



LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



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Chairperson's Message

The year 2020 will of course go down in history as the year that the Covid-pandemic broke out, which naturally led to many changes including the way the LI Human Rights Committee works and an addition to our priorities.

Supported by the very hard-working LI Secretariat, we were able to develop our working methods online. Before the pandemic broke out we were able to conduct only two events in person; with the support of the FNF Brussels office, which saw a very successful launch of the LI Handbook on Women in Political Parties. The other event was the Geneva Human Rights Summit where a big delegation, led by MP Steffi Krisper, participated.

While changing the LI HRC's working methods, we were also focused on monitoring COVID19's impacts on human rights. Unfortunately, we could note that our fear was justified as many authoritarian leaders used the opportunity and introduced exaggerated and permanent measures to restrict basic rights of their citizens. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance noted later in the year how widespread the abuse was. This trend further decreased the space for a free civil society and a true democracy. We can not yet see an end to the abuses, and in addition to all lives lost the fear is that a further decline of democracy will be seen. The pandemic has also reversed the fulfilment of the SDGs and women have experienced more domestic violence. Groups already vulnerable have often been left out when measures have been prepared to protect them from the virus.

Urgent actions were often needed to highlight the plight of brave human rights actors and defenders. The increasing experience of working online became very useful.

As a summary, we can note that more than 12 online webinars and discussions were held relating to themes that the Human Rights Committee is working on. In addition, 4 Committee meetings and several digitalisation working group meetings were held during the year.

I do believe that in some ways we were able to be more efficient; we could react promptly to pressing situations around the globe. In August and in October we had webinars with activists representing the opposition in Belarus and in a committee meeting we heard the chief of staff of Senator de Lima informing us on her situation in detention, giving us advice on what next steps could be. This similar pattern has continued as we had similar discussions on the situation in Guinea.

The online working methods has also enabled us to have world-class speakers at our policy labs, helping us formulate the Liberal Principles on Digitalisation and Human rights. I am especially grateful to MEP Karen Melchior, not even a member of the Committee having worked with the digitalisation working group and moderated several debates.

Finally, I would like to thank all the members of the committee for their devotion, our sponsors who provide us with resources to carry on with the work, especially FNF, D66, the ALDE party, the Renew group and Radikale Venstre.

But my biggest thanks goes to Mikaela Hellman, our programme officer. An immense thanks to her, for her engagement, devotion and all the hard work in difficult circumstances.

LI HRC overview

The LI Human Rights Committee consists of 24 members, 15 of which are women, and 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. The mandate of the Committee was extended at the Virtual Congress in 2020, and will continue to work until the next Congress in 2021.

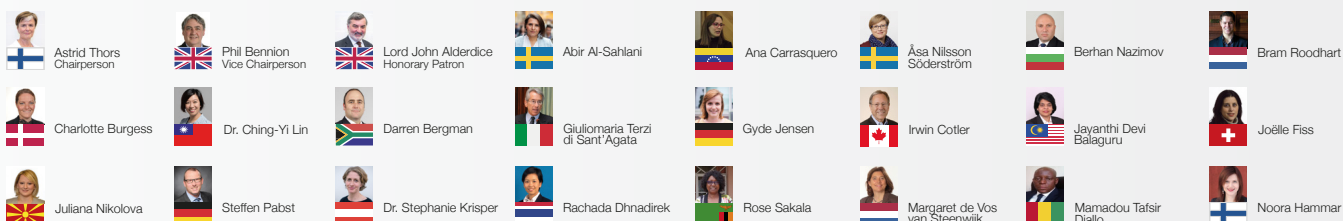
The Committee has set up two working groups; one concerning the shrinking democratic space and the other on digitalisation.

The actual work of the Human Rights Committee was very different due to COVID19. The Committee could not have a physical meeting but intensified working online; which in many cases could provide a somewhat workable substitute and held four meetings online, in addition to working group meetings.

In 2020, the Liberal International Human Rights Committee worked with the priority areas agreed upon at the start of the mandate, which includes 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.

In addition to the priorities set 2019 much attention was paid to the human rights consequences of COVID19, when so many rulers and dictators used the pandemic as an excuse to curtail human rights and freedoms. The work with effects of COVID19 had naturally many points in common with the work defending the democratic space.

Liberal International Human Rights Committee 2020-2021 #LIHRC

[View LI HRC Members](#)

Priority areas

Women's political participation

Although the LI Human Rights Committee events mostly took place online, it did not hinder the launch of the Women in Political Parties Index, the Women in Political Parties handbook and the Gender Equality Report. LI HRC organised events with regional organisations around the year, empowering women into politics. The regression of electoral rules concerning women in Somali legislation was highlighted in a statement to the UN Human Rights Council.

Digitalisation and human rights

A working group consisting of Rose Sakala, Nikolovna, Karen Melchior, Charlotte Burgess has been established to lead the work to develop the Liberal principles on Digitalisation and Human rights. A survey among member parties conducted earlier showed that a majority of member parties did not have a policy in these matters. Two policy labs were also held. During the year the planning also started concerning a campaign to support the launch of the principles.

Due to this work, LI was also connected with a range of new actors working in this field of human rights, such as Access Now and European Digital Rights.

LI HRC also joined Friedrich Naumann Foundation's #FreedomFightsFake campaign and helped to stop the sale of Dot-Org, which was received positively.

Defending the democratic space

The year of democracy defenders was reflected through the active campaign of releasing Senator Leila de Lima in the Philippines, Ilham Tohti and defending the democratic activists in Europe's last dictatorship, Belarus, and campaigned for a Cambodia without the oppression by the Hun Sen regime and for democracy in Nicaragua. LI HRC was active with the biggest delegation to the Geneva Summit for Human Rights.



COVID19

Liberals early on sounded the alarm bells and realised the dangers and temptation the pandemic meant for authoritarian regimes to introduce measures that curbed the freedom of citizens without any relevance to combatting the pandemic. We witnessed how “regular criminals” were released from prison, but not any political prisoners; the first group due to the health risks COVID19 posed for the prisoners. Filipino Senator Leila de Lima was kept in custody without having access to her legal team, to name some examples. The freedom of association was also restricted for opposition parties but not for governing parties when elections came closer. The situation in many countries merited statements and warnings from our side.



Women's political participation

COVID19 has changed our perceptions of female leadership

Online (8 June 2020)

"As liberals, we call for all governments to make the prevention of all violence against women a key component in their response to the pandemic, and to include women in making the decisions that affect them," LI President, Dr. Hakima el Haite, urged during her opening remarks. Setting the tone for the two-hour session, she stressed how women, who make up 70% of health and social workers, are simultaneously on the frontlines of fighting the crisis and bearing the heavy blow of the societal consequences of the crisis.

While female workers sometimes put their lives at risk treating those suffering from the virus, they also carry the burden as schools and childcare services close. Many women also work in the sectors most affected by the crisis, such as tourism, services, and hospitality, and they are less likely to find new employment if they lose their jobs. She also raised the dramatic rise in domestic violence seen almost in every country.

In the light of the ongoing COVID19-crisis, Liberal International, in cooperation with the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE Party), the Africa Liberal Network (ALN), the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD), and the International Federation of Liberal Youth (IFLRY) brought together liberal women from across the world, to exchange views and share experiences of how to thrive as a female politician today.

Highlighting the successes of female leaders such as Tsai Ing-Wen of Taiwan, Jacinda Arden of New Zealand, Sanna Marin of Finland, and Angela Merkel of Germany, the LI President passed on a special message to the world's male leaders: "Male leaders should have the humility to listen to those female leaders, and to take into account their success stories and duplicate them in their own countries."

Opening the panel discussion, moderator Jayanthi Balaguru (INLW, Malaysia) raised that many challenges that women in politics face are the same across the globe. "With COVID19 having changed just about everything about how we live our lives, what does this mean for women? Is COVID19 another obstacle for women, or can it be an opportunity?"

Cllr Emma Murphy (ALDE Party, Ireland) stressed the importance of not being ashamed to keep doing your political work even during the pandemic and not apologise. "The pandemic has given to us as women, a capacity again to further build our resilience. We always were resilient, but we're furthering it developing our capacity with regards to resilience," she said.

"With climate change, and the fact that in the future the world will have more crises to manage... COVID-19 is the springboard that the world needed to be able to embed this stronger gender lens. Women have many unique skills that are needed to manage a crisis, and we have proven that we can," Nereah Amondi Oketch (ALN, Kenya) said, stressing that the changing world under COVID19 has presented a vacuum where women can step in. She stressed that clear communication, empathy, and the use of innovative approaches has benefited many female leaders during the pandemic.

Webinar

Women, Power & the Pandemic:

A Liberal Roundtable



Hakima el Haite
LI, Morocco - Opening remarks



Jayanthi Balaguru
INLW, Malaysia - Moderator



Claudine Kishkek
IFLRY, Jordan



Emily Lau
CALD, Hong Kong



Emma Murphy
ALDE Party, Ireland



Nereah Amondi Oketch
ALN, Kenya



Objecting to the description of all female leaders as successful, Emily Lau (CALD, Hong Kong) raised the unpopularity of Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam. Although the pandemic itself has been well managed in Hong Kong, with few cases and fatalities, the leadership is in the process of suppressing pro-democratic voices and undermining the autonomy of Hong Kong. Emily Lau stressed that when people raise that Carrie Lam is a woman, she shuts them down. Lam is a bad leader, but it has nothing to do with her being a woman.

Claudine Kishek, in closing the panel discussion, remarked that female leadership qualities which have traditionally been perceived as weak are "actually now a power, are now the strength that is building forward and that has prevented the pandemic from breaking out, that has prevented a complete financial disaster."

Stressing the failure of populist leaders taking a more orthodox strongman-approach to the pandemic, such as Trump, Bolsonaro, Boris Johnson and Rodrigo Duterte; Claudine Kishek explained that their domineering style of leadership has not proven popular with populations. Instead, more compassionate and transparent leaders have taken the lead in handling the pandemic.

Women have proven time and time again to be more than capable leaders, both in the face of crisis and in the day-to-day running of their countries. It is time for the world to take note.



[Watch the session here](#)

Liberal women break down barriers to representation at the launch of LI's Gender Equality Report

Online (26 October 2020)

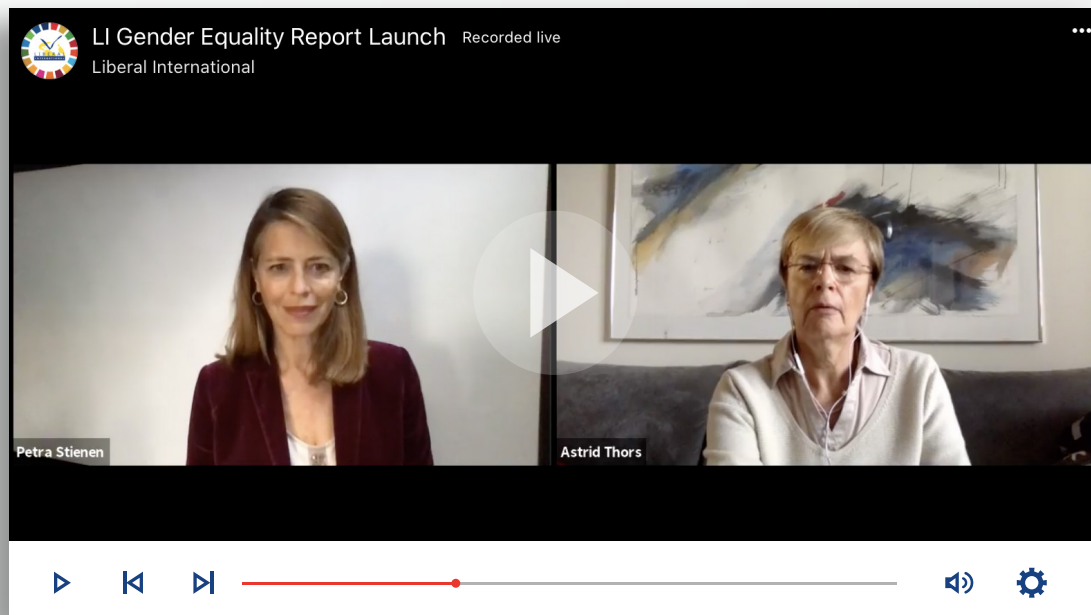
Taking place on the eve of the LI virtual congress administrative session, this report workshop was the culmination of one of the LI Human Rights Committee's most important projects in for 2020. In addition to presenting the results of the survey, this event also engaged participants in a discussion on some of the barriers to achieving female participation in political parties with invited speakers from the liberal family.

