



Human
Rights
Committee

Annual
Report
2017

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Liberal International
Human Rights Committee

Annual Report 2017

Foreword

Strengthening liberal co-operation around the globe in defence of Human Rights



Markus Löning
*Chairman of the LI
Human Rights Committee*

Promoting and advancing human rights sits at the core of Liberal International's programmatic work. The LI Human Rights Committee (LI HRC) has provided the global federation with a distinctive voice in troubled times; when liberal ideas and values are being pushed aside by loud and flashy populist far-right slogans.

In 2017, the LI HRC achieved a number of new milestones by engaging for the first time with national human rights institutions such as the **South African Human Rights Commission** and prominent international bodies like the **International Criminal Court**.

In **Nairobi**, members of the Africa Liberal Network solidified their commitment to eliminating gender- based violence by adopting the Nairobi Declaration on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women upon an

initiative driven by LI Human Rights Committee. In **Manila**, LI President **Dr Juli Minoves** and I defied the Duterte regime by openly contesting his practice of extra-judicial killings and demanding the release of our unjustly imprisoned colleague, Senator Leila De Lima: President Duterte's biggest critic. In **The Hague**, liberals rededicated themselves to advancing international justice by working to improve the accountability of international institutions and engaging in dialogue with the President of the ICC Judge, Silvia Fernández de Gurmendi.

The LI Human Rights Committee has undoubtedly faced a number of challenges in its work but along the way, it has sustained the spirit of mutual collaboration and determination to unite the liberal voice in the defence of human rights. As I look towards the future, I hope to strengthen the liberal human rights parliamentarians' network and continue to support my liberal colleagues in their pursuit for justice and respect for basic democratic principles. I invite you to join us on this journey as we work towards a freer and more equal world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Markus Löning', followed by a checkmark.



COMMITTEE OVERVIEW

Throughout 2017, the LI Human Rights Committee has shown a consistent growth in terms of diversity in its membership and priority work areas. The 199th LI Executive Committee in Johannesburg, South Africa saw the election of 24 representatives from 18 countries across 3 continents who vowed to deliver on the Committee's newly ratified priorities, including the promotion and advancement of women's rights, LGBTI rights, the responsibility to protect principle and freedom of belief. Full information about the new committee including the biography of all Committee members can be found on LI [website](#).



#LIHRC

The LI Human Rights Committee is made up of parliamentarians, experts and activists. Of the 24 members, 14 are women; All are committed to promoting fundamental freedoms around the world.



Dr. Stephanie Krispor



Berhan Nazimov



Charlotte Burgess

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Priority Work Areas

**FREEDOM
OF BELIEF**
IN AN ERA OF RADICALIZATION

Responsibility
ten v

FREEDOM OF BELIEF

Freedom of Belief has always posed a paradox for liberals around the world: how do we reconcile freedom of belief with freedom of expression? In an age where religion, in general, is misleadingly blamed for the sharp increase in extremism, how do politicians, policy experts, campaigners and human rights professionals take back and reunite our fundamental freedoms of belief and expression? These were the questions that the LI Human Rights Committee focused on as it tried to shape its policy on Freedom of Belief for the first time.

Providing an insight into the liberal perspective on these issues, the Committee released its first ever publication on Freedom of Belief. Revisiting important exchanges and debates with front- line practitioners and liberal leaders, the publication looked into the debate of addressing the urgency of confronting fundamentalism while promoting the freedom to hold a religious belief alongside the right not to believe.

Drawing on expertise provided during the LI HRC meeting with Françoise Schepmans, the Mayor of the Molenbeek in the city of Brussels, the publication provides a comprehensive overview of the work undertaken by liberals from across the globe to address some of these challenges.

The online version of the booklet can be found by clicking [here](#).



LGBTI RIGHTS

Liberal International remains as the only political international with a working group aimed at promoting and advancing LGBTI rights. In 2017, a big focus of the LI Human Rights Committee's work in this priority area was supporting Pride movements around the globe and providing wider visibility for the LGBTI community.

LI HRC AT COPENHAGEN PRIDE 2017



As part of this strategy of providing wider visibility for the LGBTI community, Chair of LI LGBTI Rights Working Group, Frank van Dalen, travelled to Copenhagen, Denmark for Pride and interviewed Karen Ellemann, Minister for Equality (Venstre), and Former Minister for Research, Innovation and Higher Education Sofie Carsten Nielsen (Radikale Venstre).

