iran, Turkey, and Venezuela have seen [significant positive developments](#) in their cases (e.g., release from prison, reduced sentences, dismissal of criminal charges). Several other colleagues have seen improvements in their conditions of confinement.

Much of the CHR's advocacy this year has been connected to the COVID-19 pandemic, from the Committee's actions to gain the release of imprisoned colleagues at high risk for COVID-19 infection to its support for colleagues who have been harassed, threatened, criminally investigated, and jailed for speaking out about health and safety concerns arising from the pandemic. In connection with these efforts, the CHR issued a rare [public statement](#) in July condemning attacks against scientists and health experts battling COVID-19 in the United States. In August, the CHR also joined the IHRN Executive Committee in [speaking out](#) against interference with



with the provision of health care during protests calling for an end to police brutality and systemic racism in the United States. CHR's staff researched and documented such interference in several U.S. cities.

To help empower colleagues undergoing rights abuse, along with their families and other supporters, and to assist them in obtaining justice, the CHR has produced an e-guide, [Confronting Human Rights Abuses: A Guide for Supporting Scientists, Engineers, and Health Professionals Under Threat](#), containing information on relevant international human rights standards and complaint mechanisms, advocacy tools, and assistance providers.

Finally, the Committee has mounted various projects this year that have explored the profound human rights implications of the pandemic, in line with the IHRN Executive Committee's [Call for a Human Rights Based Approach to COVID-19](#). The CHR has created a continually-updated COVID-19 and Human Rights [resource hub](#) and, in its capacity as IHRN Secretariat, has developed a [web repository](#) highlighting national academy efforts to promote rights-based approaches to the pandemic. As IHRN Secretariat, the CHR also hosted a [virtual event](#) in December on this theme, together with the Academy of Science of South Africa. This event examined issues such as the impact of the pandemic on communities of color in the United States and the implications of COVID-19 for socio-economic rights and violence in South Africa. Going forward, CHR will continue to explore the human rights dimensions of the pandemic and its aftermath.

COVID-19 & HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY

This year, the CHR's advocacy in support of scientists, engineers, and health professionals subjected to serious human rights violations has included efforts to address new rights-related challenges arising in connection with COVID-19. These efforts have included targeted actions to gain the release of unjustly imprisoned colleagues at high risk for COVID-19 infection. The CHR has also researched and documented numerous instances of scientists and public health experts in the United States and abroad who have been targeted in connection with their efforts to combat COVID-19. The Committee's advocacy to assist colleagues in these two areas has included action alerts, appeals, statements, and approaches to international human rights bodies.

DETAINED COLLEAGUES AT RISK OF COVID-19

A number of the CHR's colleagues, imprisoned as a result of their peaceful exercise of internationally protected rights, have been held in overcrowded prisons, under unhygienic conditions, with very limited access to medical care. With the rise of the pandemic, the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights and the World Health Organization called on governments to take urgent steps to ameliorate prison overcrowding, including through the priority release of prisoners jailed for offenses not recognized under international law. To help gain the release of 16 of its most at-risk colleagues, the CHR has undertaken a number of efforts in 2020, including a series of action alerts to CHR Correspondents and member academies in the IHRN, as well as appeals and joint letters to governments in seven countries. We are gratified to be able to celebrate the unexpected release of four of these long-time imprisoned colleagues.

COLLEAGUES TARGETED IN CONNECTION WITH COVID-19

During the past year, attacks on scientists and public health experts providing evidence-based guidance on COVID-19 to the public have escalated in many countries. [In Venezuela](#), for instance, a high-level government official suggested that scientists from the Venezuelan Academy of Physical, Mathematical and Natural Sciences be punished for "causing alarm" in a report on the status of COVID-19 in the country. Colleagues have also come under threat [in Turkey](#), where scientists and health professionals critical of the government's COVID-19 response have found themselves subjected to criminal investigations. In the United States, numerous experts have been disparaged, harassed, and threatened with physical violence for their efforts related to the pandemic.

