



LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL

HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMITTEE

ANNUAL
REPORT
2019





Table of Contents

Chairperson's Message	3
-----------------------	---

LI HRC overview	4
-----------------	---

Priority areas	5
----------------	---

Women's political participation

HRC Gender-Based Inclusivity Expert Forum 1	6
---	---

Transforming Social Protection: Can the Istanbul Convention Help?	7
--	---

HRC Gender-Based Inclusivity Expert Forum 2	8
---	---

Women in Political Parties Index	10
----------------------------------	----

Inclusivity Handbook	11
----------------------	----

Digitalisation and Human Rights

Gov IDs My Number, So Track Me Maybe?	12
---------------------------------------	----

LI Membership Digitalisation Survey	13
-------------------------------------	----

Democracy Disrupted: Digitalisation and Human Rights	14
--	----

Defending the democratic space

Establishment of the Working Group on the Closing Democratic Space 15

LI Gathers Prominent Liberals at the International Parliamentary Union to unite against Cambodia's ruthless authoritarian regime 16

LI HRC at the UN

Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy 17

High Level Meetings Promoting Gender Equality at the CSW 19

Statements

20

LI Prize for Freedom 2019 awarded to Maria Corina Machado (4 October 2019) 21

LI Human Rights Committee Meetings 22

LI Human Rights Bulletin 24

13th Edition

14th Edition

15th Edition

Staff Update 25

Intern Partnership with Svenska Bildningsförbundet 26

Speeches & Statements

Opening of the Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy 2019 27

Rapid Deterioration of Democracy and Human Rights in Cambodia 28



Chairperson's Message

Period of change

The Human Rights Committee has had the privilege of working under the leadership of two fantastic individuals, former president of the committee Markus Löning and our former Human Rights Officer Tamara Dancheva.

Tamara has done so much to build up our programme and her commitment to us continued even after she formally left the office, when she produced the useful material on inclusion in political parties.

We will also miss Markus Löning's huge experience in the field of human rights, his deep conviction in the pursuit of societies where human rights are respected and upheld. We wish both of them success in all their future endeavours.

I also wish to thank all previous and present members of the committee for their engagement in the work of the committee, and to welcome our new Human Rights Officer Mikaela Hellman.

A smart use of our limited resources

The variety of issues that should be attended is sometimes overwhelming as the liberal world order including human rights are under threat.

Our response as liberals must be to working together around the world, across borders. What we do in one country has consequences in others. As an example: Lack of attention to human rights in countries otherwise attentive to human rights will soon be used as an excuse in authoritarian countries - as has been seen with otherwise well-intended ways of combatting so-called fake news. Restrictions of human rights are in many cases one of the indicators that conflicts will erupt, having a lot of implications for the world order, creating instability, and displacing persons.

In this spirit, the committee tries to be as useful as possible for our membership, with the very limited resources at our disposal. Therefore, we are very grateful to the member parties that help us in the work with resources, including in kind.

New questions merit our attention all the time, and that is why one of the priorities of 2020 will continue to be digitalisation with its different implications for human rights.

LI HRC overview

In 2019, the newly elected Liberal International Human Rights Committee adopted a set of new priority areas at the 202nd LI Executive Committee in London, United Kingdom. These priority working areas include the promotion of women’s political representation and participation, the implication of the digitalisation of our societies on human rights, and defending the democratic space by strengthening civil and political rights.

The LI Human Rights Committee consists of 24 members, 15 of which are women, 14 are new to the LI HRC and together they represent 19 countries from across 5 continents. All members are committed to promoting fundamental freedoms around the world and have either parliamentary or civil activist background.

Liberal International
Human Rights Committee
2019-2020

#LIHRC



 Astrid Thors Chairperson	 Phil Bennion Vice Chairperson	 Lord John Alderdice Honorary Patron	 Abir Al-Sahlani	 Ana Carrasquero	 Åsa Nilsson Söderström	 Berhan Nazimov	 Bram Roodhart
 Charlotte Burgess	 Dr. Ching-Yi Lin	 Damen Bergman	 Giuliomaria Terzi di Sant'Agata	 Gyde Jensen	 Irwin Cotler	 Jayanthi Devi Balaguru	 Joëlle Fiss
 Juliana Nikolova	 Steffen Pabst	 Dr. Stephanie Krisper	 Rachada Dhnadirek	 Rose Sakala	 Margaret de Vos van Steenwijk	 Mamadou Tafsir Diallo	 Noora Hammar

Priority areas

Women's political participation

Continuing the work of the previous priority areas, the LI Human Rights Committee organised events in New York, Stockholm, Marrakech and Fès focusing in particular on women's political participation. In particular, the flagship Women in Political Parties Index and Inclusivity Handbook were developed with the help of our global membership.

Digitalisation and human rights

Adopting this new priority area at the Executive Committee meeting in London, the LI Human Rights Committee finished 2019 by hosting the inaugural LI Digitalisation Conference in Johannesburg, South Africa. Previously, the Committee organised events in both New York and at the Executive Committee in London focusing on this highly topical issue.

Defending the democratic space

At the Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy, the LI President Hakima el Haité launched the Human Rights Committee campaign Free our Liberal Leaders. The committee also submitted a statement on the situation in Cambodia to the UNHRC, and continued to speak out against violations of civil and democratic rights.



Women's political participation

HRC Gender-Based Inclusivity Expert Forum 1

Marrakech, Morocco (9 March 2019)

Hosting the first of a series of expert forums which were used to compile a handbook of liberal best practices on gender-based political party inclusivity from among the global liberal family, the Liberal International Human Rights Committee (LI HRC) united global liberals to promote and advance gender-based inclusivity in political parties at the **Africa Liberal Network** General Assembly.

The three speakers at the event – **Jayanthi Balaguru (Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats)**, **Dr. Mayada Swar El-Dahab (Arab Liberal Federation)**, and **Rosemary Machua (Africa Liberal Network)** – discussed the challenges that still exist for politically active women in their respective regions and shared drew on their own experiences from across their political parties.

“It is not about how many women are put forward as candidates but about promoting more women in winnable seats. Women should be treated for their credibility, not for their gender and in this sense, women politicians shouldn't have to restrict [themselves] to just women's rights issues”, reiterated Balaguru in her capacity as President of the **International Network of Liberal Women** and Chair of the **Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats**.

As the moderator of the event, LI HRC member **Åsa Nilsson-Söderström (Swedish International Liberal Centre)** brought in her own perspective while posing questions on the role socio-cultural norms play when it comes to empowering women.