They discussed the role both parties play in promoting LGBTI rights in Denmark and around the world.

“There is still so much to do around the world to promote LGBTI rights and to fight against suppression”
- Sofie Carsten Nielsen
Radikale Venstre, Denmark

“We have to be in the front row all the time. This means that we have to show our determination to fight for change at home as well as abroad. There is still so much to do around the world to promote LGBTI rights and to fight against suppression for all those people who don't have room to be who they are” said Nielsen.

Asked what the biggest challenge is for liberals in promoting LGBTI rights, the Danish Minister for Equality explained that LGBTI rights are interlinked



[Watch the YouTube Video.](#)

“The biggest challenge for every Liberal is to stand up for every basic human right.”

- Karen Ellemann

Vestre, Denmark

with the advancement of all other basic human rights. “The biggest challenge for every Liberal is to stand up for every basic human right. It is so important that we support and insist that you as an individual have the right to love whoever you want to love and to be whoever you want to be” she said.

The video interview also addressed the situation with LGBTI rights in countries where homophobia is more prominent and the actions liberals can undertake in order to advance the rights of LGBTI communities.



WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The LI HRC's work in the field of women's rights in 2017 focused extensively on ending violence against women in politics, reflecting the close co-operation between LI and the National Democratic Institute in the context of the #NotTheCost campaign.

Liberal International remains as the only political international to actively support the only international campaign on prevention and elimination of violence against politically active women since the campaign's launch two years' ago.



LI HRC AT AFRICA LIBERAL NETWORK GA

Teaming up with the Africa Liberal Network (ALN) at their the 13th General Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, the LI Human Rights Committee hosted a meeting on prevention and elimination of gender-based violence – taking the debate directly to Africa-based liberal parties and their respective leaders and parliamentarians.

“ Women continue to face hurdles when engaging with the democratic process: from their families and communities to the men at the top of the political tree ”

- Rosemary Machua

ALN Vice President, Kenya



Co-hosted by the Orange Democratic Movement, the event saw the adoption of the monumental Nairobi Declaration on Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women, which commits ALN to working with Liberal International and liberal parties across the world to eliminate all violence against women and girls.

The declaration also commits ALN members to work towards bringing more women into public life and politics, believing strongly that one can only eliminate violence against women when women are comfortable taking over leadership roles. The Network's members agreed to promote and, where in

government, implement policies to secure women's access to education – the single most effective method of empowerment – as well as working with judicial branches and police forces to ensure the effective protection of women from acts of violence.

Owing to the generous financial support received from Rassemblement des Republicains, the LI HRC meeting brought together around 50 liberals from approximately 15 different countries in Africa. Rosemary Machua, ALN Vice President for East Africa and LI HRC Member commented on the outcome saying:



“ I am proud that my first action as President is to endorse this declaration which commits the Network to taking the serious problem of violence against women...”

- *Stevens Mokgalapa*
ALN President, South Africa

“African politics remains overwhelmingly the work of men. Women continue to face hurdles when engaging with the democratic process: from their families and communities to the men at the top of the political tree. I am delighted that the ALN has acknowledged the unique challenges women face and the horrifying prevalence of gender-based violence. I look forward to working with the member parties on exposing violence in their home

countries and supporting more women to enter into public life.” Stevens Mokgalapa MP, newly-elected ALN President and LI HRC Member, echoed Machua’s words saying:

“I am proud that my first action as President is to endorse this declaration which commits the Network to taking the serious problem of violence against women – in all its forms – head on. It is unacceptable for liberals to stand by while over half of the population still suffers from discrimination and, in many cases, violence.

The ALN pledges today to work on ourselves, by striving to bring in more women into our own processes, whilst strongly, passionately, and loudly protesting poor treatment of women across the African continent.”

“ I sincerely hope that this Declaration will serve to solidify the efforts of liberals to speak with one voice when it comes to promotion and advancement of human rights...”

- *Markus Löning*
Free Democratic Party, Germany



Markus Löning, Chairman of the Liberal International (LI) Human Rights Committee, agreed with his colleagues by emphasizing the historic significance of this commitment. “This fundamental document represents an important step towards the empowerment of women and it testifies to the ongoing commitment by the African liberal family to gender equality.”