CHR actions in response to such attacks have included a [public statement](#) condemning threats and retaliation against U.S. colleagues and an advocacy campaign in support of colleagues in a number of countries who have been harassed, threatened, criminally investigated, and jailed for speaking out about health and safety concerns related to the pandemic.

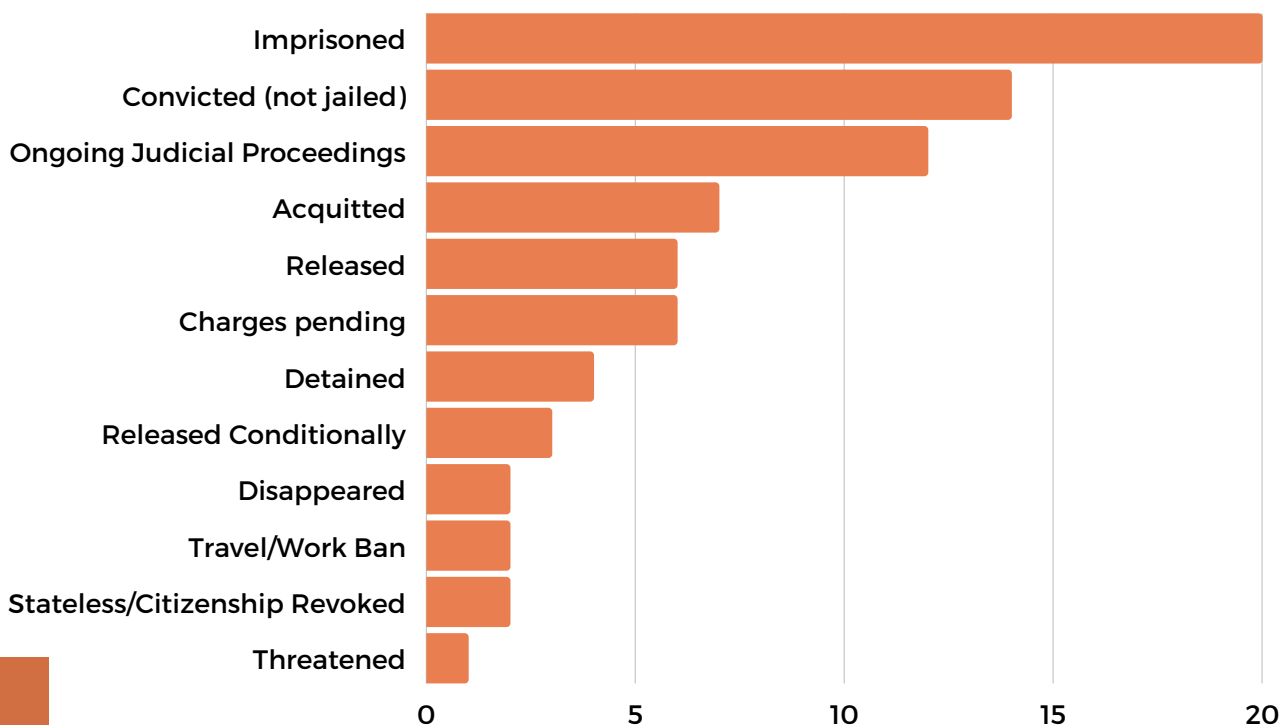
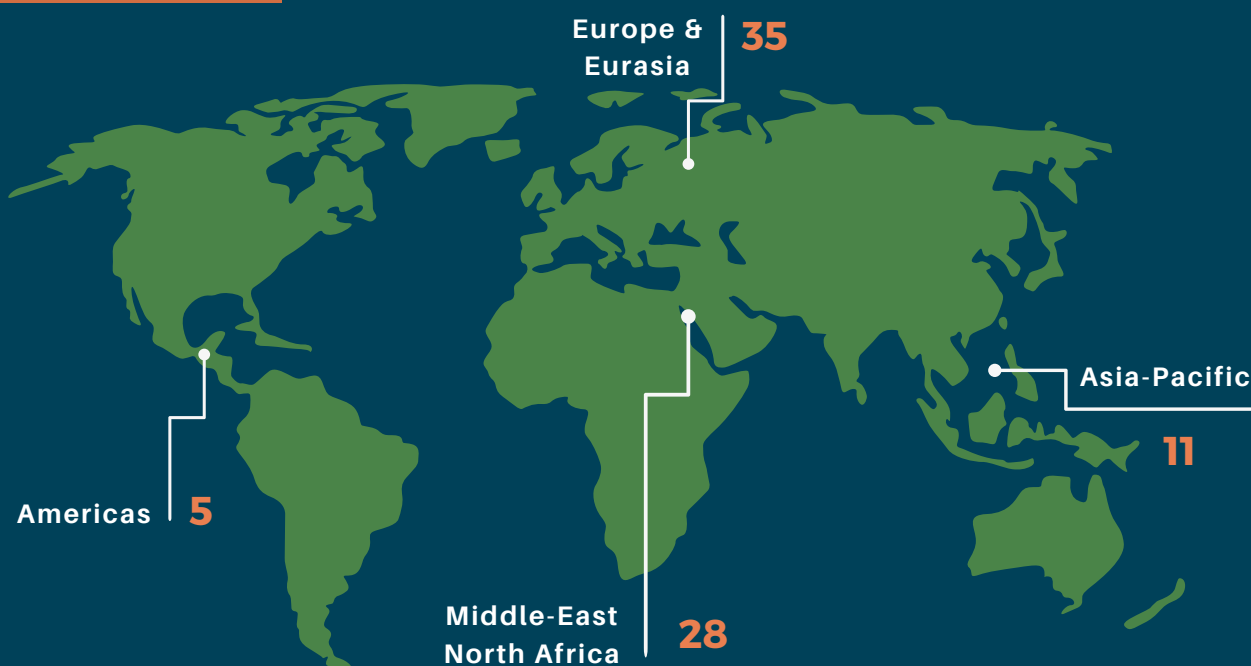


