

Information on Human Rights Defenders Summit, Paris, December 1998: Summary

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Danielle Mitterrand – President of France Libertés

Alwine de Vos van Steenwijk – Mouvement International ATD Quart Monde

THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS SUMMIT

**PALAIS DE CHAILLOT
8, 9, 10 and 11 December 1998**

What is a human rights defender?

Any person who is well-known or not, who acts alone, in a group or in an association to promote, implement and apply all the fundamental rights guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Throughout the world, men and women are struggling to preserve their dignity, exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression, feed their children, live in full respect of their community. In some countries, the actions of these human rights defenders working on the frontline makes them actual or potential victims of reprisals, threats, harassment, or arbitrary arrests, torture, murder, sudden “disappearances” or forced exile.

“As Human Rights Activists, we defend those throughout the world who are victims of ignorance and sometimes subjected to contempt by the authorities or attacks by governments and armed groups because they campaign for human rights. Through our daily fight, we are finding proof that utopia can become a reality. Anything which is impossible today, we will make possible tomorrow through the strength of our conviction, our determination and our actions.”

Human Rights without borders

Do people really understand that, simply for defending or asking for respect for basic human rights, these defenders are arrested, tortured, or sentenced to long prison terms or, in more extreme situations, simply murdered by the authorities or by armed groups.

From east to west, the risks are the same, the fears are equally deep-rooted. The struggle for the freedom to act, to speak, to bear a name is the struggle of thousands of human rights defenders, 500 of whom will take part in the Summit in Paris.

From north to south, the same commitment to dignity and to a fair and united struggle drives some to oppose the arbitrary and others to give their unconditional support for their perseverance.

We need to defend and protect the human rights defenders because, despite the efforts of the United Nations and governments over the course of the last 50 years, the protection and support for such defenders is still weak.

Amnesty International, the Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH), France Libertés and the Mouvement International ATD Quart Monde

have decided to pool their resources and expertise to organise

“The Human Rights Defenders Summit”

at the Palais Chaillot in Paris.

THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS SUMMIT

Four human rights organizations and 500 human rights defenders

Amnesty International (AI): an independent and independently financed human rights organization, and is a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. The organization has 1,000,000 members in over 100 countries. Its work has been based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for nearly 40 years, and includes working for the release of people held because of their beliefs or because of their ethnic origin, sex, colour, language, or religion, provided they have not used or advocated. AI demands a fair trial for all political prisoners and opposes torture and the death penalty in all cases, and works to end “disappearances”, hostage-taking and extrajudicial execution by governments or armed opposition groups.

“The Universal Declaration of Human Rights describes the rights which we all share and the equality we have to enjoy them. Sometimes, I think that it is the world’s best kept secret” - Pierre Sané – Secretary General of Amnesty International

Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l’Homme (FIDH): FIDH encourages the implementation of all the rights included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and includes 105 national organisations in 86 countries for whom it acts both as a base of expertise and solidarity and as the interface with international organization. Formed in 1992, it is a non-governmental, government recognised and non-profit making organisation, working through investigation and legal observation missions to prevent violations, to support civil society through training programs and legal assistance programmes, to report and denounce through the media, publications and through the Observatoire pour la Protection des Défenseurs des Droits de l’Homme (with the World Organisation against Torture) as well as to mobilise the international community through its work with intergovernmental organisations.

“Preserving the universality of human rights, with the promotion and respect for these rights, is achieved through the freedom of action of the human rights defenders who offer the first and best guarantee of these.” Patrick Baudouin – President of FIDH.

France Libertés - Fondation Danielle Mitterrand: formed in 1986 this government-recognised organisation has consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council and is made up of an extensive network of national committees and individual or collective partners throughout the world. France Libertés' humanist orientation is focussed on a strong commitment to four main points: denouncing the violation of fundamental liberties and rights, supporting local initiatives for fundamental rights, the right to social justice, education, health, housing, and land. France Libertés gives voices to those who have no voice, and supports those who challenge the arbitrary, torture, destitution, exclusion and exile.