“As we look forward to strengthening the co-operation between Liberal International (LI), its Human Rights Committee and the Africa Liberal Network, I sincerely hope that this Declaration will serve to solidify the efforts of liberals to speak with one voice when it comes to promotion and advancement of human rights” he said. The ALN General Assembly featured delegates from over 40 liberal parties from across the African continent, who

met to discuss the major issues facing their countries and the wider continent and to share their experiences of campaigning, governing and scrutinising governments in Africa.



62ND SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



The event will discuss
obstacles and challenges
business women from
different backgrounds face
in various parts of the world.
The objective is to provide
an insight into the situation
of business women and
their possibilities for
economic empowerment
around the world in an ever-
changing world of work.



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SPEAKERS



JACQUELINE PRINS
LIJ MA – Director of
Emancipation for the
Ministry of Education,
Culture and Science of
Netherlands
Gender and LGBT Equality
Department



TINA ACKTOFT
Member of Parliament for
Folkpartiet,
Sweden



KHADIJA EL MORABIT
Vice President of INLW
for MENA
Regional President of the
Association of Women
Entrepreneurs in Morocco
(AFEM)



MAYSING YANG
Vice-President of
INLW for Asia
Vice-President of
Taiwan Foundation for
Democracy

MODERATOR



MARGARET DE VOS VAN STEENWIJK
President of International Network of Liberal Women
Former Vice Chair, Clingendael Institute of
International Relations
Member of Board of Unicef Centrum Nederland

For the fifth year in a row, Liberal International and its Human Rights Committee actively participated in the work of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW).

In co-operation with the International Network of Liberal Women (INLW), the LI HRC hosted a side event which discussed obstacles and challenges business women from different backgrounds face in various parts of the world. The objective was to provide an insight into the situation of business women and their possibilities for economic empowerment in an ever- changing world.

Speakers included Jacqueline Prins, Director of Emancipation for the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands; Tina Acktoft, Member of Parliament, Folkpartiet Liberalerna, Sweden; LI HRC Member and INLW Vice-President Khadija El Morabit; Maysing Yang, Vice-President of INLW for Asia and Vice-President of Taiwan Foundation for Democracy and Margaret de vos Van Steenwijk, President of INLW.





#NOTTHECOST CAMPAIGN

At the invitation of the National Democratic Institute (NDI), Vice-Chair of LI's Human Rights Committee and LI vice president, Astrid Thors, was featured as a guest contributor to NDI's No Party to Violence online platform. The online space forms a central part of NDI's #NotTheCost campaign on ending violence against women in politics, encouraging politically active women who have suffered harassment to come forward.

“ During my time as Finland's
Minister of Migration
and European Affairs, I
experienced this kind of
attack.

- Astrid Thors

Svenska Folkpartiet, Finland

”

Sharing her experience as a woman in politics, Thors described how she was subjected to a vicious online harassment campaign which incited hatred and violence towards her while she was a Minister of Migration and European Affairs in the Finnish government.

“The backlash against women in politics is also being played out on social media, where hate speech is directed at female journalists, researchers and politicians. Hate speech that targets women is different than that which targets men: it is more violent in tone and/or makes explicitly sexual references. Its aim is to frighten women into silencing their own voices in society. During my time as Finland's Minister of Migration and European Affairs, I experienced this kind of attack. Someone created a Facebook group inciting people to commit violence against me, and the threats and harassment poured in. Compared to others I was lucky; the authorities could trace who had set up the group, and because it was done on a server in Finland, the Finnish prosecution could take action and the perpetrator was sentenced” said the LI HRC Vice-Chair.





[View the blog post](#)

She also stressed that the collaboration between Liberal International (LI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) on the issue of stopping violence against politically active women is crucial. “Both NDI’s #NotTheCost campaign and LI’s campaign for the adoption of the Council of Europe’s Istanbul Convention have the same goal and are mutually reinforcing. As an association of liberal parties around the world, LI has a key leadership role to play in setting standards for its member parties, and NDI has already proven itself to be a leader on the issue of preventing violence against women in politics, elections, political parties and online “she said.

The initial collaboration began with an endorsement by LI President Dr. Juli Minoves when he addressed the official launch of the #NottheCost campaign on the fringes of the 61st Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York in March 2016.

THE GENEVA SUMMIT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



Contributing to the annual Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy, which is one of the largest gatherings of human rights victims from across Europe, has become a cornerstone of LI's human rights work.