Discussing the main barriers for women's political participation in East Africa, Machua underlined the importance of political party funding, due to the existing social and economic inequalities that hinder the political participation of women. She also identified gender-based violence as a crucial barrier to be overcome if political parties are to attract more women among their ranks.

Dr. Dahab expressed concern about the global rise in ideologies which hinder women from enjoying equal rights as men, and pointed out that in her own country Sudan:

“Discrimination in law still exists and the distribution of power remains uneven, preventing women from seeking leadership positions”.

Some of the solutions put forwards included the importance of setting gender quotas and women's wings as a tool to promote gender-based inclusivity in political parties.

The outcomes of these sessions will be used to compile a handbook of liberal best practices on gender-based political party inclusivity from among the global liberal family, as part of a broader project undertaken by the Committee on this issue.





Transforming Social Protection: Can the Istanbul Convention Help?

New York, USA (15 March 2019)

Partnering up on the fringes of the 63rd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Liberal International (LI), the **International Network of Liberal Women (INLW, LI full-member)** and the **National Democratic Institute (NDI, LI cooperating organisation)** organised discussions on the relevance of the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) as a global framework to support social protection systems at the national level.

The speakers of the event – **Feride Acar**, President of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), LI President of Honour, **Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck**, and UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, **Dubravka Šimonović** – all agreed that the Istanbul Convention is by far the most comprehensive international law instrument on the issue of preventing violence against women.

Although the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW share some of the same state-level obligations, those stipulated in the Istanbul Convention are more specific and hence provides states with a clearer legislative framework. Elaborating further on this point, Šimonović described the convention as “an important roadmap pointing out to provisions which should be incorporated into national legislation on social protection services”.

Sharing best practices from her own country Belgium on how the Istanbul Convention is implemented to improve social protection, Neyts-Uyttebroeck said: “Belgium has devised a national action plan in 2012 following the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. It was in the framework of these efforts to implement the Convention that the state set sexual referral centres for victims of sexual violence and abuse”.

Guided by the moderator of the event, INLW President and CALD Women Caucus Chair **Jayanthi Balaguru**, the speakers identified solutions on how the Istanbul Convention could be implemented globally to ensure women's protection against violence. One of the solutions proposed came from the President of GREVIO who explained that countries which had already ratified the Convention had an obligation to provide guidance to other countries via foreign assistance and aid. In this way, the provisions of the convention penetrate the legal systems of other countries. The Istanbul Convention is a powerful tool for civil societies to push other governments for action on ending violence against women and be assisted in the process via the existing provisions of the Convention.

In her role as the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Šimonović committed to including some of the provisions of the Istanbul Convention in her thematic reports as to send a clear message that shelters for women victims should be part of social services provided by the state.

This event forms part of the LI Human Rights Committee's larger efforts to promote the Istanbul Convention beyond the borders of Europe.

HRC Gender-Based Inclusivity Expert Forum 2

Stockholm, Sweden (14 April 2019)

Ahead of the launch of Liberal International's Party Inclusivity Barometer later in 2019 – the first of its kind anywhere in the world – the LI Human Rights Committee (LI HRC) hosted the second expert forum on the promotion of gender-based inclusivity in political parties.

“Those who speak about freedom are the freest, and that is a problem we as liberals need to address”, opened Cllr. **Banar Sabet (Centerpartiet – LI full member)**, When speaking about why inclusivity is important, and why every group of society should be represented within political parties.

Representing the Asian and South American region were **Jayanthi Balaguru (Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats and International Network of Liberal Women)**, and **Kitty Monterrey (RELIAL)**. LI Vice President Monterrey stressed that the introduction of gender quotas as such does not empower women, since the increase of representation in numbers does not necessarily equal an increase in power. The priority, therefore, has to be in the education of women.

The speakers of the European session – **Karima Bouchtaoui (VVD)**, **Sabina Ćudić (Naša Stranka, Bosnia and Herzegovina – LI non-member)**, and **Joan Nunnely (D66, Netherlands – LI full member)** – highlighted the need for equality and integrity to be a recurrent topic within the party. According to Ćudić, informal obstacles can be much more dangerous than formal ones.

Rose Sakala (Africa Liberal Network – LI cooperating organisation) and **Sahar Youssef (Arab Liberal Federation – LI cooperating organisation)** represented the African and Middle Eastern region. Both speakers identified strong cultural and religious views on women's role in society as an obstacle for women's inclusion in politics, much less in taking on leading roles within political parties.





The solutions brought forward during the lively discussions included but were not limited to the introduction of gender quotas, adoption of training and mentorship programmes for women, and ensuring equal campaign opportunities for both female and male candidates.

The sessions were moderated by LI HRC Chairman **Markus Löning** and LI Vice Presidents **Abir Al Sahlani** and **Astrid Thors**.

The other participants to the event included **Charlotta Schenholm** (Swedish Liberal Party – LI full member), **Gijs Houben** (VVD), LI HRC member **Åsa Nilsson-Söderström** (Swedish International Liberal Centre, SILC – LI cooperating organisation), **Julija Sartuch** (SILC), **Johan Kling** (Centerpartiet), **Tamara Dancheva** (LI), and **Gabriela Lönngren** (LI).

The participants were welcomed by Swedish Member of Parliament **Alireza Akhondi** (Centerpartiet) at an informal welcome dinner on April 13.

Bringing together liberals from all around the world to share best practices from their regions, the event – hosted by Centerpartiet with the generous support of VVD (Netherlands – LI full member) – consisted of three sessions which were divided by geographical regions.

The two LI HRC expert forums form part of a broader project by the Committee on this topic. The outcomes of the sessions will be used to compile a handbook of liberal best practices on gender-based political party inclusivity from among the global liberal family.



Women in Political Parties Index

One of the Human Rights Committee's priority areas is women's political empowerment. As a part of the work done within the field of women's political empowerment, LI has created a first of its kind barometer and an associated inclusivity handbook. The barometer will allow all LI member parties the opportunity to measure their parties Women in Political Parties (WIPP) Index, i.e. the level of diversity and inclusivity within their party. The parties will then, with the help of the Inclusivity Handbook, have a chance to boost the inclusivity and diversity within their party structures. The WIPP is a first-of-its-kind self-assessment tool to help LI members develop a framework within their parties to advance the presence of women in politics.

At the 202nd Executive Committee in London, UK, LI consultant Tamara Dancheva presented the index survey to the membership. Inspirational keynote speeches on their experiences of being treated differently as women in politics and the crucial importance of addressing this issue for women all over the world were delivered by Norwegian Minister for Equality **Trine Skei Grande** (Venstre, Norway) and MEP **Naomi Long** (Alliance Party, UK).