Read the [CHR's full statement](#) condemning attacks on scientists and public health experts battling COVID-19 in the United States.

OTHER ADVOCACY

In 2020 the CHR worked on **79** cases involving colleagues in the Middle East and North Africa, Europe and Eurasia, the Asia-Pacific region, and the Americas. Of these colleagues, **49%** were scientists, **18%** were engineers, and **33%** were health professionals.

CASE STATISTICS



ADVOCACY: THE PROVISION OF MEDICAL CARE IN PROTEST SETTINGS

The CHR advocates in support of the right to seek, obtain, and provide medical care in times of need. Accordingly, in August the Committee [joined](#) the IHRN's Executive Committee in condemning violent efforts to obstruct the provision of medical services during protests in the United States calling for an end to police brutality and systemic racism. Media outlets and several human rights organizations, including the CHR, documented attacks against medics during the protests in several U.S. cities. Such attacks, which included the firing of projectiles directly at medics attempting to provide needed care, constituted serious violations of international human rights law.



CHR STATEMENT ON SYSTEMIC RACISM AND INEQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES

In solidarity with individuals peacefully protesting racial injustice throughout the United States, the CHR issued a [statement](#) recognizing the systemic racism and inequality that pervade U.S. society. The CHR called upon members of the scientific, engineering, and medical communities to help translate concerns about systemic racism and violence into concrete actions designed to build a more just society.

ADVOCACY THROUGH INTERNATIONAL 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 complaint procedure, the CHR continues to make use of a number of other U.N. human rights complaint processes.