To discuss these important issues, the event brought together LI Vice President and LI Human Rights Committee Chairperson Astrid Thors, Chairperson of the Women's League National Unity Platform Flavia Kalule Nabagabe, Director Gender and Women for NDI Sandra Pepera, Executive Director of Boris Divkovic Foundation Anela Lemeš, Councillor in Sarajevo and International Officer for Naša Stranka Cllr. Jasmina Mršo and Councillor in South Dublin County Council for Fianna Fáil Cllr. Emma Murphy. The event was moderated by Dutch Senator for D66 Petra Stienen.

Presenting the inaugural Liberal International Gender Equality Report, Astrid Thors thanked the member parties who participated in the 2020 Women in Political Parties (WIPP) Survey. She stressed that liberal parties are often performing above average when it comes to the representation of women, with many parties having extensive training programmes and strong representation of women in their parliamentary groups. However, many challenges remain, and many parties can do more to ensure that their female representatives have a strong voice.

Engaging in a dialogue with moderator Petra Stienen, Flavia Kalule Nabagabe presented the work and the challenges she is facing in setting up the women's league of a new political party in Uganda. The 2020 WIPP Index found that 83% of responding liberal parties do have some form of women's wing.





[Watch the launch here](#)

[Download Gender Equality Report](#)

“We decided to set up a women’s wing since women’s issues are crucial and we need to address them. If we mainstream these issues across the party structure there is a risk of them being left behind, and in this way, we can highlight them in particular,” she explained.

Debating the pros and cons of introducing quotas for women in political parties and parliaments, Emma Murphy argued that quotas institutionalise discrimination, giving women a preference over men. She explained that women are often selected simply to qualify for funding or to follow the rules, rather than to get elected, causing them to not be taken seriously as candidates. Finally, she stressed that they do not tackle the issue from the bottom up but merely act as a quick fix for counting heads.

Arguing in favour of the use of quotas for women, Sandra Pepera argued that they are not discriminatory, but instead meant to undermine long-standing historical patriarchal inequalities. She stressed that gender is still the largest inequality gap, outnumbering health, economics or any other factor. She raised that 77% of parliamentarians are still men, and that the impact of quotas is undeniable and immediate.

“I will know that I have achieved gender equality when I can be as mediocre as some of the men. Why does every woman have to be a star? There are so many mediocre men in politics,” she said.

Explaining the bottom-up mind-set that their political party Naša Stranka has adopted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Anela Lemeš and Jasmina Mršo briefed participants on how their party has managed to achieve equality in almost all aspects of party politics through their project Initiative 50%.

“We do not have a women’s wing – instead Initiative 50% is a cross-party initiative applying to everything we are organising as a party,” Jasmina Mršo explained, stressing that the reason for the success of the initiative was managing to achieve a bottom-up change in the philosophy of the party itself.

“The legislative quotas we have in Bosnia and Herzegovina haven’t worked, but our changed philosophy in achieving true equality of representation and influence has been very successful.”

In her conclusions, Petra Stienen turned a famous saying around to emphasise the positive aspects of mobilising women for real change.

“Remember, there is a special place in heaven for women who promote other women.”

This event was organised by Liberal International in cooperation with D66.

Gender Equality Report - Findings of the 2020 Women In Political Parties Index

This report presents the findings of the 2020 Women in Political Parties Index, the first of its kind tool developed by Liberal International to assist our membership in evaluating and improving their inclusivity as political parties.

The Index is based on a self-assessment survey, which was opened to the LI membership for the first time in March 2020, and all eligible parties were able to submit their results until June 2020. The result of this data collection is presented in this report.

The results find that in many ways, liberals are at the forefront of the global fight for gender equality. The global liberal family is consistently ahead of the regional trends for representation of women in parliaments, and many have comprehensive training programmes to strengthen and empower female candidates.

Despite this, many challenges remain. Many liberal parties have still never elected a female leader. Work remains to ensure that our party structures are equipped to record and follow up the threats and harassments we know that female candidates and politicians face. We must continue to actively acknowledge these challenges, and to train and educate our memberships as we strive to become more inclusive as political parties.

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



[Download the LI Gender Equality Report](#)



Liberal International **WIPP INDEX** WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTIES

Women in Political Parties Index

Continuing with the LI HRC priority of women's political empowerment, in 2020 LI launched for the first time the Women in Political Parties Index Survey. The barometer allows all LI member parties the opportunity to measure their own index rank, i.e., the level of diversity and inclusivity within their party. Using an online platform, this first-of-its-kind tool is designed to assist LI member parties in boosting inclusivity within their party structures and to advance the presence of women in politics.



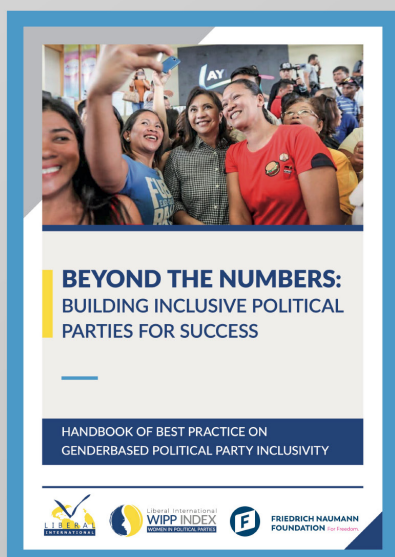
Women in Political Parties (WIPP) Handbook - Beyond the Numbers: Building Inclusive Political Parties for Success

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.

Based on the results of the Women In Political Parties (WIPP) Index, the handbook gives the best practical advice on how to accompany LI's one-of-a-kind online inclusivity index. The parties will have the possibility to upgrade the inclusivity and diversity in their party hierarchy through educating lessons from this handbook.

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.

Liberal International gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF, cooperating organisation) for financially contributing to the development of the LI Women in Political Party Index and funding the handbook's design and production. LI is also grateful for the financial contributions of the Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD, LI member, The Netherlands) and Centerpartiet (LI member, Sweden) towards the organisation and execution of the key consultative workshops which served to collect best practices on gender-based political party inclusivity and diversity from among the LI membership.



[Download the LI WIPP Handbook](#)



HRC Chair Thors launches women in political parties handbook with Euro MPs

Brussels (11 February 2020)

Liberal International (LI) has gathered liberals at the home of the European Parliament to launch the LI Women in Political Parties Index (WIPP) handbook – the practical best-practice guide to accompany LI's one-of-a-kind online inclusivity index.

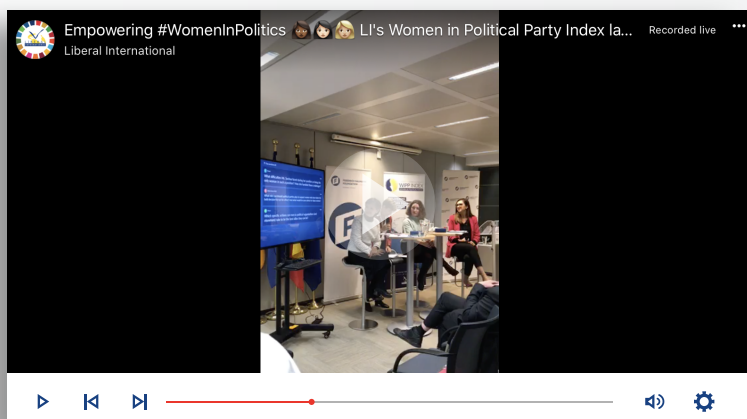
Addressing international guests at a panel debate under the theme Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Women in Politics to celebrate the launch, LI Human Rights Committee Chair, Astrid Thors, emphasised that for parties looking to be more representative, and more electable, the WIPP Index handbook is an essential strategic aid. “The handbook shares the best practices of liberal parties from all over the world. It shows the importance of having a plan to create real influence for women”, the Finnish politician said.

Representing the Renew Group in the European Parliament (LI full member), Katalin Cseh MEP (Momentum), explained: “In Hungary, it is acceptable to say, in parliament, that we would have less domestic violence if women just stayed home and did the dishes more”, before adding “Women need to have an equal voice. We need to be angry because we deserve better.”

The WIPP Index allows political parties to confidentially self-assess the level of inclusivity within their party structures while the handbook offers viable steps to create greater levels of equality.

Sharing both their personal and professional experiences of women's political representation, former Cambodian Minister for Women and long-standing advocate for women's rights Mu Sochua (CNRP, Cambodia – LI full member), Policy Officer of the LYMEC Bureau Antoaneta Asenova (MRF, Bulgaria – LI full member), and Policy Advisor Manon Deshayes of the European Women's Lobby led discussions around promoting women in politics.

Highlighting the huge amount of work still to be done, Antoaneta Asenova explained the imbalance in attitudes societies have towards women and men: “If I make a mistake, I am young and inexperienced. If a man my age makes a mistake, he's probably just having a bad day. These double standards still exist.”



[Watch the launch here](#)



Digitalisation and Human Rights

In the shadow of COVID19, China seeks to change the internet

Online Article (16 April 2020)

As Liberal International has previously pointed out, decisions that risk re-shaping the internet as we know it are progressing while the world is preoccupied with containing the spread of the coronavirus. LI has previously raised the issue of the sale of the domain .org, which would risk the communications channels of human rights organisations and NGO's from around the world.

However, this is unfortunately not the only process underway to change communications.

In cooperation with Huawei and a few other states, China is developing an alternative model of the internet as we know it. The regulation and governance of the internet today is global and based on a multilateral, loose model where no one actor has complete control. It is an interaction between international organisations, governments, companies, and civil society. China, and several other countries like Russia and Saudi Arabia, have long worked to change this into a governance structure that is easier for them to control.

The model currently being developed by China and Huawei, called New IP, would instead build on so-called cyber sovereignty. This would give governments much larger control, not only over content online but also to who gets network access in the first place. This would allow them to stop dissidents and activists from accessing the internet at all, instead of censoring their content retroactively. Instead of the global internet, we see today, we would see several national internets under the control of their respective governments.

The decision on the future of the internet is ultimately taken by governments at the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). Liberals, and others who value the internet as a medium where individuals can reach out and information be spread despite the wishes of autocratic governments, must take action to ensure it is not abandoned.

We see governments today taking advantage of the coronavirus crisis to extend surveillance and control over their citizens' lives. In China's vision of the future internet, this is the default, not the exception.



#SaveDotOrg - With the world watching, LI HRC fought to stop the sale of Dot-Org

Online (24 March 2020)

With the world's eyes focused on the Coronavirus crisis Liberal International, along with 858 other organisations, is challenging a decision that may change digital access for civil society organisations around the world.

"We urge ISOC and ICANN to not put at risk the websites of global organisations such as LI and other human rights groups. It is crucial that the work of such organisations stays safe!" says LI HRC Chair Astrid Thors.