During the autumn of 2019, the WIPP Index was tested by six LI member parties who gave the Secretariat feedback on the product. The parties testing the index are from Europe, Asia, and Africa. In addition to being presented to the Secretariat, the testing parties D66 (Netherlands), Democratic Alliance (South Africa), and Centerpartiet (Sweden) shared their feedback with the LI membership in a discussion at the 203rd Executive Committee in Fès, Morocco.

Finalising the software at the end of 2019, the Index will be ready for rollout to the entire LI membership in early 2020.

In providing these results, Liberal International's objective is to assist our member parties in promoting greater participation of women in politics, which research shows benefits political parties, countries, and government.

Inclusivity Handbook

Beyond the Numbers: Building Inclusive Political Parties for Success is a product of Liberal International (LI) and is the culmination of the hard work of many individuals and insights collected from several LI member parties.

As the only political party international with a Human Rights Committee and a specifically designated Human Rights Programme, Liberal International has played and continues to play an important role in the promotion and advancement of women's political participation and representation. This is why LI has a key role to play in setting specific criteria among its member parties when it comes to levelling the playing field for women among their ranks. The journey we are embarking on is for the benefit of the society as a whole, not only for women. We need the support of party leaders and members, young and old, men and women in this project.

The publication benefited from best practices collected from the Africa Liberal Network, the Arab Liberal Federation, the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats, Red Liberal de America Latina, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party, Centerpartiet, Democraten 66, Liberalerna, Svenska Folkpartiet, Freie Demokratische Partei, Liberal Democrats, Naša Stranka, and the Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie. The Inclusivity Handbook of Centerpartiet, Mångfald på riktigt, has been a particularly rich and inspirational source for the work.

It is important to note that the findings from both the LI membership and external experts concluded once more that both the external and internal environment in which a party operates matters when it comes to effectively including women among its ranks.





Digitalisation and Human Rights

Gov IDs My Number, So Track Me Maybe?

New York, USA (11 March 2019)

Meeting at the fringes of the 63rd Session of the **United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)** for a fifth consecutive year, Liberal International (LI) partnered with the **National Democratic Institute (NDI)** to examine the implications for social protection and empowerment of digital IDs, and determine the risks that technology-based systems present to long-term democratic integrity.

In line with CSW's priority theme, the speakers of the event – **Noble Ackerson (NDI)**, **Thea Anderson (Omidyar Network)** and **Hugo Novales (NDI)** – recognized the improvement that digital IDs have on the efficiency of the interaction between the state and its citizens, while pointing out to the threats that digitalisation poses to individual security.

Emphasising the necessity for women to be engaged in the policy debate around providing access to digital IDs, Anderson said: "The ability to opt-out of the system in national ID systems is important – we need to better understand the implications of digital privacy and human rights. As citizens, we need to hold tech companies and governments accountable for the use of our data".

Ackerson, on the other hand, pointed to the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) as a good start by stressing on its far-reaching properties, but cautioned that additional emerging standards are needed in order to make vast amounts of data interact-actable in a safe and private space.

Speaking about the inclusiveness of digital IDs, Anderson said:

"The enrolment ... is a critical part when we talk about inclusion. In many countries especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South-East Asia – where there is the lowest amount of access to IDs – with digital ID systems you are not able to enrol offline. There has to be a certain level of electricity, and that is just not the reality".

Guided by **Sandra Pepera (NDI)**, participants to the discussions determined that digital ID systems must be built so that they are inclusive and do not undermine citizens' human rights or their ability to access services, while facilitating participation in open democratic practices without fear of threat or reprisal.

This event formed part of a larger effort to drive debate on the issue among the LI membership by serving to inform LI HRC's future work in the field.

Worldwide (Nov-Dec 2019)

The survey received a high number of responses in a very short time, and the results were clear – of those who responded only 1 in 3 LI member parties have a clear policy on digitalisation.

Q1. What do you (or your party) see as being the top three threats to human rights and politics posed by digitalisation today?

- Q3. Does your party have a policy position on the (mis)use of technology? If yes, when was this last updated? (It would be helpful if you could email this to mikaela@liberal-international.org)

- Increasing individuals' ability to assert and exercise their human rights, through easier access to information and raising awareness
- Making it easier for individuals and organisations to report human rights violations
- Lower barriers for people to access and spread information and exercise their freedom of expression
- Opportunities for people to organise and unite via online platforms to exercise their freedom of assembly and protest
- Higher visibility, reach and impact for the work of human rights organisations and activists
- Higher participation in public affairs among the population, with lower thresholds and increased accountability of public services
- Other (please specify)...





Democracy Disrupted: Digitalisation and Human Rights

Johannesburg, South Africa (5-7 December 2019)

Digital technologies have the potential to unite, emancipate, and empower – to share how we interact and the narratives we live by. But, where people's fundamental human rights are unprotected or political divisions maliciously exacerbated with untruths, democratic norms begin to fray.

Our expert high-level panellists deconstructed the greatest challenges faced by liberal democrats in safeguarding political and human rights in the age of AI and algorithms. Together with colleagues in **FNF Africa**, Liberal International brought together technical experts and human rights defenders to better understand and strategise a liberal approach to digitalisation.

With expert speakers and political activists from Belarus to Venezuela – from Hong Kong to South Africa, chairperson of the LI human rights committee and LI vice president, **Astrid Thors**, sparked debates around Democracy Disrupted: Digitalisation and Human Rights.

The two-day event gathered the participants under topics such as:

- Control. Alt. Delete. Can political and human rights be safeguarded in the digital age?
 - Who Checks Your Status? Digitalisation in Authoritarian Societies
- and
- What the f@ct! Does your neighbour control your news?

Speaking after the event Astrid Thors said: "Our political parties need to be better prepared to campaign against dis-information. We also need both looking into what are the positive freedoms for people and call on businesses to have ethical codes that we can rely on."

Powerful personal experiences combined with practical actions taken by liberals resisting authoritarianism promoted the clear conclusion that human rights activists are able to utilise digital technologies for good just as well as authoritarian governments are for ill.

This event was the first such conference organised by Liberal International, kicking off what will be a big focus for the Human Rights Committee in 2020.

Defending the democratic space

Establishment of the Working Group on the Closing Democratic Space

To support the work of the LI Human Rights Committee under its third priority area, the Committee established a working group under the chairmanship of **Åsa Nilsson-Söderström** (Liberalerna, Sweden). This working group bears the main responsibility for the Free our Liberal Leaders campaign, launched by LI President Hakima el Haité at the 2019 Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy.

This campaign, focusing on the imprisoned dissidents Professor **Ilham Tohti** (China), Senator **Leila de Lima** (Philippines), **Raif Badawi** (Saudi Arabia), and **Kem Sokha** (Cambodia), aims to promote and call attention to the cases of these four individuals and their unjust imprisonment.