In 2020, 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 a continuing, albeit 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 participants in the IHRN over the past 30 years, 72 have been resolved successfully, and 4 of the colleagues whose cases are ongoing have seen positive developments—including improvements in conditions of confinement.) The CHR also submitted information about the case of an Iranian colleague to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the Special Rapporteur on the right to health, and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

CHR COLLABORATION WITH CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

In an ongoing CHR program that provides law students with an opportunity to explore the application of international human rights law to real world situations, law students from Case Western Reserve University have assisted CHR staff in researching cases involving scientists and public health experts who have come under attack. The students have gathered information about interference with the provision of health care during protests in the United States and are preparing a submission to international human rights experts based on their findings.

POSTIVE CASE DEVELOPMENTS

In 2020, the CHR, together with many CHR Correspondents and national academies participating in the IHRN, took over **3,500** actions in support of colleagues under threat (including through appeals, petitions, meetings, and submissions to human rights complaint mechanisms). Over the course of the year, **14** colleagues saw significant positive developments in their cases (e.g., release from prison, reduced sentences, dismissal of criminal charges) in Bahrain, Hong Kong, Iran, Turkey, and Venezuela. Additionally, the conditions of confinement of several other colleagues have improved. Visit our website for [more details](#) on these cases.



5 Academics for Peace



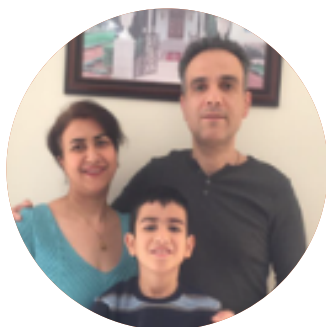
Fariba Adelkhah



Tuna Altinel



Chan Kin-man



Payman Kooshakbaghi



Jose Alberto Marulanda



Narges Mohammadi



Kylie Moore-Gilbert



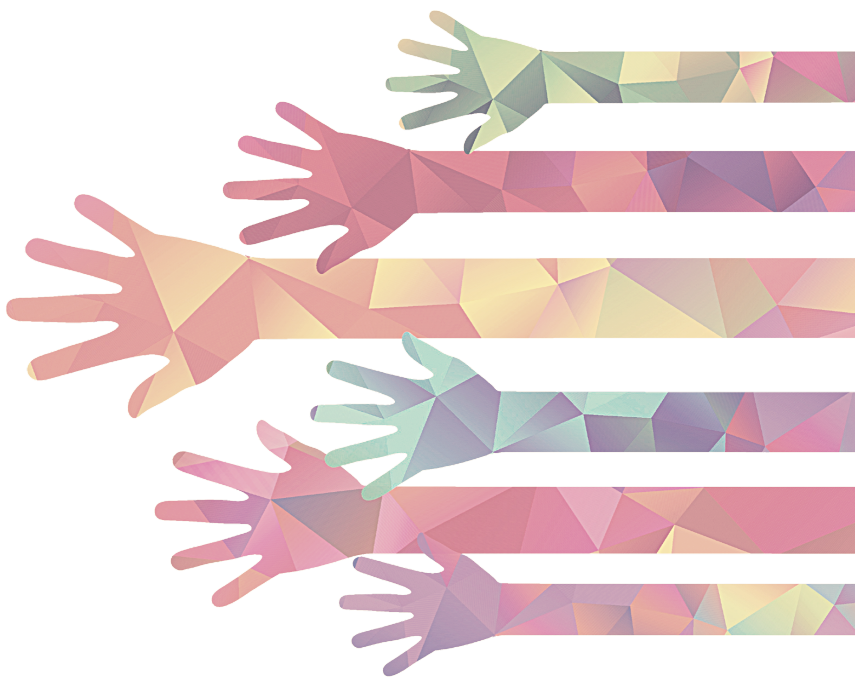
Nabeel Rajab



Murat Tuncer

Photo Credits: Image of Chan Kin-man by Etan Liam; Image of Narges Mohammadi courtesy of the Center for Human Rights in Iran; Image of Nabeel Rajab provided by the Bahrain Center for Human Rights.