On Friday 20 March the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the internet registration outfit, was due to decide on whether to allow the sale of the .ORG domain (as used by Liberal International and many other NGOs) from the Internet Society (ISOC) to private equity firm Ethos Capital. This deadline was extended by 30 days, at the very last minute, and is now due on 20 April.

The possibility of this sale is still very real and could put many civil society organisations at risk.

Many non-profits have argued that selling .org to a private equity firm could lead to human rights organisations and other non-profits having their domain names taken away by those looking to censor them. Additionally, it is possible that Ethos Capital could hike prices on its non-profit domain customers, which could hit poor civil society organisations hard.

For example, the registry has the power to suspend domain names based on accusations of "activity contrary to applicable law." In a time of increased authoritarianism and restrictions on civil society across the globe, it is crucial that we ensure this information platform is not exposed to such threats.

Powers like this leave NGO:s and other organisations vulnerable to state actors targeting them with allegations of illegal activity – something we know is commonplace in many countries today.

While Liberal International welcomes the postponement of the decision, it means continued uncertainty on this issue.

Liberal International, along with 858 other organisations at the time of writing, has called on ISOC and ICANN to stop the sale of .ORG and urges individuals and organisations across the global liberal family to do the same.

A threat to civil society defeated as the sale of Dot-ORG blocked

Online (4 May 2020)

[Read article here](#)

The global fight against fake news is of great importance

Online (21 July 2020)

#FreedomFightsFake Campaign

Liberal International was proud to launch our #FreedomFightsFake global campaign to fight disinformation together with Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit!

From election interference to fighting Coronavirus we've all encountered deliberate media manipulation with the objective of degrading public trust in democratic and state institutions.

The #FreedomFightsFake campaign will empower citizens around the globe to think critically and "pre-bunk" disinformation!

How can we detect which claims are (deliberately) false? In what ways can we counter the global phenomenon of disinformation? What is the state of media freedom around the world and how can we strengthen it?

As the world focused on the US election in November 2020, LI, our member parties, and FNF provided regular updates across multiples countries in several languages to fight back against the disinformation pandemic.



[Find out more. Get involved](#)

Bill Gates, Chinese bioweapons or 5G networks: disinformation surrounding the coronavirus permeates societies around the world, as a global study conducted by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom shows. Dr Hakima el Haité, President of Liberal International, and Prof. Karl-Heinz Paqué, Deputy President of Liberal International, declare:

"The global fight against fake news is of great importance. It needs to be given a much higher priority than it has right now. From a liberal perspective, this is not about suppressing controversial views. It is about fostering critical thinking worldwide through diligent research and factual reporting. If we want to promote human progress, we need facts and empirical research instead of myths and conspiracy theories." – Dr. Hakima el Haité & Prof. Karl-Heinz Paqué



“Sorry, you’re on mute” – LI HRC webinar stresses defending rights as key to dealing with pandemics

Online (20 May 2020)

On Tuesday, 19 May 2020, Liberal International hosted its first webinar focused on the coronavirus and its impact on our societies.

Summarising the hour-long discussion on freedom of expression, moderator Karen Melchior (Denmark), MEP from Radikale Venstre (LI full member), identified the red thread running through all the comments of the evening: “Dealing with future challenges, both in terms of digital technology and COVID19, it’s not a question of ‘giving up’ our rights to deal with these challenges effectively, but ‘defending’ our rights as part of an effective approach to deal with pandemics or new technology.”

During the discussion, speakers Gyde Jensen (Germany), MP for FDP (LI full member) and Chair of the Bundestag Committee for Human Rights and David Kaye (USA), United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression will share their perspectives on this timely topic.

Stressing the importance of securing citizens’ access to information and governments and public authorities taking care to treat their populations as adults and properly conveying to them the risks associated with the pandemic, David Kaye explained that “when governments speak honestly about the limitation of the information they have, but also the measures that need to be taken as a precaution, people respond to their governments in a more positive way.”

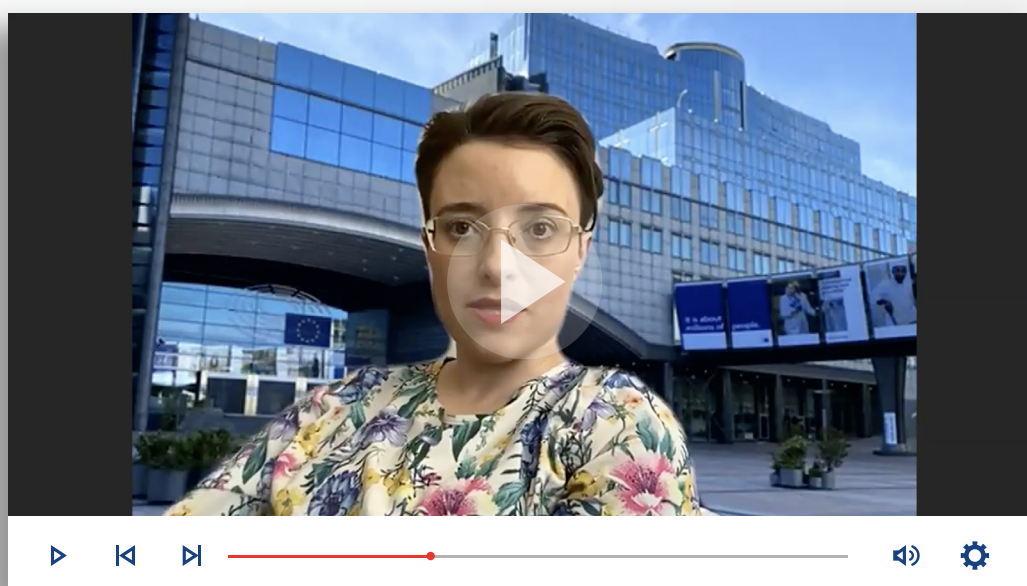




Gyde Jensen agreed with this assessment, stressing that actions like cutting off internet access in certain regions undermine both citizens' access to information and the ability of journalists to work. "I think it is our responsibility, from the ministries and authorities too, to inform the public about websites or campaigns strategically geared toward disinformation and fake news," she commented.

When asked whether there are positive examples who deserve mention for their handling of the pandemic, particularly regarding their approach to being honest and keeping their citizens informed, the panellists highlighted countries such as Germany, New Zealand, Australia, and Taiwan.

Gyde Jensen explained that "when coronavirus came to Germany March, we didn't know anything about it or what was coming. We still don't know what is coming – but we know that using digital tools responsibly and protecting the freedom of expression is key."



[Watch the session here](#)

Liberal Principles of Digitalisation and Human Rights



LI Policy Lab takes first steps towards establishing liberal principles of digitalisation and human rights

Online (3 July 2020)

How can liberals work to ensure transparency and accountability in the use and collection of personal data? How can regulatory systems be built robustly enough to withstand both ignorant and malevolent governments? Can individual rights online be secured at a global level?

These were some of the questions addressed on Wednesday 1 July, when Liberal International in cooperation with the European Liberal Forum gathered policymakers and experts from across the world to discuss some of the most pressing issues for the coming years. This policy lab was the first in a series organised by the LI Human Rights Committee under its priority area of Digitalisation & Human Rights.

Speaking in the discussion that opened the session, moderated by MEP Karen Melchior (Radikale Venstre, Denmark), Hong Kong privacy activist Glacier Kwong reflected on the implications of the new so called security law which had been brutally enforced in Hong Kong and what it means for digital rights.

"This is more far-reaching than any other Chinese internet-related law. It aims to create fear and self-censorship online. The great firewall of China has only one goal – to control what others can and cannot see. It is now expanding rapidly into the world."

Stressing the expansionary role China is taking in the digital sphere, she explained how companies like Apple and Google have adjusted their services according to Chinese censorship standards, and how these standards are creeping beyond China through apps such as TikTok.

"Nobody should have to change their human rights depending on where they are. Universal rights should be protected everywhere," she said, stressing that companies based in democracies must not be let off when they are found to have aided in the oppression of human rights by using the excuse of having followed local laws.

Diego Naranjo, Head of Policy at European Digital Rights (EDRi), agreed with Glacier Kwong's description of the human rights situation online.

"In Europe, large reactions were sparked in 2019 by the use of facial recognition by the authorities in Hong Kong to quell protestors, but similar systems have been implemented in France, for example, without causing much outrage."

He stressed that the presence of biometric tracking in public spaces not only risks violating the privacy and data protection rights of the people using these spaces, but they also spill over to threatening other rights such as freedom of assembly and expression when people can be scanned during a protest as has happened in Hong Kong.

Additionally, he raised the issue of what he called the "Digital Stockholm Syndrome", where companies like Facebook and Google create de facto monopolies where people have no choice but to use their services (and shed personal data while doing so) whether they want to or not.



Glacier Kwong

Political activist from Hong Kong &
founder of the NGO Keyboard Freedom



Diego Naranjo

Head of Policy for EDRI &
lawyer specialised in human rights



Karen Melchior

Radikale Venstre Member of European Parliament
and webinar session moderator

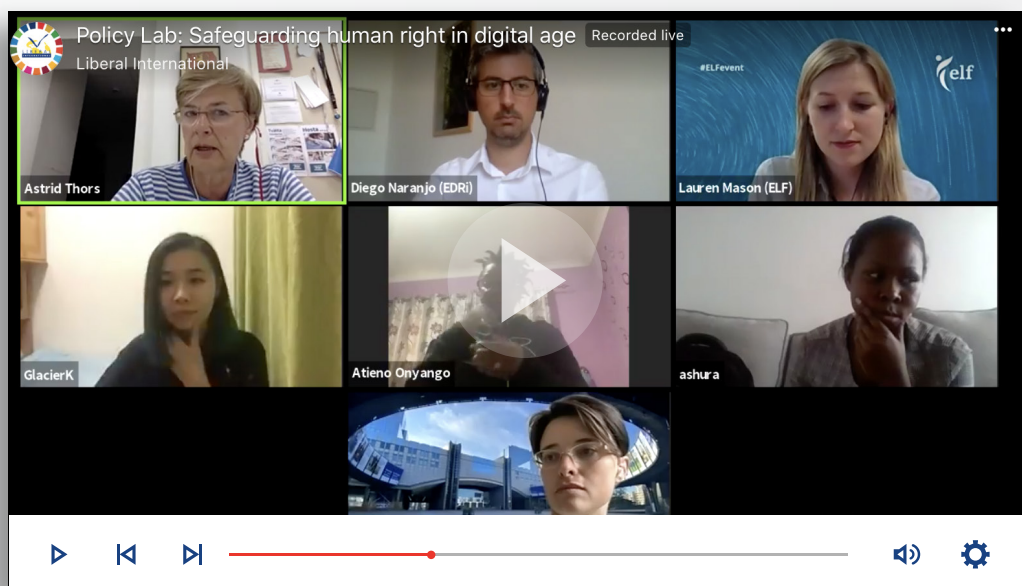
“Theoretically someone could start a new ‘YouTube’, but in practice, it is impossible since there is no well-functioning digital market. In a well-functioning market, there would be alternative companies where consumers could choose according to for example data protection standards,” he explained, stressing the need to address problems with enforcement of data protection and competition regulations.

Moderator Karen Melchior raised the importance of narrow and well-defined legislation which clearly outlines the scope where user data may be used without leaving the full interpretation to the companies, as often happens today. She also brought up the importance of creating legislation robust enough for the worst offenders, rather than assuming benevolence from governments and other actors. This is particularly relevant since pioneering legislation is often copied by other countries.

Glacier Kwong agreed, highlighting the need for creating more balance of power between consumers and companies.