In 2019, thanks to the tireless work of LI Human Rights Committee Deputy Chair **Phil Bennion**, MEP, Professor Ilham Tohti was awarded the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.



LI Gathers Prominent Liberals at the International Parliamentary Union to unite against Cambodia's ruthless authoritarian regime

For the first time, and under intense surveillance from Cambodia's authoritarian regime, Liberal International gathered prominent liberal politicians together with the exiled leadership of the Cambodian National Rescue Party (LI full member), at the 141st Assembly of the International Parliamentary Union, in order to mobilise collective and coordinated political pressure and popular support.

Despite Dictator Hun Sen's unrelenting threats against opposition leader in exile, **Sam Rainsy's** life; intensifying violence against opposition supporters, dehumanizing arbitrary arrests and widespread intimidation, Rainsy has not wavered from his commitment to defend democracy in Cambodia.

The twelve liberal parties from around the globe expressed their undivided support for the safe return of Rainsy to his native Cambodia on the 9th of November and collectively agreed to:

- Engage with lawyers to refer the threats to Rainsy's life to the International Criminal Court;
- Mobilise political pressure through national parliaments and liberal-lead governments from around the globe;
- Provoke popular support for Rainsy's return under the #IStandWithSam hashtag.

The many threats of arrest and execution levelled against Rainsy and his supporters are absolutely unacceptable, and only serve to signal to the rest of the world that the government is afraid of their people; intimidation is the crutch of authoritarian regimes that exist without popular support and we reject its use in any circumstance.

One of the main strengths of an interconnected world is that dictators cannot act in a vacuum; they are subject to the scrutiny of international observers and, as such, Liberal International shall ensure that the focus is squarely on the illegal actions of the illegitimate Cambodian regime.

We, as liberals and as supporters of democracy, call on the Dictator to stand down, to allow the safe return of Sam Rainsy and his supporters, and to finally accept the will of the people

We, the undersigned, endorse this statement:

Ferran Costa – Liberal Party, Andorra
Lord Navnit Dholakia – Liberal Democrats, United Kingdom
Paulien Geerdink – People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, Netherlands
Gerry Horkan – Fianna Fail, Ireland
Siripa Intavichein – Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats
Annelie Lotriet – Democratic Alliance, South Africa
Till Mansmann – Free Democratic Party, Germany
Juliana Nikolova – Liberal Democratic Party, North Macedonia
Jaqueline Oduol – Orange Democratic Movement, Kenya
Branislav Rajić – Modern Centre Party, Slovenia
Baroness Rosalind Scott – Liberal Democrats, United Kingdom
Laurent Wehrli – Free Democratic Party, Switzerland

Liberal International will continue to gather liberals at the IPU to raise pressing global issues.



LI HRC at the UN

Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy

Geneva, Switzerland (26 March 2019)

For the sixth consecutive year in a row, LI co-hosted the annual Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy, the largest gathering of remarkable human rights defenders in Europe.

LI President **Hakima el Haité** delivered a speech at the Summit opening, held at the United Nations, during which she launched the new LI Human Rights Committee political prisoners' campaign.

Addressing a room full of civil liberties defenders and survivors of human rights violations at one of the largest gatherings of human rights NGOs in Europe, Liberal International president, Hakima El Haité, drew on the work of the LI Human Rights Committee to urge a global effort to support those speaking out against injustice.

Applauding the bravery of the speakers addressing the LI co-hosted Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy, the LI president emphasized the importance of fighting back at a time when many liberal values such as freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights are under attack from authoritarian and far right leaders around the world.

"We need a global concerted call for action to end all forms of human rights abuse and the only way to do so is if each one of us stands up and speaks out against injustices and blatant human rights violations in our own communities", the LI president said.



Hakima el Haité called on liberals to continue the fight for all of those who remain unfairly behind bars by announcing the launch of Liberal International's new campaign to free liberal political prisoners.

The Geneva Summit heard family members of imprisoned human rights defenders, including **Vicente Il de Lima**, the brother of Philippine Senator and LI Prize for Freedom laureate **Leila de Lima**, who has been imprisoned for over two years for criticizing President Rodrigo Duterte's violent "war on drugs". Calling for the international community to take a stand against the arbitrary detention of his sister, Mr. de Lima said: "If you are standing with my sister you are also standing with the Philippines people against Duterte's regime".

On the fringes of the Summit, the LI President and Mr. de Lima also met for a bilateral meeting to discuss Senator de Lima's case. Speaking on behalf of the liberal family, El Haité promised to continue fighting for the Senator's release.

The family of LI Prize for Freedom laureate **Raif Badawi** – who has been imprisoned in Saudi Arabia for over six years for advocating for human rights – took the stage for the first time together, giving a touching interview about their fight to free their husband/father. Speaking about her husband's case, **Ensaf Haidar** stressed that this is not only one man's case, but the case of the whole nation.

On the fringes of the Geneva Summit, LI – represented by LI Human Rights Committee member **Phil Bennion**, LI Head of Programmes **Tamara Dancheva** and LI Human Rights Programme Support Officer **Gabriela Lönngren** – also met with **Joelle Fiss** (FDP.Die Liberalen – LI full member) to discuss LI Human Rights Committee's work and cooperation opportunities.

More information about the event, including a video stream from the 2019 Summit, can be found on the Geneva Summit website. Read President Hakima el Haité's speech in full at the end of this report.

High Level Meetings Promoting Gender Equality at the CSW

New York, USA (March, 2019)

On the fringes of the 63rd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), a delegation from Liberal International (LI) and the **International Network of Liberal Women (INLW**, LI full-member) – represented by INLW President, CALD Women Caucus Chair and LI HRC Member **Jayanthi Balaguru**, INLW Deputy President and LI HRC Member **Khadija El Morabit**, Member of Parliament and LI HRC Member **Dr. Ching-Yi Lin** (DPP, Taiwan), INLW Immediate Past President **Margaret de Vos van Steenwijk**, INLW Treasurer **Lysbeth van Valkenburg**, INLW Board Member **Ruth Richardson**, Member of Parliament **Gulan Avci** (Liberalerna, Sweden) and LI Head of Programmes **Tamara Dancheva** – met with several liberal leaders from across the globe to discuss and share best practices on the promotion of gender equality and women’s rights.

LI and INLW delegates held a bilateral meeting with **Trine Skei Grande**, Norwegian Minister of Culture and Equality (Venstre, LI full-member) at the residency of the Deputy Permanent Representative of Norway to the UN to discuss existing gender issues in Norway and the leadership the country has undertaken to solve the issue of gender inequality globally. Minister Skei Grande highlighted the issue of gender division in the workforce as a key priority area for her country alongside promoting female leadership in the tech industry.