AWARENESS RAISING & ASSISTANCE



NEW E-GUIDE ON SUPPORT FOR AT-RISK COLLEAGUES

To help empower colleagues undergoing rights abuse, along with their families and other supporters, and to assist them in obtaining justice, the CHR has produced [Confronting Human Rights Abuses: A Guide for Supporting Scientists, Engineers, and Health Professionals Under Threat](#). This e-guide includes relevant information on international human rights norms and complaint mechanisms, advocacy tools and strategies, and assistance providers. Developed with input from scientists, engineers, and health professionals who have themselves come under threat, it provides human rights information specific to members of these professional communities along with important general information.



RESOURCE COLLECTIONS

The CHR has prepared resource collections on key topics related to human rights and science, engineering, and medicine, including on the [implications of COVID-19 for human rights](#). The CHR's new resource collection on the [right to science](#) provides information on the status and interpretation of this internationally recognized right, such as the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' recently issued [General Comment on Science and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#). The right to science resource collection also provides information on efforts by the [American Association for the Advancement of Science](#), working together with the members of the [AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition](#), to define the right and to push for and monitor its implementation.



WEBINAR: HEALTH INEQUITIES, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND COVID-19

Communities of color in the United States have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting deeply entrenched health and social inequities in the country. In November 2020, the CHR hosted a webinar, [Health Inequities, Human Rights, and COVID-19](#), that explored this health and human rights challenge, as well as strategies to confront it, including through priority access to COVID-19 vaccines. The panel was moderated by **Alicia Ely Yamin** (Lecturer on Law and Senior Fellow at the Petrie-Flom Center for Health Law Policy, Biotechnology and Bioethics at Harvard Law School) and featured presentations by **Ana Diex Roux** (Dean and Distinguished University Professor of Epidemiology, Dornsife School of Public Health, Drexel University/Director, Drexel Urban Health Collaborative), **Greg Millett** (Vice President and Director of Public Policy at amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research), and **Saad Omer** (Director, Yale Institute for Global Health/Associate Dean (Global Health Research), Yale School of Medicine). This webinar was part of a [larger virtual event](#), organized by the IHRN in collaboration with the Academy of Science of South Africa.

THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK

OF ACADEMIES AND SCHOLARLY SOCIETIES

The CHR serves as the Secretariat of the 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 works to raise awareness of the connections between human rights, science, engineering, and medicine.

In May 2020, the IHRN's Executive Committee, made up of members from 12 academies around the world, issued a [public statement](#) calling for a human rights-based approach to COVID-19. The statement called on States to ensure the availability and accessibility of quality health care to all people, without discrimination, and emphasized that emergency COVID-19 measures affecting the right to freedom of expression and other human rights must be lawful, necessary, proportionate, time-limited, and non-discriminatory.

The IHRN's Executive Committee subsequently issued another [public statement](#) in August of 2020 condemning attacks on medics in the United States. The statement expressed concern over reports of targeted attacks against healthcare workers and efforts to obstruct their provision of medical services during protests calling for an end to police brutality and systemic racism in the United States.



The IHRN was pleased to welcome four new members, listed below, to its Executive Committee in 2020. They join existing members Édouard Brézin, Martin Chalfie, Carol Corillon, Abdallah Daar, Belita Koiller, Pedro León Azofeifa, Ida Nicolaisen, John Polanyi, and Ovid Tzeng. Visit the [IHRN's website](#) for more information on the Executive Committee.

Zohra ben Lakhdar Akrouit (Tunisia)



Dr. Akrouit is a physicist and member of various scientific academies, including the Islamic World Academy of Sciences (IAS), The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS), the African Academy of Sciences (AAS), and the Académie Tunisienne des Sciences des Lettres et des Arts (BAH). She has conducted research at the Faculty of Science in Tunis, as well as in many African countries. Her laboratory—LSAMA: Laboratoire de spectroscopie Atomique, Moléculaire et Applications—became part of a Laboratoire International Associé (LIA) with Centre National de Recherche Scientifique en France (CNRS) in 2004.