“We have to acknowledge that these companies have as much power as many governments, and they can analyse individuals and behaviours in a very far-reaching way. We need to find a balanced regulatory solution which balances profit and individual rights, and where both companies and individuals can thrive,” she concluded.

The second part of the policy lab consisted of internal discussions among the participating policymakers and experts on the way forward for liberals, highlighting the need for digital literacy education and encouraging sustainable business models online. This event was the first instalment in a series of policy labs to gather the expertise of the liberal family and work towards laying the liberal policy foundations in the field of digitalisation and human rights.



[Watch the session here](#)

TRUTH OR SHARE: HOW WILL THE DIGITAL DISINFORMATION WAR END?



LIVE

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live on LI's Facebook page

WED
21
OCTOBER

10:00 - 10:45
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Liberal International
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Dragoș Tudorache MEP

Chairman, Special committee on artificial
intelligence in a digital age in the
European Parliament



Maria Ressa

CEO of Rappler; Journalist



Akinwale Goodluck

Head of Sub Saharan Africa, GSMA



Ketevan Bojgva

Founder and Chairperson,
Democracy Lab Georgia;
Journalist



Astrid Thors

LI Vice President & LI Human
Rights Committee Chair

Truth or Share: How will the disinformation war end?

Online (21 October 2020)

Internet trolls spreading disinformation and journalists jailed because of their views, – Liberal International (LI) unified fighters against disinformation from various countries to the LI hosted webinar, Truth or Share: How will the digital disinformation war end?

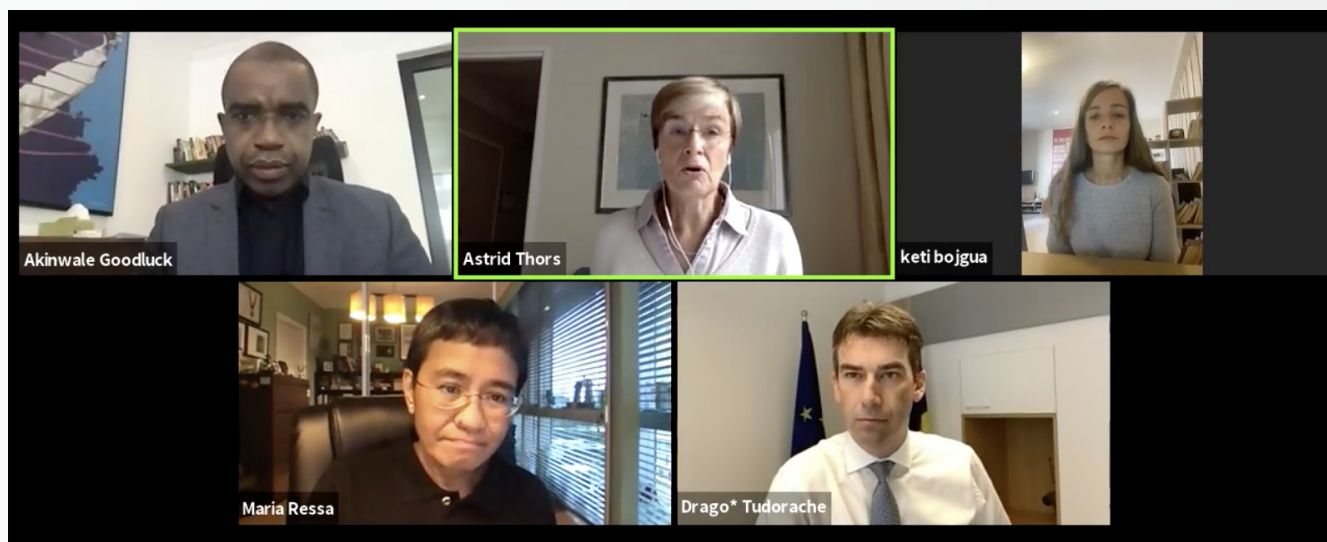
To the event, LI invited Maria Ressa, Journalist and CEO of Rappler, Dragoș Tudorache MEP, Chairman of Special Committee on artificial intelligence in a digital age in the European Parliament, Akinwale Goodluck, Head of Sub Saharan Africa, Global System for Mobile Communications (GSMA), Ketevan Bojgva, Journalist and Founder and Chairperson of Democracy Lab Georgia, and moderated by LI Vice President and Human Rights Committee chair, Astrid Thors, who unlatched immediately by thanking the diversified group of experienced experts and mentioned the relevance of Fake News with the upcoming US Presidential Election.

"Fake News is a weapon, there are rules and instruments we use to regulate any weapons trait – Sanctions, retaliation, naming and shaming, we need to bound our diplomatic efforts against those that use it." – Dragoș Tudorache MEP

Dragoș Tudorache MEP, foregrounded the fact that disinformation is a threat to our democracies and the use of word 'war' is an understatement, expressing the first line of defence must come from the politicians and that we must never fear the use of sanctions and retaliation under a disinformation attack. Regulation and education are the keys for combating the threat and continued to emphasize the vitality of regulating the use of disinformation weapons and investing in education. In the closing remarks, he recognised the LI and Friedrich-Naumann Foundation's campaign Freedom Fights Fake.

"I still believe in the wonderful good that this technology can do but left in the hand of capitalists who became the gatekeepers and then who optimized for growth at all costs, had a cost on every one of us in a democracy." – Maria Ressa

"I could face up to the maximum sentence of 100 years – when you are the target you get to see the shifts in tactics," said Maria Ressa, talking about the allegations she has received through the years. One of Rappler's stories could see her face up to 6 years in prison, for a story published 8 years ago and violating a law that did not exist at the time. Press Freedom has rolled back, but its beyond that, she said.



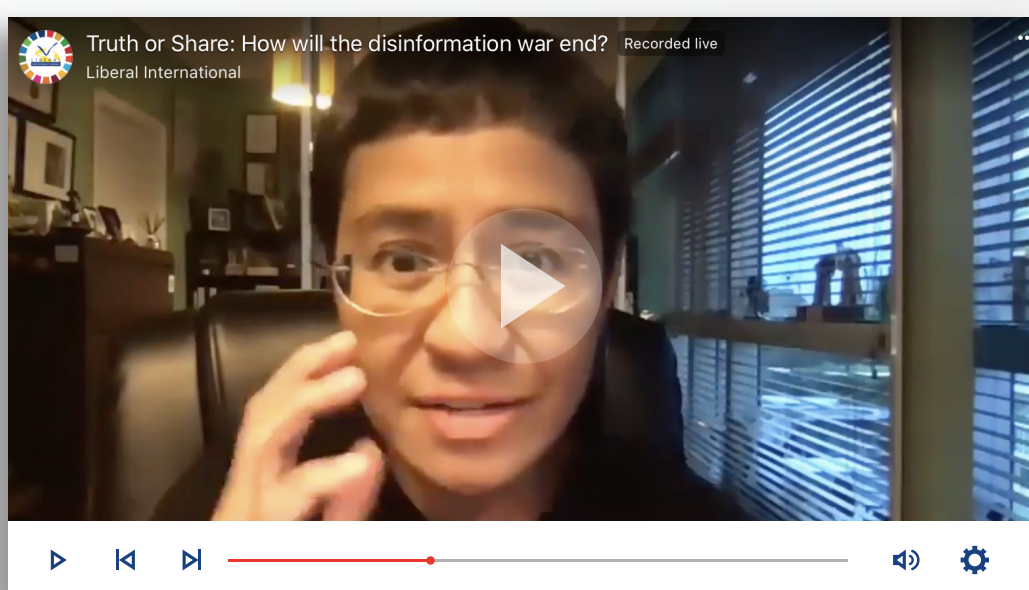
“It is a real war because it is well-orchestrated, well designed and often well-executed.” – Akinwale Goodluck

Akinwale Goodluck spoke about the phenomenon of disinformation war with people spreading lies in rooms and results in sparking fights on the streets. Fewer literacy levels in the area crave easier readable text and more visualisation from the government, and messaged strongly of it being a real war, due to its well-planned strategy and tactics.

“We were at the stage of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and now at the stage of acceptance – we have accepted we are in this war.” – Ketí Bojgua

Bill Gates wants to microchip the globe through vaccines, 5G spreads COVID19 – those are conspiracy theories that are spread on social media, says Ketí Bojgua, and shared a memory of her time in school, where Stalin was portrayed as a hero and savior of the World War II. She also embarked the importance of standing together in this fight.

All the panellists agreed on education’s vitality in the disinformation war. The event was concluded by moderator Astrid Thors, who raised the need for a human right based social media business model and embraced the panellist’s important work for freedom and rule of law.



[Watch the session here](#)

Policy Lab: Liberals gather to end internet shutdowns

Online (9 November 2020)

Following our successful first Policy Lab on July 1st, this policy lab gathered experts within the field of digitalisation and human rights from across the global liberal family. The participants discussed some of the key policy issues surrounding digitalisation and human rights, and work to develop liberal responses to some of the questions which will shape the internet and societies of our future.

Speakers Marietje Schaake, International Policy Director at the Cyber Policy Centre, Stanford University, and former MEP for D66, and Felicia Anthonio, lead for the #KeepItOn campaign at Access Now, shared their perspectives in an opening discussion moderated by MEP Karen Melchior.

"Is it legitimate that private companies design, architect, and govern the digital infrastructure that underpins our societies?" asked Marietje Schaake in her opening remarks, stressing the enormous control the big tech companies have and that policy makers so far have done little to reign in. "It is essential that we discuss who has the legitimate power to make these decisions, and how we ensure that there is independent oversight and research into the developments that are in reality taking place."

In her opening remarks, Felicia Anthonio raised the growing issue of government-induced internet shutdowns. Showcased not least by events surrounding this week's elections in Tanzania and Guinea and the ongoing protests in Belarus, authoritarian leaders are increasingly using internet shutdowns to control their citizens access to information and stifle freedom of speech.

"The pandemic has shown how crucial internet access is to help people keep safe and stay in touch with their loved ones. We see a trend where shutdowns are increasing in number, but they are also lasting longer and increasingly affecting vulnerable groups in society," she explained.

Moderator Karen Melchior raised the balance needing to be struck between governments stepping in to regulate the digital sphere, while governments at the same time are the perpetrators in some of the worst digital human rights offences, such as internet shutdowns.

"Often internet infrastructure is rolled out with the help of aid money in countries where there are no data protection provisions, thereby assisting in creating oppressive systems. Democratic governments are not incentivised to step forward and promote digital rights," Marietje Schaake commented.

LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL VIRTUAL CONGRESS

POLICY LAB: SAFEGUARDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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facebook.com/LiberalInternational

Register interest for the closed breakout session:
<http://bit.ly/LIPolicyLab>

FRI 30 OCTOBER 15:00 - 15:45 [UK Time]

Marietje Schaake
International policy director at Stanford University's Cyber Policy Center, D66 MEP (2009-2019)

Felicia Anthonio
'Keep it on' campaign lead, Access Now

Karen Melchior MEP
Lawyer & Member of the European Parliament, Radikale Venstre

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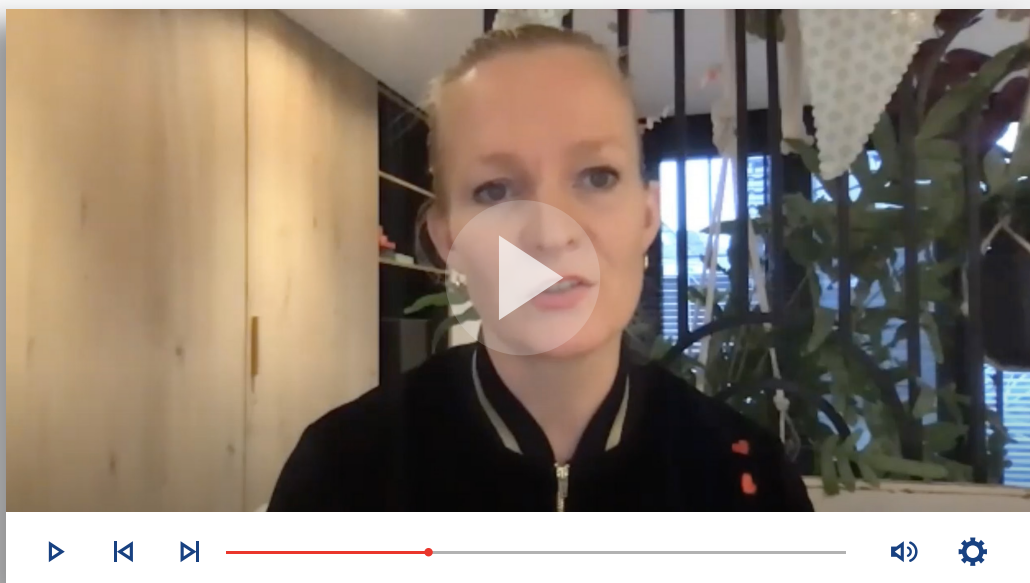
Felicia Anthonio stressed that the power to shut down the internet should not be in the hands of one actor. Today, governments order internet service providers to cut off their services, and most often the companies obey to secure their business interests in the country.

“Companies like Orange, Vodafone and others have all complied with shutdown orders. I do not know why it is so easy for them to make these decisions, but companies should be able to refuse and receive support when they do,” she noted.

In her final remarks, Marietje Schaake highlighted that there are great opportunities for like-minded countries to cooperate globally to secure human rights online both against big tech companies and autocratic governments.

“Enforcement and investigations of the rules we already have must be stepped up. We should build on the knowledge we have and not try to reinvent the wheel – there is no parallel digital world, but it is part of the real world with universal human rights and fundamental freedoms,” she said.

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, they risk escalating a development where democratic norms begin to fray.



[Watch the session here](#)

Defending the democratic space

LI active with biggest delegation to Europe's largest human rights NGO conference

Geneva (26 February 2020)

Liberal International Human Rights Committee vice chair, Dr Phil Bennion, has led one of LI's biggest delegations to the largest gathering of human rights NGOs in Europe in Geneva, Switzerland this week. The liberals presented an award and chaired panel debates at the LI co-hosted Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy.

The gathering of civil liberties defenders and survivors of human rights violations from China, Venezuela, Mauritania, Russia and other countries saw testimonies shared in a call to the global community for action. Presenting this year's prestigious International Women's Rights Award to Iranian women's rights activist Shaparak Shajarizadeh, LI Human Rights Committee and Austrian MP Dr Stephanie Krisper concluded that: "Shaparak Shajarizadeh is teaching us a valuable lesson: if the world is not right, it must be made right!"

Focus points:

- LI HRC member Dr Steffi Krisper presents International Women's Rights Award
- Raised awareness of the case of LI Prize for Freedom laureate Ilham Tohti at Europe's largest gathering of NGOs
- Strategised with Jewher Ilham, daughter of Ilham Tohti, about future actions
- LI representatives chaired debates on urgent global human rights concerns

Raising the case of Ilham Tohti

Liberal International especially invited Uyghur activist Jewher Ilham, daughter of scholar and LI Prize for Freedom laureate Ilham Tohti, to share her father's story with the activists, diplomats, NGOs and students in the Summit audience. In her intimately personal account, she shared the last words her father said to her before she left China for good:

"Go, go, don't cry! Don't let them think Uyghur girls are weak."

During a lunch consultation with the Liberal International delegation, Ms Ilham shared her concerns regarding her father's situation and in particular the threat posed by the Corona virus to the thousands of Uyghurs currently interned in over-crowded so-called re-education camps.





LI Activities in the Summit Programme

Throughout the day, representatives of Liberal International fulfilled several important roles at the Summit.

Moderating a panel on Supporting Political Prisoners, Human Rights Committee member Professor Irwin Cotler engaged with Ms Ilham regarding her father's situation, as well as with Dennis Chau, son of a Vietnamese political prisoner, and Professor Elham Manea, working on behalf of Saudi blogger and LI Prize for Freedom laureate Raif Badawi.

"After being under investigation and isolation for 11 months, my father was allowed a one-hour consultation with a lawyer," Dennis Chau shared.

Engaging with activists from Cuba, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Turkey while moderating a panel on Fighting Authoritarianism, LI Human Rights Committee Deputy Chair Dr Phil Bennion raised the importance of a functioning judiciary for a just society.

Participating with a large delegation, LI was represented by LI Human Rights Committee Deputy Chair Dr Phil Bennion (Liberal Democrats, UK), Human Rights Committee members Professor Irwin Cotler (Liberal Party of Canada), MP Stephanie Krisper (Neos, Austria), Joëlle Fiss (FDP, Switzerland), LI Human Rights Programme Officer Mikaela Hellman and LI Communications Officer Jason Frazer.

[View photos from event here](#)

In times of crisis, we must stand up for Liberal Democracy, LI HRC member Åsa Nilsson Söderström says

Online (23 April 2020)

The corona pandemic is not only a threat to our health and economy, but also to liberal democracy. The trend of declining democracy has been evident for more than a decade. Scholars are talking about the “Third wave of auto-cratisation”. In the wake of the pandemic, this wave is now growing into a tsunami, threatening to wipe out hard-earned democratic gains across the world.

Authoritarian regimes are increasing their powers and cracking down on both civil society and political opposition. Dictators are learning from each other and copying each other's laws in a more rapid pace than ever before. The typical authoritarian response to the virus is to first deny and do nothing. This was seen in Latin America, where Bolsonaro claimed that Corona is “a regular cold” and where the Sandinistas in Nicaragua called for manifestations of love. And of course, we have all seen the initial cover-up by both the Chinese communists and the Iranian theocrats.

Once the outbreak is obvious autocrats like to blame someone else. Another popular strategy is to hide the spread by reporting very low numbers. After this, the typical autocrat will introduce harsh restrictions, limiting both freedom of assembly and freedom of speech. In the Philippines, President Duterte has introduced a state of emergency for six months and has given orders that those who do not observe the curfew can be shot dead. In Cambodia, Prime Minister Hun Sen has been granted the right to close independent media and organisations, and he has used the restrictions on freedom of speech to put opposition figures in prison. Another example of a president increasing his power is Viktor Orbán, who now has made Hungary the first dictatorship inside the European Union.

Democratic regimes are now also introducing severe restrictions, restrictions that we would normally only see in dictatorships. As of April 1st, over half of humanity was in lockdown. Draconian emergency measures have become the new normal and will likely remain for some time. Some of these measures are necessary to flatten the now-famous virus curve. Others are not.

Limiting the freedom of speech is not a way to stop the virus, rather the opposite. Still, Bolivia and Botswana have chosen to do so, along with twenty other countries. As liberals, we need to constantly remind the world that the free flow of information and exchange of ideas is what has led the world forward.

Restrictions on movement and assembly, although some may be necessary now, do put democracy at risk. Once installed they might be difficult to get rid of. Also, other liberal core values are at risk in this pandemic. Free trade is taking a hard blow when countries choose to close their borders and to limit exports. Personal integrity is at risk when increased surveillance is introduced in many countries and considered in even more.

It is an important liberal fight to make sure, not only that measures are efficient from a medical point of view, but also that they are restricted in time and that they harm our rights and values as little as possible. In these difficult times, we need more – not less – liberalism, internationalism and solidarity.

Åsa Nilsson Söderström
Member of the LI Human Rights Committee
Chairperson of the Working Group on Closing Democratic Space



The Philippines

LI President nominates Senator Leila de Lima for the Nobel Peace Prize

Online (7 April 2020)

Senator Leila de Lima has stood for human rights since the beginning of her political career, despite great personal cost to herself. She has faced down oppressive authoritarians at the highest levels of power while accepting the risks that it entails.

In particular, the Senator is a known critic of the Philippine Drug War of the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte. In February 2017, days after garnering international awards for her campaign against extrajudicial killings in the Philippines, she was arrested and charged for being linked to the drug trade during her stint as Justice Secretary, an accusation almost unanimously understood to be politically motivated. Three years later, she remains behind bars without having received any form of a fair trial.

In October 2017, the prestigious Liberal International Prize for Freedom was awarded to her for her stand against dictatorial regimes. She was designated as a “prisoner of conscience” by numerous international human rights organisations. In May 2018, Amnesty International conferred to her the first-ever “Most Distinguished Human Rights Defender” award during the Ignite Awards for Human Rights.

In a time of rising populism, insecurity and inequality, those of us who are resisting must do everything possible to recognise the people leading the fight on our behalf.





Liberal International calls for accountability in the incommunicado detention of Philippine Senator Leila de Lima

Online (27 July 2020)

For 45 days, from 25 April 2020 until 10 June 2020, Philippine Senator and Liberal International Prize for Freedom Laureate Leila de Lima was in incommunicado detention. She was barred from receiving guests, including so-called “essential visitors” – her family members, lawyers, personal doctors, and priests.

In this statement, submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, Liberal International calls for accountability in this long case of incommunicado detention. Such conditions are illegal by both international and Philippine law and are particularly damaging for a working political representative.

Additionally, Liberal International urged the Philippine authorities to lift all remaining restrictions on the Senator’s interaction with the outside world, and to immediately and unconditionally release her. The statement also calls for the Philippine authorities to cease persecution of the free media and political opposition, and to adhere to the principles of liberal democracy and human rights.

Liberal International has raised the issue of the detention of Senator Leila de Lima previously, and will continue to do so until she is released.



LI President condemns President Duterte's attempt to silence Senator Leila De Lima

Online (7 May 2020)

Liberal International President, Hakima el Haité, has condemned the Philippine government's decision to exclude Liberal Party Senator and LI Prize for Freedom Laureate Leila De Lima from virtual parliamentary sittings. In denying Sen. De Lima's constituents' legitimate democratic representation, the LI president called out Duterte as 'the newest member of a crooked club of COVID collaborators.'

Rejecting the belief that Senator De Lima cannot be included in virtual sittings of the Philippines' parliament because she is detained as a prisoner of conscience, LI President Hakima el Haité said:

"Rodrigo Duterte's government has this week joined the ranks of other illiberal governments around the world. Like Orban's Hungary or Putin's Russia, President Duterte has exploited the COVID-19 lockdown to gag free speech and silence human rights defenders. He is now the newest member of a crooked club of COVID collaborators.

"Senator De Lima has long-continued her political service while being detained as a prisoner of conscience. The Duterte's government thinks it has found a new way to deny Filipinos represented by Leila their constitutional rights and is exploiting the pandemic catastrophe to silence her.

"Every country on Earth is struggling with the impact and consequences of the coronavirus and we need our best leaders. The charges against Senator Leila De Lima must be dropped and she cannot be denied the right to carry out the job she was elected to do."

Europe's last dictator wobbles: What next for Belarus?

Online (20 August 2020)

With mass protests across the country on a scale that has never been seen before, calling for free and fair elections and the resignation of Alexander Lukashenko, the dictator who has held power in the country for 26 years, Belarus is in the process of making history.

Yesterday, Liberal International brought together Olga Karatch, founder and director of Belarusian civil rights organisation Nash Dom, and Astrid Thors, LI Vice President and Chair of the LI Human Rights Committee to discuss the situation in Belarus in a fireside chat.