2017 marked the fifth year since LI became a strategic co-host to the Summit and saw the largest-ever Liberal International delegation, with representatives from Africa, Asia, and Europe.

LI representatives included Chito Gascon, LI HRC Member and Chair of the Philippines Human Rights Commission, Astrid Thors, outgoing OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Medard Mulangala, LI HRC Member and Vice-President of the Africa Liberal Network and Tamara Dancheva, Head

“...we have a challenging road ahead of us, much work has to be done...”

– Chito Gascon

Chair of the Human Rights
Commission of the Philippines

“your work shows how a defender of human rights, how a true democrat, is the person best to represent and defend the interest of all people living in a country.”

– Astrid Thors

Svenska Folkpartiet, Finland



of LI Human Rights Programme. Addressing the opening of the Summit, Chito Gascon described the political consequences of human rights abuses saying:

“In this hall are assembled champions of human rights who are working in extremely difficult circumstances... we have a challenging road ahead of us, much work has to be done, and unfortunately, the odds are seemingly not in our favour as human rights violations continuously undermine democracy.” He concluded by stressing on the importance of pushing back against human rights violations. “An attack on human rights is an assault on democracy... it is important for us to clearly draw the line and to speak out against human rights violations whenever we see them... We should draw on the courage of

women who marched on the streets of Washington DC and San Francisco... we must push back” he said.

The address followed the presentation of the Geneva Summit Courage Award to the former president of the Maldives, Mohamed Nasheed, by Astrid Thors. “Mr. President, your work shows how a defender of human rights, how a true democrat, is the person best to represent and defend the interest of all people living in a country. Your work has contributed greatly to the awareness that if climate change is not debated than it will harm the human rights of everyone, but first it often hurts the most vulnerable. I am certain that you can count on Liberal politicians to defend the values that are at the core of human dignity and freedom” she said. Medard Mulangala spoke of the elections in the Democratic



Republic of the Congo (DRC) at the time by cautioning of the need for strong institutions and calling on the international community to get behind the people in the DRC citing the recent political success in the Gambia. The 2017 Geneva Summit Women's Rights award



was presented to Shirin, a freed Yazidi sex slave of ISIS by Tamara Dancheva. Shirin received the award for “for giving a voice to the voiceless and for defending the basic human rights of Yazidi women”.

The Summit took place over the course of two days and it featured a closed session at the United Nations headquarters tailored towards the international diplomatic community.



LI HRC MEETINGS

A wide-angle photograph of a large, modern, circular conference room. The room features a curved wooden wall and a large, curved, perforated metal ceiling. Numerous people are seated at long tables arranged in a semi-circle, facing towards the front of the room. The lighting is soft and even. The text "LI HRC MEETINGS" is overlaid in white at the top left of the image.

LI HRC AT ANDORRA CONGRESS

Do Liberals recognise that human rights are individual and not collective or do they believe that human rights are first and foremost, group rights? This was the question that was debated during the bi-annual meeting of the LI Human Rights Committee on the fringes of LI 70th Anniversary Congress in Andorra.

“As humans we only exist in a community and cannot exist as sole individuals
- Lord John Alderdice
Liberal Democrats, United Kingdom”

Inspired by the debate style of the British Parliament, around 35 delegates to the LI Congress and LI HRC members defended the two sides of the debate.

Defending the side of group rights, LI President of Honour Lord Alderdice (Liberal Democrats, UK) explained that in many cases human rights are social and economic rights and therefore they are group rights not individual human rights. He also emphasized that while liberals recognise that individuals have rights, there are some rights which one cannot implement unless he/she is part of a group (such as minority rights for example). This is because implementation of individual rights within a group is not possible. In his concluding statement he reiterated that it is not a question of either or: people only exist in a community and thus cannot exist as sole individuals.

“One cannot implement individual rights without group rights. There are some rights which one cannot implement unless he/she is part of a group because implementation of individual rights within a group is not possible. As humans we only exist in a community and cannot exist as sole individuals” he said.





“ Everything starts with the individual and the person: a group is made of individuals and therefore we can't have group rights without individual rights...”

- Saumura Tioulong

Cambodia National Rescue Party, Cambodia

Saumura Tioulong (Cambodia National Rescue Party) who defended the individual rights debate opposed Lord Alderdice's position by reminding of the fact that liberals should defend all rights and that one cannot privilege individual rights over group rights when these rights clash. “Everything starts with the individual and the person: a group is made of individuals and therefore we can't have group

rights without individual rights; the origin of all rights is the person; rights and freedoms are individual and universal and they should not be mixed up with group rights” she said.