RoseEmma Mamaa Entsua-Mensah (Ghana)



Prof. Entsua-Mensah is a Fishery Scientist and an Aquatic Ecologist and served as Chief Research Scientist and Deputy-Director General at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Ghana from 2008-2018. She is a Fellow of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, and she is currently the Chair of the University of Ghana College of Basic and Applied Sciences Advisory Board.

Edward K. Kirumira (Uganda)



Dr. Kirumira is a Professor of Medical Sociology and Director of the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS) Stellenbosch, South Africa. He is a Fellow of the Uganda National Academy of Sciences (UNAS). His work focuses on HIV/AIDS, population and reproductive health, emergent diseases, and global health.

Indira Nath (India)



Dr. Nath is the Former Founder Head of the Department of Biotechnology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. She is currently Visiting Professor, Biosupport Unit of DBT, New Delhi, India. Dr. Nath has made pioneering contributions to immunology research in human leprosy. She is a Fellow of the three National Science Academies (India), National Academy of Medical Sciences (India), Royal College of Pathology (UK), and The World Academy of Sciences (Trieste).

THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK'S

HUMAN RIGHTS & COVID-19 VIRTUAL EVENT



In December 2020, the CHR, as IHRN Secretariat, and the [Academy of Science of South Africa](#) (ASSAf) hosted a [virtual public event](#) on the topic of human rights and COVID-19. The event consisted of a series of presentations and webinars on rights-related challenges, including the following:

Keynote Address: Towards a Rights-Based Approach to COVID-19

Professor Larry Gostin, NAM member and Director of the O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law at Georgetown University Law Center, delivered the [keynote address](#), "Towards a Human Rights-Based Approach to COVID-19". In his address, Prof. Gostin discussed important implications of COVID-19 for the right to health, civil liberties, and social justice, and offered suggestions for integrating human rights into pandemic response efforts.



COVID-19 & Human Rights: Perspectives on Socio-economic Rights and Violence

ASSAf hosted a [panel discussion](#) that explored the impact of COVID-19 on socio-economic rights and violence faced by individuals in South Africa. Panelists explored measures taken by the government to slow the spread of the pandemic, which have had far-reaching consequences for a range of socio-economic rights, such as the rights to education, food, and work. Panelists also discussed the serious consequences for civil and political rights in relation to domestic violence and use of force by law enforcement officials.

IHRN Human Rights and COVID-19 Repository

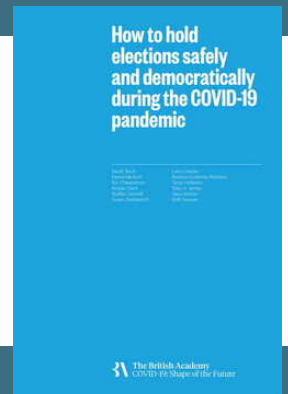
Through their research and other activities, many national academies are examining the connections between science, engineering, health, and human rights and working to promote rights-based approaches to the pandemic. The CHR, as IHRN Secretariat, created a [digital repository](#) highlighting some of the work that national academies around the world have produced in this space.

The repository features resources on an array of topics, such as the pandemic's impact on the digital education divide, COVID-19 and children's rights, and privacy implications of digital contact tracing efforts. Examples of featured resources include:



A Policy Briefing produced by the Royal Society of Canada that examines [various rights engaged by COVID-19 response strategies](#), including the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, liberty and security, and privacy.

A Briefing from The British Academy that highlights innovative ways in which regional and national governments have addressed [election-related challenges during COVID-19](#) and previous public health crises.



An interview with Global Young Academy (GYA) Co-Chair Dr. Anindita Bhadra about the pandemic's impact on the [digital education divide](#).

A podcast from the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia that considers the implications of the COVID-19 crisis from a [gender perspective](#).