"Since 9 August many people have disappeared, and many are still missing. In the last days they have started finding the people dead. One member of the election commission who refused to participate in falsifying the results was today found in the river," Olga Karatch explained, joining the conversation from Vilnius, Lithuania where she had engaged with Lithuanian politicians about the protests.

"More and more cases of serious torture and sexual assault of men, women and even children in the prisons are being reported, but the strikes and protests still continue. Almost all factories have stopped, and ordinary people have stopped paying taxes and are leaving the state-controlled trade unions. They are also taking their savings out from the national banks not to support Lukashenka."

Astrid Thors raised that the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the OSCE had released a statement on the torture and sexual violence aimed at protesters, and that the international community is starting to act. She also raised the issue of documentation, stressing the important role of the Belarusian civil society in documenting the atrocities as few international observers are present on the ground. Olga Karatch outlined the actions she and her organisation would like to see from the international community:

EUROPE'S LAST DICTATOR WOBBLES: WHAT NEXT FOR BELARUS?



ASTRID THORS

LI Human Rights Committee
Chairperson



OLGA KARATCH

Director of Belarus civil
society organisation: Nash Dom



“We would like a very clear political message from Europe, in three parts:

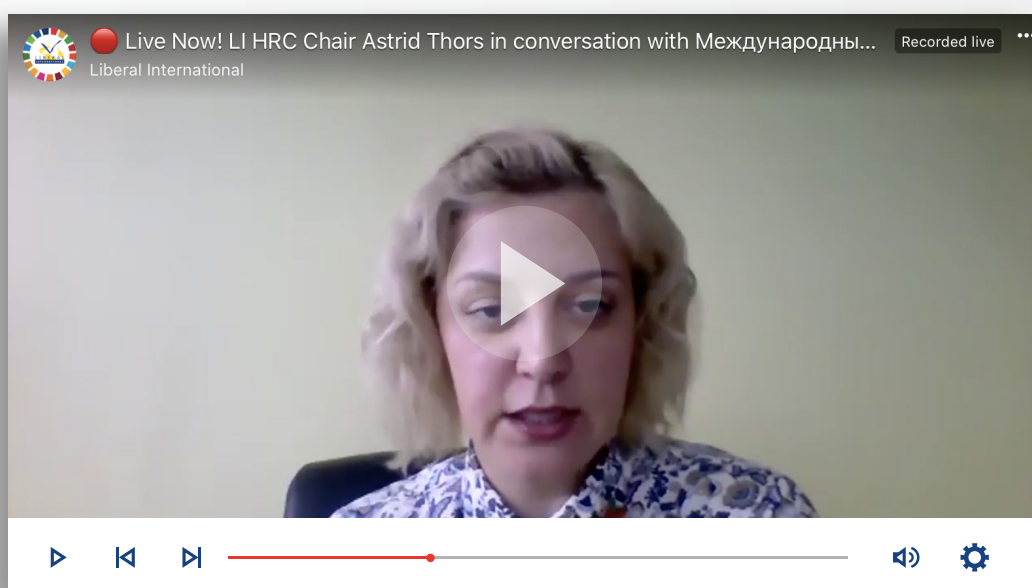
- Personal sanctions against the people who have been involved.
- All technical, financial, and intellectual support of Lukashenka’s regime and his state bodies must be withdrawn.
- Sanctions against the state factories using forced labour to produce everything from furniture, iron, sugar, and clothes, which provide Lukashenka with funds through sales to the West.”

Astrid Thors, reflecting on the development of the coming days and weeks, asked: “Do you think a peaceful transition is possible, and how will these protests go on if no changes happen?”

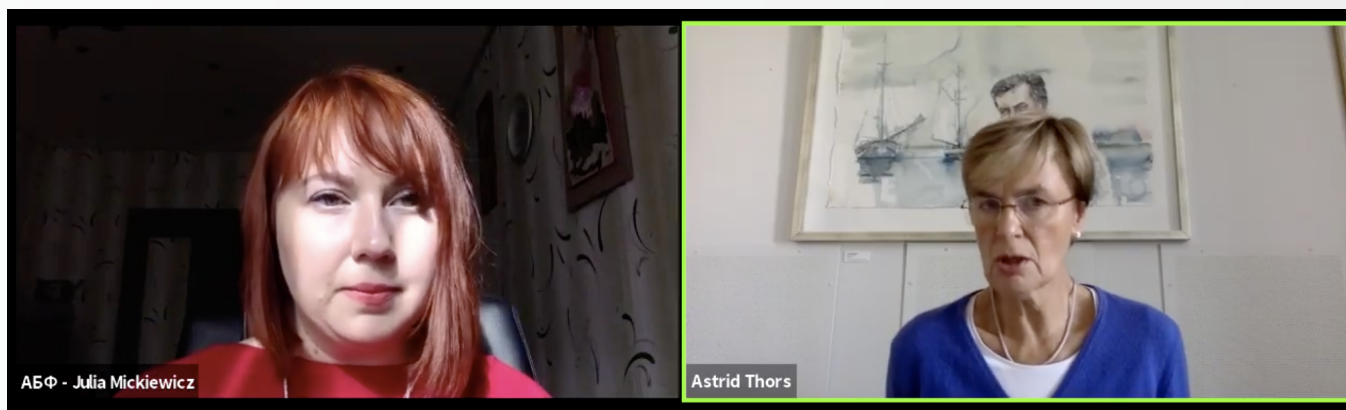
“This is a question of life and death for the protesters now. If there is no transition of power and Lukashenka wins, they will lose their lives. The Belarusian people are fighting for liberal values. Those who already have freedom sometimes don’t understand why they should keep fighting – but we are killed for wanting freedom, free markets, showing our sexual identity and many other things,” Olga Karatch stated, explaining why she thinks the protests will continue.

Urging people to stay updated using the hashtag #Belarus2020, she ended by praising the bravery and innovation of the Belarusian people.

“I’m quite optimistic, but we are going through horror right now. We are crying, but we continue.”



[Watch the session here](#)



“Lukashenko knows only one weapon: threats”, Belarus activist Julia Mickiewicz tells LI HRC Chair

Online (6 October 2020)

As protests calling for free and fair elections and the resignation of Alexander Lukashenko, the dictator who has held power in the country for 26 years, continue across Belarus, Liberal International brought together Julia Mickiewicz of the Coordination Council of the Belarusian opposition and LI Human Rights Committee Chair Astrid Thors to discuss the latest developments in the country. Julia Mickiewicz joined the conversation directly from Minsk, Belarus.

“We have a fighting spirit, and we are definitely going to continue,” Julia Mickiewicz said, explaining that in addition to the protests a wide range of strikes are taking place at factories and universities across Belarus. She explained that in many ways the situation is still the same as it has been for the past months, with daily protests everywhere in the country. Echoing the comments of Olga Karatch in Liberal International’s previous webinar, she urged western governments to stop funding Lukashenko’s regime.

“In the last 2-3 years there was a very fruitful dialogue between the EU and Belarus, and lots of EU aid money was spent on different Belarusian state institutions. One of our requests to the international community is about economic sanctions, to stop giving money to the regime,” she said. Commenting the fact that Lukashenko has not been included on the list of individuals sanctioned by the EU, Julia Mickiewicz said that “Lukashenko is the number one criminal in this country, and he should be on the sanctions list, but I understand why he was excluded.”

Conveying her shock at the images of innocent people being brutally detained that have consistently been emerging from Belarus, Astrid Thors asked how much the Coordination Council knows about how many have been detained and how they are treated.

In her response, Julia Mickiewicz stressed that Belarus is in a state of legal collapse. She explained that arrests are being carried out not only by uniformed police officers, but also by people in civilian clothing who refuse to disclose who they are or why you are being arrested or beaten. The protestors have also noticed the presence of infiltrators, some of them Russian, who try to incite violence during demonstrations to discredit the peaceful nature of the demonstrations.

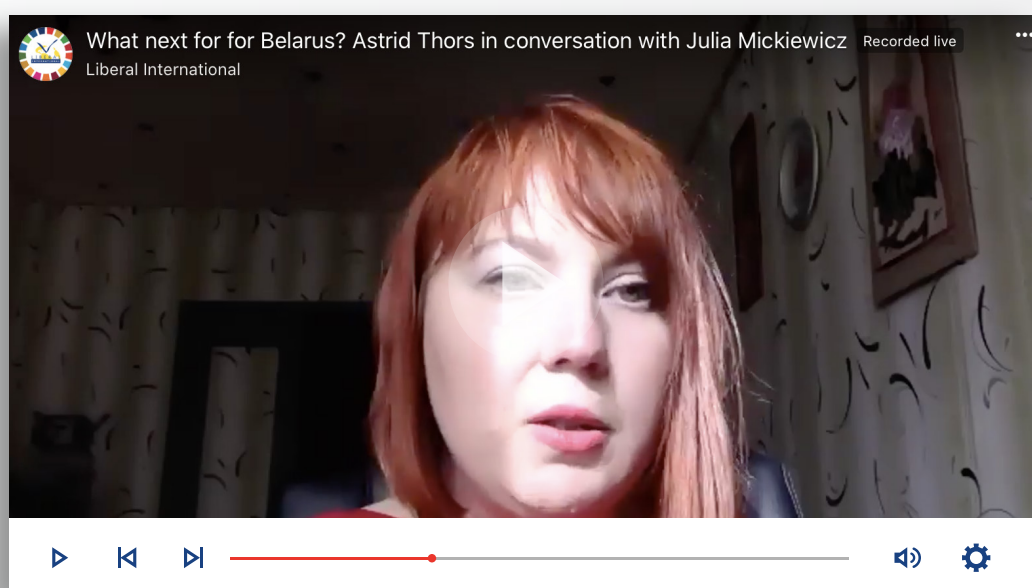
“Lukashenko lives in another reality; he doesn’t really know or understand what is happening in the country. He either refuses to recognise what is happening or does not understand it. He knows only one weapon: threatening the people,” she said.

During the protest’s certain members of the Coordination Council have been particularly prominent, and Astrid Thors asked about the latest developments for author and Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Alexievich and Maria Kalesnikava, who was detained on the border after destroying her passport to stop her own deportation. Julia Mickiewicz confirmed that Alexievich is safe in Germany, and that relatives and friends have been receiving communications from Kalesnikava who remains in custody.

“Maria’s letters have asked us to continue, continue, continue and never give up. She reminds us to believe and remember that we are incredible,” she said.

When asked what individuals and activists in other countries can do to help the protests in Belarus, Julia Mickiewicz thanked for all the support the movement has been receiving from supporters in other countries.

“Write about what is happening, talk to your friends, remember us. It shows the authorities that we are not alone, and that you believe us and stand with us,” she concluded.



[Watch the session here](#)

Nordic Liberals demand release of Belarus human rights leader after sham trial

Online (14 October 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

Belarusian opposition council member engages with high-level liberals in Stockholm

Stockholm (12 November 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

Cambodia



LI calls liberal family to sign petition calling for justice for victims of state-backed killings in Cambodia

Online (12 August 2020)

LI asked freedom fighters from both the EU and Cambodia what lies ahead for the country as dictator Hun Sen faces increased international pressure.

Human rights violations perpetrated under Cambodian dictator, Hun Sen, have led the European Union to suspension of the Everything but Arms (EBA) trading scheme between Cambodia and the EU as of today, 12 August 2020.

With repressions continuously increasing and the situation rapidly deteriorating in the past months, and the coronavirus crisis being used as an excuse to ramp up oppression against opposition representatives and other dissenters, Liberal International encourages the liberal family to sign this petition calling for justice for victims of state-backed killings in Cambodia.