Alexander Kolks, who supported the argument presented by Tioulong, explained that individual rights are key to the rule of law. “One of the biggest infringements on an individual within a society is discrimination. The core of humanity is the individual and one's freedom should not infringe on anyone else's rights. As liberals we defend individuals who are part of a minority and if we don't protect individual rights there is no group to be a part of” he concluded.

Participants raised questions in relation to the obligation liberals have to defend individuals in a society and the need for liberal parties to work together in order to defend group rights alongside individual rights.

The main conclusion from the debate was that liberals face a big challenge when defending individual rights as at times these rights clash with group rights. Therefore self-identification is crucial and as long as group rights are advanced alongside individual rights then there can be full equality for all.

The debate was moderated by LI HRC member and Former Member of Parliament (FDP, Germany) Marina Schuster and featured LI HRC Member Naomi Blumenthal (Israeli Liberal Group) and Members of Parliament Judith Pallares and Eva Biaudet as additional speakers.





LI HRC AT SOUTH AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

As part of its on-going mission to collaborate with external partners and human rights institutions, the Liberal International Human Rights Committee (LI HRC) held a series of strategic meetings with representatives of the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) in Johannesburg including SAHRC Chairperson Professor Bongani Christopher Majola and Commissioner Mohamed Ameerma.

The LI delegation, led by the LI HRC Chair Markus Löning, raised a number of questions relating to the mandate of the Commission, its complaints handling and advocacy mechanisms and its relationship with the South African Parliament. Stressing on the importance of the visit Löning said: “As the only political international with a specifically designated Human Rights Committee, LI is tirelessly working to promote and advance a variety of fundamental human rights issues and reaching out to institutions such as SAHRC forms a fundamental part of our work.”

Löning was joined by a number of LI HRC Members including LI Vice-President on the Bureau Abir Al-Sahlan, the Chair of Radikale Venstre’s International Relations



Committee Charlotte Burgess, the Chair of the LI British Group Philip Bennion, Chair of LI LGBTI Rights Working Group Frank van Dalen and the Information Officer of the Swedish International Liberal Centre Asa Söderström. Sharing her experience as a former Member of the Swedish Parliament, Al-Sahlan drew attention to the fact that while human rights issues are in fact streamlined into the Swedish political framework, the UN Charter is yet to be incorporated into the Swedish human rights legislation. The LI VP also drew parallel



“External engagements with institutions such as LI HRC provide the SAHRC with a great opportunity to create greater awareness for the Commission’s work and global efforts to prevent human rights violations more generally.”

- *Bokankatla Malatji*

SAHRC Commissioner, South Africa

comparisons between Europe and South Africa pointing out that soft human rights issues such as hidden discrimination have been steadily on the rise.

Chairperson Majola and Commissioner Ameerma impressed with their presentations on the independence and transparency of the work of the Commission not least in light of the shrinking civil society space in South Africa and the ongoing financial challenges the Commission

faces in its daily work. In an appeal for better protection of civil and political rights around the world, Professor Majola emphasized the need to better intertwine such rights into the global human rights approach.

In his concluding remarks, SAHRC Commissioner for Older People and People with Disabilities Bokankatla Malatji stressed on the value of external engagements such as the one with Liberal International Human Rights Committee “as these provide the South African Human Rights Commission with a great opportunity to create greater awareness for the Commission’s work and global efforts to prevent human rights violations more generally.”

The LI HRC study tour took part on the fringes of the 199th LI Executive Committee meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa in October 2017 and featured 25 delegates from around 10 different countries.

THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL JUSTICE: LI'S HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE CONVENES IN THE HAGUE

Gathering at the seat of the international legal system for its 10th bi-annual meeting, members of the Liberal International Human Rights Committee (LI HRC) came together in The Hague, The Netherlands to discuss strategies on advancing international justice.

In panel discussions with the Secretary-General of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD)

Kiat Sittheeamorn, former Member of the European Parliament Lousewies Van Der Laan (Democrats 66, Netherlands), Member of the European Parliament Ilhan Kyuchyuk (Movement for Rights and Freedom, Bulgaria) and the CEO of the Hague Institute for Global Justice, Steven Van Hoogstraten, LI HRC members debated how liberals can make international justice work and what future there is for the international legal system.