The meeting sparked an engaging discussion on women’s rights around the world, in which cultural restrictions were identified as a leading challenge in many parts of the world. The participants of the meeting stressed the need to challenge cultural stereotypes about women, as well as the need for liberal support and cooperation in eliminating discrimination and attaining gender equality on a global scale.

The meeting was followed by a discussion with **Ingrid van Engelshoven**, Dutch Minister for Education, Culture, and Science, at the Dutch Mission to the United Nations, where the Minister addressed Dutch NGOs working on women’s rights promotion and advancement and where she had an opportunity to meet with some of the INLW and LI delegates present.

Upon the invitation of Taiwan’s Ambassador-at-large for Human Rights and Democracy and INLW Board Member **Maysing Yang**, LI and INLW also met with several Taiwanese NGOs, including Taiwan’s Women Link and the North American Taiwanese Women Association, at the Taipei Cultural and Economic Affairs Office in New York. The meeting was attended by representatives from the Senegalese Alliance for the Republic (APR, LI full member) and the Taiwanese Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, LI full member). The discussions focused on cross-cutting collaboration on women’s rights, including the promotion of mental health for women, and women’s leadership and political empowerment.

The briefing at the Taipei Cultural and Economic Affairs Office was followed by a working lunch with Belgian Member of Parliament **Viviane Teitelbaum** from Mouvement Réformateur (MR, LI full member) and LI President of Honour **Annemie Neyts**, where LI and INLW delegates shared best practices on women’s empowerment from among their countries and discussed the strengthening of the collaboration and representation of liberals at the annual UNCSW sessions.





Statements

Rapid Deterioration of Democracy and Human Rights in Cambodia

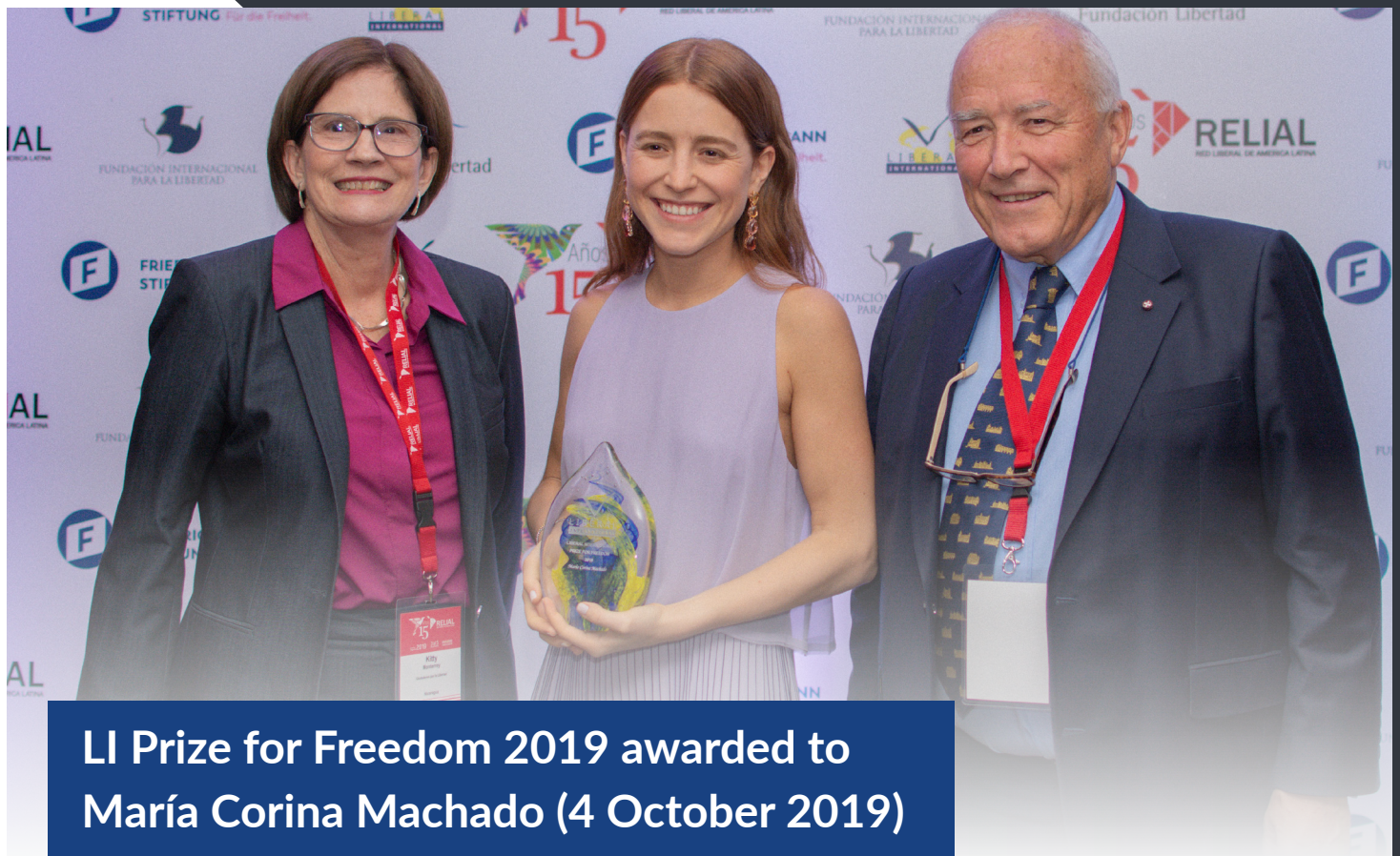
UN doc. A/HRC/40/NGO/67

The opposition **Cambodia National Rescue Party** forcibly dissolved. Its leaders imprisoned or made to flee. A prime minister who controls the judiciary. Against this backdrop of human rights abuses, Liberal International submitted a written address to the United Nations Human Rights Council, setting out a series of steps for key international actors to take to avoid further destabilisation in one of Southeast Asia's poorest and most corrupt countries.

In a step-by-step breakdown, Liberal International (LI) called on the United Nations, the European Union, China, USA, and ASEAN to intervene and the government of Cambodia's prime minister, Hun Sen, to uphold his obligations under international law. The statement called on the premier to "sign and ratify further multilateral treaties which enshrine the rights of citizens, civil society, political parties, employees and the media", urging China, in particular, to "understand the dangers" presented by the current government.

Expressing significant concerns about the increasing instability in Cambodia, which is also affecting neighbouring countries – LI condemned the house arrest of Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP – LI full member) president **Kem Sokha**.