[Sign the petition here](#)

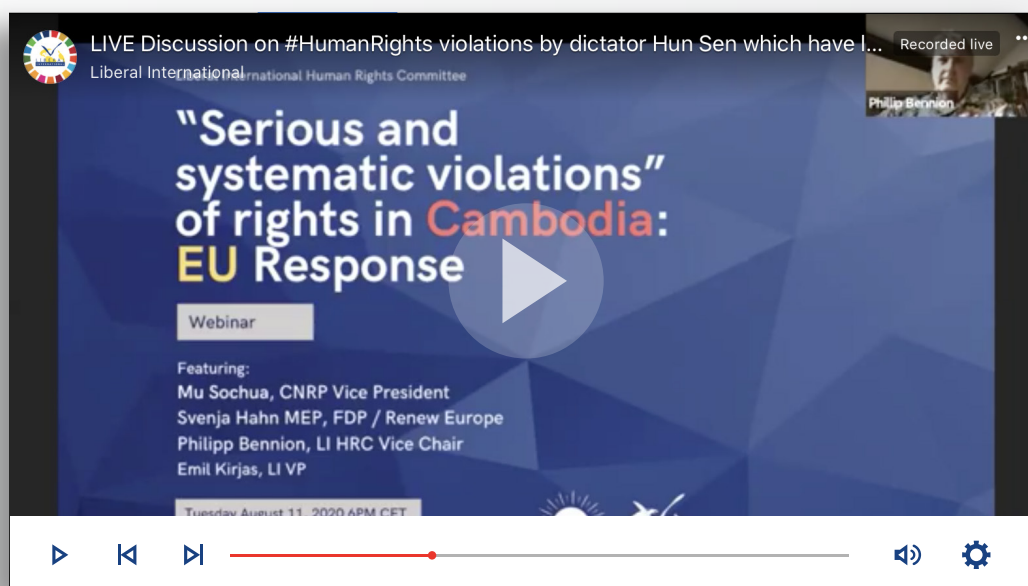
In an LI-hosted webinar yesterday, moderated by LI Nominal Vice President Emil Kirjas with prominent liberal representatives from both the EU and Cambodia, the panel discussed the actions that the EU is taking to respond to Hun Sen's repression of his country. Cambodia National Rescue Party Vice President Mu Sochua, MEP Svenja Hahn and LI Human Rights Committee Deputy Chair Phil Bennion stressed the importance of the EU to act decisively as the largest export market of Cambodia.

"In April, the National Assembly adopted an emergency law despite Cambodia having very low infection rates, giving large powers to particularly the Prime Minister to ban freedom of expression and assembly. Now, there is very heavy surveillance online, causing self-censorship. Several people have been arrested and forced to confess publicly to "spreading fake news," Mu Sochua explained, outlining the recent development in Cambodia.

Svenja Hahn, active in EU trade policy and a member of the EU delegation to South East Asia and ASEAN, raised the strong economic role of the EU and the attractiveness of access to the single market as a force for good.

"The only criteria to qualify for an EBA agreement is to respect fundamental human rights. In the case of Cambodia, this is simply not the case. We must draw a red line, and this red line has been passed. The reason it is a partial suspension and not a full suspension, is to not adversely affect the poor people of Cambodia, in particular women," she outlined.

Reflecting on the importance of using economic leverage to promote fundamental rights globally, Phil Bennion explained: "The EU has to have some form of ethical foreign policy, and if you do not use your economic levers to promote human rights then all is lost. Despots and autocrats make progress when liberals and others do not respond."



[Watch the webinar here](#)

CAMBODIA AT CROSSROADS: SANCTIONS AND ISOLATION OR RECONCILIATION AND PROSPERITY



Watch, comment, question
live on LI's Facebook page

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TUES
13
OCTOBER | 13:00 — 13:50
[UK Time]



Liberal International
www.liberal-international.org



Astrid Thors

LI Vice President & LI Human
Rights Committee Chair



Mu Sochua

Cambodia National Rescue Party
Vice President



Wong Chen MP

Member of Parliament, Asean
Parliamentarians for Human Rights



Emil Kirjas

LI nominal vice president &
Founder of Kirjas Global

Cambodia at crossroads: sanctions or prosperity

Online (13 October 2020)

On 13 October Liberal International (LI) kicked off our online virtual congress festival with an exciting webinar that was shared 200 times in the first hour. The webinar, organised in cooperation with ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) discussed Cambodian politics being at crossroads. The webinar focused on the restriction of free expression, freedom of assembly, human rights violations, and lack of democracy in Cambodia and raised awareness of the atrocities happening under the authoritarian President Hun Sen.

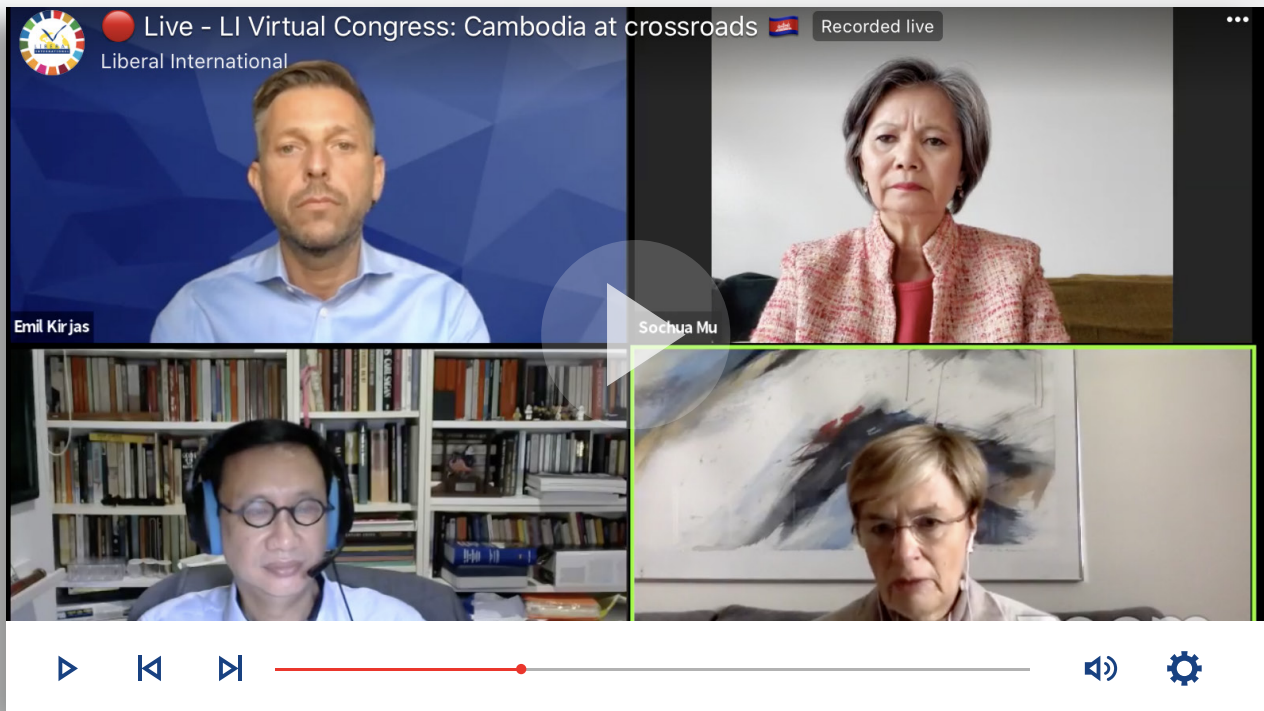
LI vice president and Chair of the LI Human Rights Committee, Astrid Thors together with APHR Board Member and Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) Vice President, Mu Sochua, APHR Member and Chair of International Relations and Trade Select Committee, Wong Chen MP and was moderated by Emil Kirjas, founder of Kirjas Global.

"In the liberal experience you will not have true development if you are not respecting the rule of law, human rights, and a true democracy." – Astrid Thors

Astrid Thors highlighted that Cambodia has signed the UN Declaration of Human Rights and ratified the Paris Peace Accords 1991, which obliges them to pursue what they signed up for. LI has actively put down resolutions in the UN condemning the situation in Cambodia and Ms Thors closed her opening speech with promising Cambodia that they can rely on LI's continued support in the fight for democracy.

"We must stop the brutality. We cannot go back to the old days, the dark days of genocide. And together, we fight to end impunity so there is justice to the victims of Cambodian state-backed killings. We are announcing this to the world, and we thank the 25 000 people who have signed this petition already. It does not stop there; we must work harder because Cambodia is at crossroads." – Mu Sochua.

Mu Sochua, has been personally threatened with her life and is currently living in exile alone, as the opposition is under attack from the Hun Sen's regime, who has been in power for 30 years, and the people want to see liberal values implemented in Cambodia. Mu Sochua revealed how the government jails activists, uses unjust methods to silence opponents and adversaries, while no independent investigations into Hun Sen related killings have been conducted.



[Watch the webinar here](#)

Last week, a young 15-year-old boy, was arrested and tortured for going to look for his father at the party's old headquarters, who also was arrested. Another CNRP Member, Chum Sarath, was also arrested in his own home and his daughter is concerned for his treatment in jail, as he suffers from health problems. The Cambodian police and militia have gotten away with perpetrating many injustices, but today everything is recorded because of social media and digitalisation. She urges everyone to sign the petition, which demands an end to impunity and justice to the victims of Cambodian state-backed killings.

The world is waking up to the human rights violations in Cambodia and all the countries who signed the Paris Peace Accords should follow the democratic path towards a prosperous future.

"In showing that by embracing the democratic path, being accountable, being fair, can result in economic growth. When that happens, we can conclusively re-engage Cambodia or any other Asian countries, where democracy is lacking – to show them, empirically behaving better, can make democracy work for the benefit of the country." – Wong Chen.

Wong Chen MP analyses the Cambodian politics and lack of democracy from a Malaysian perspective and lays down the fact that International law has been breached, by the suppression on the country's largest opposition party (CNRP) and independent media. Wong Chen suggests that the key option for Malaysia is to lead by example. Currently, there is a power struggle in Malaysia and his party, People's Justice Party (PKR), is fighting for a second chance at ruling the country. If so, they would have the opportunity to push greater democracy, greater transparency and accountability into practice, and hopefully, Malaysia would reap a democratic dividend. "When Malaysia, or any other Asian country, can show what democracy looks like, Cambodia will follow the same path."

The webinar was rounded up by thanking LI and ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights for the work they have done and CNRP for the long fight for liberal values, human rights and democracy in Cambodia.

Other Online events



WORLD REFUGEE DAY
Every Action Counts!

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy
Chair of the World Refugee Council
& Former foreign minister of Canada

Abir Al-Sahlani MEP
Liberal International vice president & Member of European Parliament

#LIHRC #WorldRefugeeDay

LI webinar explored challenges ahead for World Refugee Day

Online (23 June 2020)

[Read more and watch the webinar here](#)



Liberal International Webinar

**Pride & Prejudice:
A new decade for
LGBT+ rights**

#GlobalPride

REMARKS BY:
DR JULI MINOVES
Liberal International
President of Honour

MODERATED BY:
MIŁOSZ HODUN
International advisor
at Nowoczesna

HADI DAMIEN
Founder of Beirut Pride
& LGBT+ political activist

THOZAMA NJOBE
International LGBT+
human rights speaker & activist

JOYCE TENG
Deputy Executive Director
of Taiwan Equality Campaign

Liberals hold Global Pride Event

Online (10 July 2020)

[Read more and watch the webinar here](#)



LI HRC at the UN

Liberal International endorses World Refugee Council's call to do more to support refugees threatened by COVID-19

Written submission (10 June 2020)

Subject: Liberal International endorses World Refugee Council's call on United Nations Secretary General to do more to support refugees and internally displaced persons threatened by COVID-19.