“ The work of parliamentarians in the ratification of the Rome Statute treaty and its national implementation of the Rome Statute is key which is why I am delighted to welcome such a large delegation from Liberal International to the ICC Headquarters ”

- Judge Silvia Fernandez de Gurmendi
President of the International Criminal Court

Hoogstraten agreed that improving accountability is not a responsibility just for international institutions and that “a monitoring mechanism alongside a prosecutorial system is necessary in order to make

the international justice system more efficient” while Van Der Laan stressed that “international institutions need to work with national states in achieving global justice and liberal order.” She further explained that maintaining prevention systems and international legal systems is crucial for sustaining global peace and accountability and global liberal order.



Judge Silvia Fernandez de Gurmendi

Warning of the decline in democracy worldwide, Sittheeamorn insisted that justice is a tricky issue. “International justice can only be achieved when the rule of law is respected and the judicial process is credible and accountable. The response to atrocities and injustices must be swift which is why preventive measures are also increasingly important: the quicker we react the more lives we can save” he said. On the fringes of these debates, the LI HRC also met with the President of the International Criminal Court,

Judge Silvia Fernandez de Gurmendi, who welcomed the overwhelming support from liberals in government and opposition for the important work of the Court.

“The work of parliamentarians in the ratification of the Rome Statute treaty and its national implementation of the Rome Statute is key which is why I am delighted to welcome such a large delegation from Liberal International to the ICC Headquarters” she said. The LI HRC meeting saw 15 members on the Committee representing 3 different continents gather for the first time since their election at the 199th LI Executive Committee meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa.







LI HRC VISITS SENATOR LEILA DE LIMA IN PRISON

One of the most prominent cases that the Liberal International Human Rights Committee undertook during the past year was the case of the unjustly imprisoned Filipino Senator Leila De Lima (Liberal Party of the Philippines).

Senator de Lima – an outspoken critic of President Rodrigo Duterte and his so-called “war on drugs” – was arrested in the Philippines on trumped up charges. She has been held in pre-trial detention since February 2017.



“ The charges against Senator de Lima are based solely on the conflicting testimonies of criminals who were subsequently absolved of drug charges after they agreed to be prosecution witnesses. ”

- Dr Juli Minoves

Liberals d'Andorra, Andorra

The President of Liberal International (LI), Dr Juli Minoves, and the Chairman of Liberal International Human Rights Committee, Mr Markus Löning, conducted a field visit to Manila in July 2017 in an attempt to see Senator De Lima in prison and convey the heartfelt support on behalf of the entire global liberal family. While Dr. Minoves was arbitrarily barred from meeting face-to-face with the human rights champion, Löning was allowed to meet with her at the site of her incarceration, Camp Crame, Quezon City, The Philippines.

In a statement issued having been refused entry to Camp Crame, Dr Minoves said at the time: “The Regime in the Philippines has abandoned even the appearance of democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. In preventing my meeting with Senator De Lima the authorities obviously did not like that we questioned human rights in the country at the United Nations last month. Parliamentary immunity is meant to protect sitting



members of parliament from undue political and other pressures. Pre-trial detention is completely disproportionate especially for a sitting senator. Under international standards pre-trial detention should in no case be longer than six months. President Duterte, a lawyer himself, should be well aware of this." The Regime in the Philippines has abandoned even the appearance of democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights."

Löning was equally forceful in his statement advising that "more than 13.7 million people had voted for Senator Leila De Lima and right now she should have been fighting the extension of martial law in the Senate, not wasting her time sitting in prison."

Attacking the charges against the Senator as baseless he concluded his statement saying: "The charges against

Senator de Lima are based solely on the conflicting testimonies of criminals who were subsequently absolved of drug charges after they agreed to be prosecution witnesses."

"LI calls for the immediate release of Senator de Lima from detention."

As President Rodrigo Duterte has stepped up his campaign of censorship in the Philippines, it has now been over one year since Senator de Lima, was unjustly arrested for bravely speaking out against the president's so-called 'war on drugs', which has left thousands of mostly poor Filipinos dead.

In effort to put even more pressure, the LI HRC addressed the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council calling on the UN to remain vigilant on the case of Senator De Lima and condemn the continuing violations of fundamental human rights and the rule of law in the Philippines.



LI HRC AT THE UNITED NATIONS

Advocacy towards the United Nations (UN) is one of the most prominent aspects of LI Human Rights Committee work.