Find the statement in full at the end of this report.



LI Prize for Freedom 2019 awarded to María Corina Machado (4 October 2019)

Establishment of the Working Group on the Closing Democratic Space

On behalf of the global liberal family, we were proud to present the 2019 LI Prize for Freedom to the daughter of our 36th laureate, María Corina Machado – the long-standing voice of Venezuela’s democratic opposition. The prize was awarded in a ceremony at the margins of the RELIAL Congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina. LI Vice Presidents Robert Woodthorpe Browne and Kitty Monterrey were present at the ceremony to award the prize.

Sadly, owing to harsh and uncompromising restrictions in Venezuela, María was not able to be present in person but we were honoured that her daughter, Ana Corina Sosa Machado, was able to accept the Prize on her mother’s behalf.

Ana Corina Sosa Machado shared a very personal account of her mother’s struggle for democracy in Venezuela during the prize ceremony:

“The regime fears my mother because she is talking to the people of Venezuela about freedom, human dignity. As she defends these values, the dictatorship tries to do away with them. She is fighting for freedom as a tool for development, putting an end to the impunity which has been a stain for my country and the history in Latin America.

My mother is trying to empower a generation of Venezuelans through information & education – all the while connecting them to ideas of freedom and hope! She is a voice of hope for many Venezuelans who want a democratic government and to be reunited with their families. For those of us abroad, we are looking forward to coming back to a strong, prosperous and united Venezuela!”

– Ana Corina Sosa Machado

Although not present in person, María Corina Machado greeted the attendants via video message:

“The LI Prize for Freedom demonstrates that Venezuelan liberals are not alone – that the liberals around the world stand with us in this fight for freedom and that they understand, like us, how Venezuela today is the greatest opportunity for liberalism in the world!”

- María Corina Machado



LI Human Rights Committee Meetings

LI HRC Roundtable on Women's Rights in Morocco

Fès, Morocco (24 November 2019)

"We want to create a power that will push the parliament to create stricter laws regarding violence against women, laws that will defend women", explained Youness Hamid Shami'a of the Initiative pour la Protection des Droits des Femmes, at the LI Human Rights Committee round table discussion in the margin of LI's 203rd executive committee meeting.

With a focus on the empowerment of girls and women in the MENA region – and the day before International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women – a panel of gender equality experts set about discussing strategies and objectives with the LI HRC to advance women's rights.

The topics of empowering women and ending violence against women could not have been more relevant. Apart from the empowerment of women being one of the LI HRC's priority working areas, violence against women is also a significant structural and societal problem in Morocco, with almost half of the female population falling victims to violence at some point in their life.

The biggest issue, according to the local human rights activists, is that the Moroccan society and its judicial system both accept violence against women. Women often face discrimination in front of judges and many of them are unaware of their rights in court, including rights to legal aid. Furthermore, a high proportion of women – especially women in the Berber minority – are illiterate, which puts them in an even more vulnerable situation.



Fortunately, with new laws strengthening women's rights having been adopted in the country during recent years, the stigma related to violence against women has been reduced. This has resulted in more activists stepping forward to talk about domestic, physical, sexual, economic, and psychological violence.

Even if the stigma related to violence against women is decreasing, women in Morocco are still facing discrimination, harassment, and violence, with transgender and homosexual women being in an even more vulnerable position. It is still illegal to be homosexual or transgender in Morocco, and there are no laws against discrimination or harassment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

The local human rights activists sharing their expertise at the meeting were Professor Fatima Sadiqi, founder of the first centre for studies and research on women at the University of Fès and Professor of gender studies, Youba Darif from 9sbat tal'fin (a LGBTQ+ collective in Morocco), Fatna El Bouih, President of Prison Relais Société (Female Prisoners' Reintegration), Youness Hamid Shami'a from Initiative pour la Protection des Droits des Femmes (the Initiative for the Protection of Women's Rights) and Lamia Regragui from Espace Multi Fonctionnelle des Femmes (Reintegration and Empowerment of Female Victims of Violence).

"Violence against women is a universal problem, and it is therefore the duty of the whole global liberal family to fight back against the oppression and violence against women", LI HRC Chair Astrid Thors said as she concluded the fruitful meeting between the LI Human Rights Committee and the local human rights activists.

As stated in Liberal International's Andorra Liberal Manifesto, liberals believe in equality for all and will therefore continue to fight fiercely for the rights of women.



LI Human Rights Bulletin

During 2019, the LI HRC published three editions of the LI Human Rights Bulletin.

● 13th Edition

The 13th instalment of the LI human rights bulletin focused on the LI HRC & Radikale Venstre Campaign to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This campaign sought to educate, engage, and promote our liberal values alongside the UDHR's 70th anniversary, and the campaign reached over one million people.

This edition also featured an expert opinion from LI Human Rights Committee members **Dr. Stephanie Krisper MP** (NEOS, Austria) and **Ilhan Kyuchyuk MEP** (MRF, Bulgaria) on breaking the cycle of migrant anxiety in Europe.

● 14th Edition

The 14th edition of the LI HR Bulletin introduced the LI membership to the newly appointed Human Rights Committee and its new chair, Astrid Thors.

Additionally, this edition featured articles about the development of the Women in Political Parties Index and the awarding of the 2019 Prize for Freedom to Venezuelan opposition politician María Corina Machado.

● 15th Edition

The 15th edition of the bulletin focused on the new priority area of the HR Committee, digitalisation and human rights. Outlining the successful event hosted by Liberal International and FNF Africa in Johannesburg at the beginning of December, the bulletin highlighted the need for liberal action in this field.

This edition also introduced the LI membership to the LI Inclusivity handbook, launched at the 203rd Executive Committee Meeting in Fès, Morocco.

Staff update



Mikaela Hellman

New Human Rights Programme Officer

Taking over from Tamara Dancheva, the LI Secretariat in London has recruited **Mikaela Hellman** to join the team as Human Rights Programme Officer. Mikaela joined the Secretariat in October 2019.

In her role as the human rights programme officer, Mikaela will be working to deliver the priorities of LI's human rights committee. She will be driving human rights-related campaigns and coordinating with committee members to achieve LI members' priorities within the field. She will also be supporting preparations for the upcoming executive committee meeting.

For the past two years, Mikaela has been working for the international office of the Swedish Centre Party (**Centerpartiet**), coordinating the party's international work and its involvement in the ALDE-party and LI as well as its policy development in foreign- and security policy. She is a former intern with the Liberal Democrat International Office and with the Swedish Permanent Representation to the Council of Europe.