“Defending the defenders of human rights means preserving humanity’s future, our future” – Danielle Mitterrand – President of France Libertés

Mouvement International ATD Quart Monde Founded in 1957 by Joseph Wresinski, with families from a shantytown in the Paris area, ATD brings together, with the very poor as its guides, those who challenge the violation of human rights which destitution constitutes. ATD acts as a spokesperson for families from the Fourth World which it considers as the leading defenders of human rights. It affirms that human rights are indivisible and that without enjoying all these rights – economic, social, cultural, civil and political -- no person or family can live in dignity, assume its responsibilities and take part the future of humanity.

“Humanity is advancing accompanied by a point of reference which it has given itself – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Universal wisdom carried for thousands of years by millions of victims without voice, was suddenly proclaimed in a restrictive manner”. Alwine de Vos van Steenwijk – Mouvement International ATD Quart Monde

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

The four organisations which initiated the Summit were committed to involving human rights defenders working on the ground as full members of the Steering Committee for the Summit, as regional representatives. The seven human rights defender who have been contacted were all very interested in the project but are not all yet able to confirm that they will be taking part, for reasons of availability and security. We can at this time confirm that the following people have agreed to take part:

Fernando Gomez is a lawyer in Guinea Bissau. The father of two, he president of the Guinea Bissau League of Human Rights, president of the Forum of Non-governmental Organisations of Human and Children's rights in Portuguese-speaking Countries, and vice-president of the InterAfrican Union of Human Rights. In 1993, he was imprisoned for several hours, in 1994 his home was forcibly entered by the police and in 1995 he was subjected to death threats.

Salima Ghezali has been the director of the weekly publication, La Nation in Algeria since 1994, which has been banned since it published a special edition on the country's human rights violations. Earlier, the French teacher and trade unionist was the founding president of the Association for Women's Emancipation, then the founding director of the feminist bi-monthly Nyssa and finally the founding vice president of the Association of European and North African Women. She has just won the Sakharov Human Rights Prize.

Jaribu Hill is a lawyer in the United States specialising in civil rights. In 1996 she organised the first human rights conference in the southern states of the USA held in Mississippi, a conference which brought together over 200 campaigners from a coalition of human, civil and employment rights associations, who had come to study the victims of oppression in the south and throughout the country. She recently started to work on the problem of death row prisoners who are mentally retarded or who were minors when the crimes were committed.

Yavuz Onen is an architect in Turkey where his life is divided between his profession and human rights. He has actively campaigned at the Association of Human Rights since 1986 from which the executive committee formed the Human Rights Foundation in 1989 and of which he has been president since 1990. He was imprisoned for 27 months in 1972. Since then, the father of three has worked at his architectural practice with his wife, also an architect. He is also president of the Turkish Union of Engineers and Architects.

Dimitrina Petrova runs the European Centre for Romany Rights, a non-profit, international human rights organisation based in Hungary. She was formerly president of the Human Rights Project in Bulgaria which also worked on the situation of the Romanies. She is a law and philosophy professor and has also run courses on "human rights and inter-ethnic relations in eastern Europe" and has been a member of the Bulgarian parliament. She has been the official representative for various human rights authorities.

Aims: Defending the Defenders

50 years since the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the Palais de Chaillot, Amnesty International, FIDH, France Libertés and the Mouvement International ATD Quart Monde believe that the commemoration of the 50th anniversary is not just a matter for governments but also for every citizen of the world.

To demonstrate that the daily defence of human rights is based on the activities of citizens, we intend to convene in Paris 500 human rights defenders from around 100 countries, and to generate global support and awareness.

An international event

Because the situation for human rights defenders has never been as grave as it is today, the Human Rights Defenders Summit is being convened to create an opportunity for public debate and concrete commitments which can transcend cultural barriers and social divisions. The specific aims of the summit are:

*To make people understand that the daily work of thousands of activists is necessary to save the victims from repression by those in power.