In 2017, the Committee highlighted several important cases before the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) not least by addressing Council members in exercising its right to an oral intervention.

The below report provides a detailed account of LI's policy towards each session of the UNHRC for the past year.

34TH SESSION OF UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Call for Democracy and Rule of Law in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

In a written statement to the 34th United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Session, Liberal International together with its co-operating organisation the Africa Liberal Network (ALN), called on the United Nations to establish an Independent Commission of Inquiry in order to conduct full, thorough and transparent investigation into the alleged human rights violations in the country and hold those responsible to an account.

The statement also recalled previous actions LI and ALN had undertaken to address the crisis in the country following the stalling tactic deployed by President Joseph Kabila in order to use administrative and technical means of delaying the election and remaining in power beyond the end of his constitutional mandate on 20 December 2016.

In the conclusion of the statement, LI committed its liberal parliamentarians in government and in opposition across the world to continue to take a firm stand in their parliaments and speak up in support of the political agreement reached between members of the Congolese majority and opposition groups.



LIBERAL
INTERNATIONAL

FAO

PABSE
UNITED NATIONS

Call to Criminalize Domestic Violence in Russia

“How can a country such as Russia, which is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopt legislation which not only decriminalises but clearly condones domestic violence?”

“ We call on President Vladimir Putin to repeal the law decriminalizing family-based violence and to cease all attacks on fundamental human rights and freedoms in Russia ”

- *Phillip Bennion*

Liberal International British Group, United Kingdom

This was the question that LI HRC Member and Chair of Liberal International British Group Phillip Bennion posed to the permanent members of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland. Addressing the Council two days after International Women's Day on behalf of Liberal International, Bennion condemned a newly adopted Russian law which legalises domestic abuse.

“We call on President Vladimir Putin to repeal the law decriminalizing family-based violence and to cease all attacks on fundamental human rights and freedoms in Russia” said Bennion.



He also reminded the Council that Liberal International, a champion in the fight against domestic violence pioneered through its Human Rights Committee work, will continue to stand side by side with those who have been victimized and who have been denied justice.

35TH SESSION OF UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Deterioration of the state of democracy and rule of law in the Philippines

In an effort to apply further pressure on the Duterte regime following the politically motivated arrest and imprisonment of liberal Senator Leila De Lima, the Human Rights Committee of Liberal International called on the United Nations Council to set up an independent international commission of inquiry into the alleged extra-judicial killings in the country in order to determine responsibility and ensure mechanisms for accountability.

The call referenced a resolution adopted by the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats, LI co-operating organisation, expressing alarm about the “creeping authoritarianism” in the Philippines as a consequence of its continuing war on drugs adopted on 25 February 2017.



36TH SESSION OF UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL



Call for Democracy and Rule of Law in Zambia

Rallying together with the Africa Liberal Network in the wake of the arrest of the leader of the opposition Hakainde Hichilema, the LI HRC brought the deteriorating situation in Zambia before the attention of the UN Human Rights Council.

In its appeal, Liberal International called on the government of Zambia to lift the state of emergency as it was being used as an instrument to intimidate the opposition, control the media, consolidate power and infringe upon human rights.

The written statement also called on the United Nations, the Commonwealth, and the European Union to increase their support to the people of Zambia by engaging the government towards a system that could stop human rights abuses and all practices deemed inconsistent with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Hon. Hichilema was released later in 2017.



LI HUMAN RIGHTS BULLETIN



Over the course of 2017, the LI Human Rights Committee published four editions of LI Human Rights Bulletin with each edition reflecting a core working priority area of the Committee.

The online publications attracted contributions from both prominent liberals and established human rights practitioners with an opening rate above the industry average.

7TH EDITION

In line with the LI HRC meeting held at the Molenbeek Cultural Centre with the Mayor of Molenbeek (a district in Brussels), Françoise Schepmans, the Bulletin examined freedom of religion and belief in an era of radicalization.

The edition featured a special video interview with Mayor Schepmans who explained the importance of having in person exchanges for the purposes of sharing expertise and a sense of community when one fights radicalization among the youth. LI HRC Member and Former Member of Parliament Boris Van Der Ham (D66, Netherlands) shared his expert opinion on the freedom to be a non-believer discussing at length the various steps liberals need to undertake in order to address the issue of freedom of religion and belief.