For matters relating to the LI human rights committee, Mikaela can be contacted via email at: mikaela@liberal-international.org

Thank you to Tamara

In April 2019, Human Rights Programme Officer Tamara Dancheva left Liberal International after 8 years of tirelessly working for liberal human rights in the world. Liberal International and the Human Rights Committee thanks her for her innovative and intelligent work for the benefit of both the committee and LI as a whole, and wishes her all the best in her new career.



Intern Partnership with Svenska Bildningsförbundet



Gabriela Lönnngren

Gabriela Lönnngren was the staff intern for the LI Human Rights Programme, sponsored by Svenska Bildningsförbundet (SBF/SFP, Finland), during the first half of 2019. She was the first intern in more than five years after all internship programmes between LI and its membership were halted.

Gabriela has a Master's degree in public international law at Åbo Akademi University (Finland). Prior to joining LI, Gabriela completed an internship at the Embassy of Finland in Nairobi, Kenya. She did her exchange studies in M.A. Human Rights at Makerere University, Kampala Uganda.

Since leaving LI, Gabriela has been working as a consultant for the United Nations Population Fund in Copenhagen, Denmark.



Ida-Maria Skytte

Ida-Maria Skytte was the SFP staff intern for the second half of 2019. She is the youngest council and board member in her home municipality Korsholm, where she was successfully elected for the liberal Swedish People's Party of Finland in 2017. Most recently she, as Svenska Folkpartiet's youngest candidate, challenged for a seat in the European Parliament in the 2019 elections winning 2,224 votes.

Apart from being an active liberal politician, Ida-Maria is also a Master's student in Vaasa, Finland. As a psychology student with a mayor in crisis psychology, Ida-Maria has been working with unaccompanied refugee children and is passionate about safeguarding and improving the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees in Finland and elsewhere in the world.

Since leaving LI, Ida-Maria has been working as a parliamentary assistant to the Finnish Minister of Justice, Anna Maja Henriksson.

Speeches & Statements

Monday, 25 March, 2019

United Nations Headquarters

Geneva, Switzerland

Opening of the Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy 2019

Speech by LI President Hakima el Haité

Dear Ambassador Moses, Dear Delegates and Guests, it is a pleasure to address one of the largest gatherings of human rights dissidents in my capacity as President of Liberal International.

I am honoured to stand here today alongside individuals like Vicente de Lima, Dhondup Wangchen, Ensaf Haidar, Ketty Nivyabandi, Nguyen Van Dai, Nurcan Baysal, Regis Iglesias and Dr Yang Jianli, whose courage and determination to fight for what they believe in and for what is right I applaud. They have knowingly sacrificed their lives in the name of basic democratic values such as freedom, justice and equality for all, and as a result have suffered unimaginable horrors at the hands of their governments.

As a political federation of over 100 political parties in over 80 countries and the only political international with a specifically designated Human Rights Committee, Liberal International is sadly way too familiar with the many dangers that come with promoting and defending basic democratic values. Many of our own liberal leaders remain behind bars for simply exercising their civil and political rights.

The previous three recipients of the LI Prize for Freedom – Senator Leila de Lima, Ilham Tohti and Raif Badawi – are all prisoners of conscience and remind us every day of why it is so important to stand up for human rights.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of fighting back at a time when liberal values such as democracy, the rule of law and human rights are under attack from authoritarian and far-right tendencies all around the world. We have seen the recent decline in all parts of the world not least in mature democracies proving that at no time can we take these values for granted.

This is why we are here today. We need a global concerted call for action to end all forms of human rights abuse and the only way to do so is if each one of us stands up and speaks out against injustices and blatant human rights violations in our own communities.

As a liberal and a politician, I stand with solidarity with all of my colleagues who much like the esteemed delegates here have faced or continue to face prosecution because of their belief in the fairness and justice of the democratic system. Tomorrow as the Geneva Summit opens its doors to the public, you will all see the posters of Kem Sokha, Senator Leila de Lima, Ilham Tohti and Denis Yucel among many others: opposition politicians and human rights defenders whose only “crime” has been to exercise their basic right to freedom of expression and assembly. While sadly all of them remain in jail rest assured that none of them have been silenced.

Standing here as the representative of the global liberal family, I pledge that we will continue to fight for all of those who remain unfairly behind bars because it is our duty to speak up when no one else does; to act when no one else is willing to act and to defy injustices when everyone else is turning a blind eye.

I am also pleased to announce that Liberal International will be taking up cases of imprisoned human rights defenders to the heart of our membership gearing up the network of liberal human rights parliamentarians through a dedicated six-month campaign.

Statement to the UNHRC

Rapid Deterioration of Democracy and Human Rights in Cambodia

Liberal International (LI) welcomes the report submitted by the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia as submitted to the 39th Session of the UN Human Rights Council. LI fully endorses the recommendations in the report and in particular the call of the Special Rapporteur to the Cambodian government on the “need to expand the democratic space so that “civil society organizations, human rights defenders and political activists, including members of the former Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), can actively and openly participate in inclusive political debate.” With this statement, LI would like to draw attention to the rapidly deteriorating situation with democracy and human rights in Cambodia and in particular the unjust imprisonment of the leader of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (LI full-member party) Kem Sokha and the subsequent forced dissolution of the party.

Recognising that:

- Cambodia suffered what is often described as the world’s worst genocide. Between 1975 and 1979 almost a quarter of the population died as a result of the China-backed communist Pol Pot regime and that the current Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) Prime Minister Hun Sen was part of the genocidal Pol Pot regime until he defected to Vietnam in 1977, and is now the world’s longest-serving prime minister.
- Hun Sen was a signatory to the 1991 Paris Peace Accord, now breached, which required a new constitution, and accession to treaties and provisions promising democracy, rule-of-law and human rights, and which had given hope to the Cambodian people
- Since the first post-1991 Paris Peace Accord elections in 1993, Hun Sen and the CPP have systematically sought to rig elections in their favour and that the CNRP was widely expected to win the July 2018 general election
- Cambodia’s judiciary has become a tool of Hun Sen and the CPP; a key factor in its reputation as kleptocratic, prone to land grabs by the CPP elite, and known for unlawful activity, particularly illegal logging and land clearance.