*To draw attention to the isolation of human rights defenders, their precarious situation and the danger they face every day;

*To analyse and expose the reality of the repression of human rights defenders as an attack against universality, indivisibility and legitimacy of the commitment to human rights.

*To improve the use of the legal instruments and international mechanisms by human rights defenders

*To make people understand of the urgent need to mobilise to offer human rights defenders assistance and to organise a network of international support and protection.

At the Summit -- 50 years after governments proclaimed the UDHR -- the human rights defenders who have gathered will launch "The Paris Declaration".

This will be an appeal which will be signed by human rights defenders and sent on 10 December 1998 to the UN members who will be gathering for an official commemoration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As well, an international plan of action will be developed which will reflect the global consensus of human rights activists.

The programme

Five topics will be given priority for discussion at the Summit. They include the the work of human rights defenders in relation to:

- impunity
- armed conflict
- extreme poverty
- women's rights
- the role and responsibility of the business world

Workshops, round tables and testimonies will be open to the international media.

(Check the following graf with Sophie)

On 10 December a joint event will bring together international personalities and the 500 human rights defenders. There is a possibility that the Summit participants address UN members from the Palais Chaillot with a live link-up to New York and a further possibility that the members of the interministerial 50th anniversary celebration committee, presided over by Robert Badinter, will also be present.

Along with the formal agenda, there will also be other cultural activities, including:

*An exhibition space, and a place to meet the human rights defenders

*A giant sculpture : the World's Largest Book will be exhibited and it is likely that it will be presented to Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General. The book's long journey began on 10 December 1997 and will be made up of some 50,000 books from around the world. The books include signatures from millions of people -- well known individuals and ordinary citizens -- promising to commit "to doing everything in their power to ensure that the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights become a reality".

*Publication of the report produced by the Observatoire des Defenseurs des Droits de l'Homme by the Federation Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH) and the World Organisation against Torture. This gives an account of the legal and material aid given and of the introduction of an international alert system.

It is hoped that there will also be a world music concert organised in the evening of 10 December at Bercy by the interministerial mission for the defence of human rights and Summit.

Background

The Human Rights Defenders Summit will draw on series of agreements from world conferences where representatives from organizations throughout the world have gathered: the environment in Rio in 1992, human rights in Vienna in 1993, women's rights in Beijing in 1995, social summit in Copenhagen in 1996, children's rights in Stockholm in 1996 and the permanent international criminal court in Rome in 1998.

The Summit will serve as a focal point for meetings and international campaigns conducted throughout 1998.

*The regional meetings of human rights defenders organised by Amnesty International over the five continents over the past two years and still to come before the end of the year:

Colombia in 1996

Tanzania in 1997

Zimbabwe in March 1998

Ivory Coast in July 1998

Egypt in August 1998

South Africa in October 1998

Turkey in November 1998

*The Forum 98 on the protection of human rights defenders in Geneva organised by the World Organisation against Torture and the International Human Rights Service.

*The celebration on 17 October of the "World day for the refusal of destitution" on the subject of "Poverty, human rights and development" as part of the world decade for the elimination of poverty (1997-2006)

*The adoption of a text on 4 March 1998 by the UN on the activities of human rights defenders intensifies the ability of defenders to tackle persecution throughout the world.

PROFILES OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

AFRICA

Fatimata M'Baye: a 40-year-old lawyer who has been a human rights campaigner in Mauritania for many years. She was arrested on 5 February 1998 for belonging to an unauthorised association. This was the argument used by the Mauritanian government to deal a blow to human rights campaigners who had just denounced on French television the slavery which still exists in the country. On 24 March 1998, their sentence was confirmed on appeal: 13 months imprisonment. But the international support campaign launched since their arrest intensified and the Mauritanian President finally gave in to the pressure of public opinion and pardoned the three prisoners. However the sentences remain and human rights organisations are still forbidden, making the campaigners' work as difficult as ever.