8TH EDITION

The advancement of the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) Principle lies at the heart of the liberal agenda and has always been at the forefront of LI human rights work. In line with this, the 8th Edition of LI Human Rights Bulletin discussed the challenges before the implementation of the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) principle and the course of action the global liberal community can undertake in this regard.

Featuring expert opinions from the UN Special Adviser on RtoP His Excellency Ivan Simonovic and the Deputy Executive Director of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect Jelena Pia-Comella, the online publication looked into the progress achieved on RtoP implementation by the international community and the role of women in this implementation to address armed conflict respectively.

The edition also included a video interview conducted by LI Vice-President Robert Woodthorpe Browne with the Philippines Human Rights Commissioner Chito Gascon concerning the extra-judicial killings commissioned by President Rodrigo Duterte.



“ Liberals in opposition and government needs to continue to raise awareness of the human rights violations committed by the Duterte regime. Freedom and democracy cannot be lost in a country like the Philippines. ”

– Chito Gascon

Chair of the Human Rights Commission of the Philippines

9TH EDITION



The 9th edition of the Bulletin addressed the recent LGBTI+ genocide in Chechnya and the on- going debates on same sex marriage in Chile in order to showcase the steps undertaken by LI member parties in these countries (Yabloko and the Liberal Party of Chile respectively) to promote and advance the rights of their respective LGBTI+ communities.

In a special video interview conducted on the ground of Copenhagen Pride 2017, Chair of LI LGBTI Rights Working Group Frank Van Dalen discussed the challenges liberals face in the battle for LGBT+ equality with Karen Ellemann, Minister for Equality (Venstre), and Former Minister for Research, Innovation and Higher Education Sofie Carsten Nielsen (Radikale Venstre).

10TH EDITION

Expert Opinions



Astrid Thors

LI vice-president & former OSCE high commissioner for national minorities

Pulling together to end violence against women

LI and NDI target the same unacceptable attitudes often intended to diminish and silence women. I am proud to be a member of a global network of party activists committed to leading the fight against the sort of violence that threatens politically active women...



Jayanthi Devi Balaguru

Chair of the CALD Women's Caucus and LI Human Rights Committee Member

Breaking barriers for political participation in Asia

More political parties across Asia must come forward to break cultural and traditional barriers and welcome women into the fold. Parliaments are designed to represent all sectors of society however nearly all of the world's Parliaments are dominated by men. I will be contesting a seat Parliament at the next general election...

How can we work together to eradicate harassment of women in politics? This was the question that the 10th edition of LI Human Rights Bulletin posed to readers from around the world.

In a video discussion between Liberal Democrats Baroness Sal Brinton and Christine Jardine, the two liberal parliamentarians shared tactics for fighting abuse against politically active women.

The online edition was complimented with op-ed articles by LI HRC Vice-Chair and LI Vice- President on the Bureau Astrid Thors and LI HRC Member and Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats Women's Caucus Chair, Jayanthi Devi Balaguru, who described their experiences as women in politics who have faced intimidation and harassment because of their political activities.



LI PRIZE FOR FREEDOM



“ The Chinese government seems to be so scared of the idea of freedom, that it is sending anyone who demands personal liberty and political freedoms to prison. ”

- Markus Löning

Free Democratic Party, Germany

The Prize for Freedom is Liberal International's most prestigious human rights honour. Awarded annually since 1985, it is presented to an individual who has made an exceptional contribution to the advancement of human rights and political freedom around the world.

The 2017 LI Prize for Freedom was awarded to Professor Ilham Tohti for “promoting reconciliation between Uyghurs and Han Chinese.” Professor Tohti is currently serving a life-term jail sentence in China on politically motivated charges stemming from his actions to promote conciliation between Uyghurs and Han Chinese.

Presenting the award to Marie Holzman, a co-founder of the Ilham Tohti Initiative, Chairman of LI Human Rights Committee Markus Löning said: “Ilham Tohti has fought for the rule of law in China with the sharp words of an intellectual & the warm heart of a humanist. He has used his right to freedom of speech. The Chinese government seems to be so scared of the idea of freedom, that it is sending anyone who demands personal liberty and political freedoms to prison.” Professor Ilham Tohti was the first-ever recipient of the LI Prize from mainland China and was endorsed as the 2017 recipient of the LI Prize for Freedom during the 70th LI Anniversary Congress in Andorra in May.





CREDITS

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