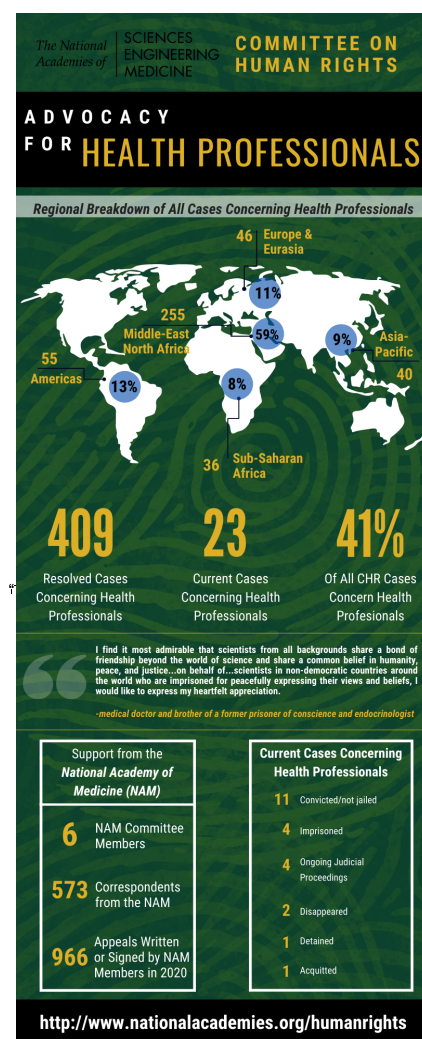
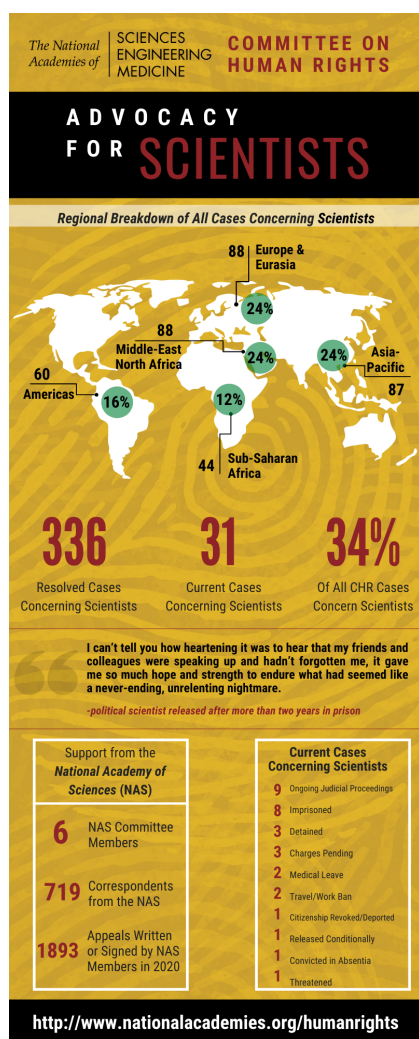
An interview with the IHRN and article for the Uganda National Academy of Sciences by Dr. Sabrina Bakeera-Kitaka on the [pandemic's impact on children](#).

THE 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 2020



“

It is our responsibility to ensure that science and its applications are in harmony with the full set of universal standards. A human-rights approach to science must be at the heart of what we want to be a sustainable future...

”

**-Nada Al-Nashif, UNESCO
Assistant Director-
General for Social and
Human Sciences, [*Science
as a Human Right*](#)**



HOW YOU CAN HELP

BECOME A CHR CORRESPONDENT

If you are a member of the National Academies interested in receiving updates on the CHR's activities, become a Correspondent by emailing the CHR at [chr@nas.edu].

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR MAILING LIST

If you are a member of the public and interested in learning more about CHR events, activities, and opportunities to assist threatened scientific colleagues, please [subscribe to our email list](#) on the CHR website.

SUPPORT US

You can make a [secure online gift](#) to the CHR on the National Academies' website, or by contacting the CHR via email. To make giving easier, the National Academies have also introduced a monthly recurring gift option, which allows you to set up an automatic donation to the CHR each month.

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