Emphasizing that:

- Three months after the commune elections, on 3rd September 2017, the current leader of the CNRP, Kem Sokha, was arrested and subsequently incarcerated on charges of spying for the United States of America.
- Kem Sokha is facing 30 years in prison and is currently under house arrest along with his wife and mother despite the fact that no evidence has been presented by the authorities, to date, and the charges are widely regarded as political.
- As part of his house arrest he must conform to the following restrictive conditions: He may not leave the court-specified demarcation of the territory. In case of a health emergency which requires leaving this demarcation, he must ask for permission from the court. He may not meet former CNRP leaders and foreigners. He may not engage in any meeting with political purpose
- The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Cambodia Rhona Smith was refused permission by Cambodia’s government to visit Kem Sokha
- On 16th November 2017, the entire Cambodia National Rescue Party was dissolved by the Supreme Court, and its membership was made illegal and subject to a custodial sentence. CNRP councillors up and down the country were required to defect to the CPP or step down and face possible arrest and incarceration
- A total of 118 CNRP officials were banned from political activity for five years, and the CNRP’s local and national seats were reallocated to unelected members of the ruling and other parties, and that a wave of arrests continued during 2018 and 2019 to the extent that even former members merely expressing support for the CNRP have been arrested, harassed or forced to dismiss them.
- In 2017 a crackdown on the free press and a number of NGOs not least the Committee for Free and Fair Elections was launched by the government and the Cambodia Daily and Radio Free Asia were shut down. Thirty-two radio stations across twenty provinces that broadcast reports critical of the government were forced to close.
- Especially harsh treatment has befallen critics of illegal logging, land grabs or the poor treatment of garment workers, with several high profile activists and journalists being murdered

Acknowledging that:

- The international community has significant concerns about the instability increasing in Cambodia and spilling over into neighbouring countries
- The European Union (EU) has sought steps to remove trade privileges and suspend the Everything but Arms scheme, and link restoration to reforms, which would have had a major impact.
- The EU has been considering applying pressure by removing trade privileges as more than 40% of Cambodian exports go to the EU
- In early October 2018, the EU notified Cambodia that they are launching the process for the withdrawal of Cambodia's Everything but Arms preferences

Asserting that:

- An electoral process, from which the main democratic opposition party, which enjoyed 44% of the national vote in 2013 and 2017, has been arbitrarily excluded, cannot be considered legitimate
- The steps towards one-party rule in 2017 and 2018 represent the latest in a long line of regressions in human rights, and that over the last 25 years the Hun Sen government has whittled away at constitutional safeguards and the separation of powers, enshrined in the 1991 Paris Peace Accords
- The government in Cambodia under the leadership of Hun Sen, should not interfere in the judicial process in the country
- Cambodia is not on the road to greater stability, which is a major concern for the region and the world
- International institutions, especially in the UN system, should take note of the dangers ahead and take further measures to restore the democracy, rule-of-law and human rights which were promised in the 1991 Paris Peace Accords, by way of rules-based international governance
- Sovereignty arguments should not be used to permit the drift to dictatorship in Cambodia which is likely to have serious negative consequences for the whole region

Recalling:

- The Written Statement of Liberal International to the 31st Session of the UN Human Rights Council on Cambodia condemning the ruling CPP party for reinstating the politically motivated conviction against the then leader of the CNRP opposition and LI full-member party, Sam Rainsy, and other steps aimed at suppressing political opposition and threatening basic rights and freedom, warning of the long term consequences
- The deep concerns expressed in a statement by Liberal International at the 36th Session of the UN Human Rights Council condemning the arrest and unsubstantiated charges of treason against CNRP opposition leader Kem Sokha without a warrant and in breach of parliamentary privilege, and the silencing of critics in the independent media and civil society; and calling on all 19 signatories of the 1991 Paris Peace Accords to suspend aid, loans and support for the Cambodia CPP government
- The World Today Resolution approved at the 62nd LI Congress in Dakar, Senegal on 29 November 2018, which regretted the transformation of Cambodia into a one-party state, condemned the unwarranted ban on the main opposition CNRP Party preventing its participation in the July 2018 general election, and the arrest and detention of opposition leader Kem Sokha



Calls on the Cambodian government to:

- Release CNRP president Kem Sokha immediately and unconditionally
- Drop all charges and cease all intimidation and threats against CNRP officials and activists in Cambodia and abroad not least CNRP Acting President Sam Rainsy
- Restore the CNRP to a status of legitimate opposition party with the same status and privileges as all major political parties
- Return all confiscated elected local positions to the CNRP
- Hold new free and fair legislative elections
- Comply with international norms of Jus Cogens and customary international law in fulfilling its international human rights obligations as contained in the treaties and conventions it has ratified, and cease to use its domestic law as a means of avoidance, accepting the doctrine of pacta sunt servanda as codified in Article 26 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.
- Sign and ratify further multilateral treaties which enshrine the rights of citizens, civil society, political parties, employees and the media
- More specifically, meet the obligations of treaties on human rights acceded to in the years after the 1991 Paris Peace Accords
- Repeal the amendments to the Law on Political Parties which provided for expansive grounds for the dissolution of political parties
- Take steps to ensure there is an independent judiciary and separation of powers, including impartial systems for appointing and removing judges, proper appellate paths, and clear reporting and precedent systems
- End the use of trumped-up judicial, administrative and fiscal misdemeanours and felonies as political tools against the opposition and the media
- End land grabs by establishing fair and transparent systems of land registrations, completing the many international programmes that have been initiated by UN system organisations and others, and implementing objective processes for restitution to previous owners where land grabs have occurred
- Restore freedom of the press and media, and desist from attempting to close down any press and media outlets which are not acting as public relations voices for Hun Sen and the CPP
- Outlaw large scale systematic illegal logging and implementing international commitments

Calls for UN system institutions to:

- To encourage the Cambodian CPP-led government to bring Cambodia back towards democracy, rule-of-law and human rights and restore hope that the aspirations of the 1991 Paris Peace Accords can be met
- To support an international enquiry into the nature and conditions of recent Chinese investment in Cambodia, including environmental and labour standards, lest the public disquiet over Chinese investment erupts into economically damaging violence

Calls on the European Union to:

- Accelerate the process of Everything but Arms Scheme trade privileges suspension given the rapid deterioration of human rights and stability over the last three years. We implore the EU to try again to impose tariffs on rice as a first step, following the attempt using QMV on 4th December 2018
- Support the application of global environmental and International Labour Organisation standards in the application of Chinese investment in Cambodia.

Calls on the Chinese leadership to:

- Understand the dangers, and to reign in Hun Sen, for example by withdrawing from the 1996 Economic and Technical Cooperation Treaty between Cambodia and the People's Republic of China, and regulating the investment flows and auditing the type or organisations involved

Calls on the USA leadership to:

- Withdraw from Investment Accords signed from 1997, including the 2006 Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA)

Calls on the Chinese leadership to:

Understand the dangers to its members' interests and apply pressure for reform in Cambodia as expressed above, before it is too late, beginning by suspending Cambodia from the 16-member Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership negotiations.

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