Your Excellency, dear Mr Secretary General,

On behalf of the bureau of Liberal International, and in line with the resolution on refugee rights passed by our membership of 106 political parties from Andorra to Zanzibar at our 202nd executive committee meeting, we would like to reiterate and endorse the sentiment of the letter sent to you by the World Refugee Council on 17 April of this year.

Bringing together experts, academics, and politicians from across the political spectrum, the letter, signed by Canada's former foreign minister and a member of the Canadian Group of Liberal International, Lloyd Axworthy, has called on you to intensify crucial efforts to address the perilous state of the world's refugees and displaced persons during the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Refugees, forcibly displaced persons, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are particularly exposed to the ongoing health crisis due to lack of access to health care and poor sanitary conditions. Within this group, women and children are especially vulnerable. The uncontrolled spread of the virus in refugee camps and in conflict areas risks further exacerbating already difficult humanitarian situations.

We would like to congratulate you on the work you have already done on this issue; your call for an immediate ceasefire in all corners of the world, as well as the launch of the \$2 billion appeal for the UN's COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan will go a long way to protecting this vulnerable class of persons.

However, we share the World Refugee Council's concerns that, although admirable, these actions do not yet meet the threshold for adequate protection against COVID-19.

As Secretary-General and former High Commissioner for Refugees you are uniquely endowed with the moral authority and political experience to lead. We encourage you to use your convening power to engage like-minded states, private corporations and associations, philanthropists, international agencies like the Red Cross, civil society networks, health-based NGOs, regional multilateral organisations and representatives of refugees and IDPs themselves to join in the common effort to ensure the protection of the world's most vulnerable people in this time of crisis.

Liberal International stands ready to give our support to these efforts if so needed.

Sincerely,



Dr Hakima el Haité
President, Liberal International



Ms. Astrid Thors
Chair, Liberal International
Human Rights Committee

LI tells UN Human Rights Council China must release Tohti

Written submission (9 March 2020)

Leveraging its influence as an ECOSOC consultative member at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, Liberal International (LI) has called for the immediate release of LI Prize for Freedom laureate and Uighur scholar, Ilham Tohti.

On the back of Ilham Tohti's daughter, Jewher Ilham's, address to the largest annual gathering of human rights NGOs in Europe at the invitation of Liberal International last month, LI is again taking a leading role in shining a light on the case that is starting to attract global attention. Ms Ilham explained that no one has heard from her father since 2017.

In a written statement to the UN, LI called on the "Chinese authorities to release Ilham Tohti from prison and to drop all charges against him... to put a stop to the persecution of the Uighur minority in China".

In addition to calling for his release, Liberal International urges the international community to continue to raise the deteriorating human rights situation in Xinjiang and calls on China to immediately seize the persecution of the Uighur minority and to respect the human rights of all its citizens.

The Uighur scholar and activist Ilham Tohti is a human rights defender, economics professor and advocate for the rights of China's Uighur minority, who has for over two decades worked tirelessly to foster dialogue and understanding between Uighurs and Chinese. After a show trial in September 2014, Tohti is serving a life sentence in China. His family does not know where he is, or even whether he is still alive.



'The human rights of millions are now threatened', LI President tells UN high commissioner

Letter (23 July 2020)

[Read Letter here](#)

Liberal International calls on the UNHRC to act against Corona dictators

Written submission (28 July 2020)

[Read submission here](#)

LI communicates women's rights violations to the UN CSW

Written submission (31 July 2020)

[Read submission here](#)

Liberal International calls for female representation in Somali elections at UN HRC

Written submission (6 October 2020)

[Read submission here](#)





Statements

Empowering women into politics and condemning violence during COVID19

(6 April 2020)

All of us fully understand that certain emergency measures are needed to combat the pandemic, but all such measures must be necessary, proportionate, strictly time-limited, and subject to regular scrutiny, to solve the immediate health crisis. Such rules must be subject to a sunset clause.

Unfortunately, several governments across the globe are already using the pandemic to claim extraordinary powers that can undermine democratic institutions, including the free press. As we see, often these restrictions are said to try to prevent fake news; but in reality, what they call fake news is actually reporting in a way that would disclose mismanagement by the rulers.

One of the most tragic examples is Turkmenistan, where state media are not even allowed to use the word coronavirus. In Russia, amendments to legislation have been introduced to impose up to five years in prison for spreading false information about the COVID-19 pandemic. In Romania, a decree was introduced which grants the government special powers to curb freedom of information. In Azerbaijan, the owner of any internet information resource is under the obligation to prevent publication of false information online. And not to mention Hungary; I hope all of us have signed the petition by the ALDE Party to ask the European Commission for action.

Fortunately, Serbia and Armenia are two cases where outside pressure made the governments withdraw draconian legislation.

In fact, in these times it is more necessary than ever that journalists can continue their work to provide the public with reliable and fact-based information. Journalists are already under big pressure because of the economic recession, which naturally also hits the media.

And in fact – as always – transparency is the best way to combat the spread of the terrible pandemic.

Astrid Thors

Astrid Thors,
Chair of the LI Human Rights Committee

The LI Human Rights Committee call out “corona dictators” on Human Rights Day

(10 December 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

Temporary Measures should not become Permanent Mass Surveillance, LI Human Rights Committee states

(20 April 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

LI bureau condemns China’s demolition of ‘one-country-two systems’ firewall

(8 July 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

LI Calls For Solidarity With Black Lives Matters

(11 June 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

Human rights champions denounce widespread abuses amid Guinea and Tanzania elections

(30 October 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

Liberal democrats must not lose sight of risks to stability in Caucasus region as Nagorno-Karabakh peace deal signed

(24 November 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

Georgian Dream must find political compromise to stem deepening democratic crisis

(25 November 2020)

[Read statement here](#)



LI Prize for Freedom 2020 awarded to Prince Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein

On behalf of the global liberal family, we were proud to present the 2020 LI Prize for Freedom to our 37th laureate, Prince Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein.

Prince Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein is the Perry World House Professor of the Practice of Law and Human Rights at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a former Jordanian diplomat who also served as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights from 2014 to 2018. He played a central role in the establishment of the International Criminal Court and was elected the first president of the Assembly of State Parties of the International Criminal Court in September 2002. He also served as a political affairs officer in UNPROFOR in the former Yugoslavia from 1994 to 1996.

In 2020, His Royal Highness Prince Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein was awarded the Liberal International Prize for Freedom. Nominated by LI member party: Swedish People's Party of Finland (SFP) for his extensive resumé in championing human rights.



LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS BULLETIN

LI Human Rights Bulletin

During 2020, the LI HRC published three editions of the LI Human Rights Bulletin.

● 16th Edition

The 16th edition of the LI human rights bulletin focused on the launch of the LI Women in Political Parties Index (WIPP) handbook – the best practical best-practice guide to accompany LI's one-of-a-kind online inclusivity index, and on the topics, LI HRC raised at the LI co-hosted Geneva Summit on human rights, the largest gathering of NGOs in Europe, where LI had the biggest delegation.

This edition also featured the LI nomination of Senator Leila de Lima for the Nobel Peace Prize, the statements of not using COVID19 as an excuse for curtailing freedom of expression, and articles on the protection of women from abuse during the COVID19 crisis and the campaign on Dot-Org.

● 17th Edition

The 17th edition of the LI HRC Bulletin reflected the democracy protests in Belarus and the highly participated events 'Europe's last dictator wobbles: What next for Belarus?' with the Belarusian Nash Dom founder Olga Karatch, and the webinar on digital human rights 'Sorry you're on mute', stressing defending rights as key to dealing with pandemics.

This edition also promoted the petition to end state-backed killings in Cambodia and a call for the release of Senator Leila de Lima in the Philippines.

● 18th Edition

The 18th edition of the LI HRC Bulletin focused on the launch of the Gender Equality Report, reporting the findings of the Women in Political Parties Index to assist our membership in evaluating and improving their inclusivity as political parties.

This bulletin also reflected on the illiberal measures by Alpha Condé against LI Vice President Cellou Dalein Diallo in Guinea, the UN75 dialogue and how to develop it, and various HRC events such as the Policy Lab during the LI Virtual Congress.

Articles

Women must be protected from increased abuse during COVID-19 crisis

(2 April 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

Liberals must not lose sight of human rights in the face of COVID-19 crisis

(26 March 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

Journalists, dissidents, and activists remain wrongfully imprisoned despite the coronavirus

(9 April 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

Lock-downs risk grinding the fundamental machinery of democracy to a halt

(30 April 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

Police brutality during COVID19 is undermining the Rule of Law

(14 May 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

COVID-aid must not fuel corruption and undermine the rule of law

(27 May 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

The free press is essential to managing pandemics and societies

(4 June 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

“New normal” must not sacrifice democracy and human rights

(27 July 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

‘Vaccine nationalism’ is the latest threat to global cooperation

(25 August 2020)

[Read statement here](#)

Contact Tracing Apps: Key to defeating COVID19 or the entrenchment of mass surveillance?

(6 May 2020)

[Read statement here](#)



Thank you note to the Human Rights Programme Officer



Mikaela Hellman

Human Rights Programme Officer

Mikaela Hellman functioned as the Human Rights Programme Officer throughout the year of 2020, working hard to deliver results within every LI HRC priority area.

In her role as the human rights programme officer, Mikaela has worked to deliver the priorities of LI's human rights committee. She has been driving human rights-related campaigns and coordinating with committee members to achieve LI members' priorities within the field. She has been the driving force behind the human rights and digitalisation campaign with Radikale Venstre, the Women in Politics Index, the Gender Equality Report, and the statements to the UN. Ms Hellman led the Human Rights Committee with an ambition to deliver high-quality results.

For matters relating to the LI human rights committee, email via at: office@liberal-international.org





Viola Mickos

Viola Mickos joined the Liberal International Secretariat in London as the new staff intern for the first half of 2020. Viola took over from Ida-Maria Skytte, as part of the Liberal Praktik internship program run by Svenska Folkpartiet (SFP – LI full member).

As for her background, Viola is a member of the Swedish People's Party in Finland and ran successfully for the municipality council in her hometown Sipoo in 2017. She is currently a substitute member of the municipality council of Sipoo and has also had other responsibilities within the Swedish People's Party through their youth organization (Svensk Ungdom).

In 2018 Viola was elected for the representative council of The Student Union of the University of Helsinki where she has been working hard with questions concerning language, minorities, and equality at the university.

After her internship, Viola has worked as a Customer Service Specialist at the Social Insurance Institution of Finland.



Kasper Kannosto

Kasper Kannosto joined the Liberal International Secretariat, working virtually from Finland, as the new staff intern in September 2020. The Secretariat offered Kasper an internship extension of two months in December 2020, resulting in a 7-month internship.

As for his background, Kasper is a member of the Swedish People's Party in Finland (SFP). He has served as vice-chair for Swedish Youth (Svensk Ungdom) International Committee and is currently competing in the Helsinki City Council Elections. He has also been active in his student organisation, Statsvetenskapliga Klubben at Åbo Akademi University, where he created events that link students with employers (e.g., Company Visits, Recruitment Fairs), upheld the organisation's international network and organised excursions abroad to local parliaments, embassies and parties.

Before the internship, Kasper completed his Bachelor's Degree in Political Science and Economics at Åbo Akademi University with the thesis "What can EU do to protect the Rule of Law?". Prior to the internship, Kasper had been working at Handelsbanken in Finland. Kasper also volunteers for the Finnish Foundation for Supporting Ex-offenders.

Since Liberal International, Kasper has been working at Handelsbanken and will start as the Communications Intern for the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control in Helsinki, Finland.

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to our supporters...



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