Blanche Toie, president of the Burkina Faso Nurses' Association, needs daily action to continue her fight against AIDS in Burkina Faso. She is attempting to convince the inhabitants of the villages she visits of the necessity to use condoms in a country where AIDS has been rising by almost 20% a year. She needs to overcome social and cultural traditions, such as polygamy, which make women the first victims of this epidemic "There is anger, there is resignation," Blanche Toie explains. Many times her fight to promote health coincides with the fight for female emancipation so that fighting for health rights is fighting for human rights.

AMERICAS

Elsa Constanza Alvarado and Mario Calderon are both university lecturers in Columbia who have been working for many years with the Jesuit Research and Popular Education Centre, one of the oldest and most respected human rights organisations in the country. Its actions are mainly focussed on social and economic questions, particularly environmental protection, the promotion and defence of human rights. On 19 May 1997, at dawn, five men armed with sub-machine guns burst into the home of Elsa Alvarado and Mario Calderon, killing the couple and Elsa's father and seriously wounding her mother. The police found the couple's baby sitting beside the bullet-ridden bodies. The assassins said they belonged to the criminal investigation department but were probably members of paramilitary groups.

Raimunda Gomez Da Silva is a 58-year-old mother of six, a peasant and trade unionist in Brazil. More precisely she is what is called a "peasant without land". She has been fighting since the 1980s for the rights of *passeiros*, untitled occupants of formerly vacant land which then became the subject of the covetousness of large landowners. She took part in forming the main rural workers' trade unions and is one of the founders of the Federation of Agricultural Workers. She now runs the Rural Women Workers Co-ordination, is one of the representatives of Brazilian Women's Movement and is part of MST, the Movement without Land.

ASIA

Zafaryab Ahmed is imprisoned in Pakistan for opposing forced child labour. He is a journalist, a human rights campaigner and refuses a practice which he likens to slavery, that of the forced labour of young children. He was arrested in June 1995 after writing an article about the murder of a 12-year-old boy, Iqbal Masih, who has become the standard bearer of this fight, he himself having suffered forced labour which he decided to denounce after freeing himself. In order to silence Zafaryab Ahmed, the Pakistani authorities also accused him of exploiting the death of Iqbal. Freed on bail, he is again charged with attacking the state's authority and this could be a pretext for placing him in illegal detention.

Dita Indah SARI aged 24, runs the Workers' Battle Centre, a non-governmental organisation, campaigning for the improvement of working conditions and salaries in Indonesia. She was arrested on 8 July 1996 when she took part in a demonstration in favour of increasing the minimum national wage. This totally peaceful demonstration was however brutally broken up by a large military and police deployment. Along with several other people, Dita Sari was beaten and arrested. She was then placed in police custody and charged under the very strict Anti-Subversion Law. Dita Indah Sari has lived in fear for almost a year of being sentenced to death. She was finally sentenced to eight years in prison, which was reduced to five years in July 1997.

EUROPE

Aline Coté (pseudonym) and her family have lived in a very old caravan which had been used as toilet, leaked and had been burned in one place. Obligated to use candles for lighting, the whole family's eyesight has deteriorated. The children suffer from rheumatism as a result of living in the cold and damp. In the snowy weather, Aline Coté occupied an empty flat. Two vanloads of police chased her out. Now rehoused, she writes: "I think of those who are obliged to live like animals. We need to act quickly because without this we will be marked for life, in body, spirit and at heart". Wanting to have the rights provided for in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as "the right to a sufficient standard of living to guarantee her health, well-being and that of her family, particularly for food, clothing and housing," is also a defence of human rights.

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Cheik ‘Abd al-Amir Mansur al-Jamri is a very well-known religious figure and writer in Bahrain. He is an elected member of the dissolved National Assembly as well as one of the 14 representatives of the various religious tendencies which in 1994 launched a petition in favour of re-establishing the National Assembly. The government reacted by a firm repression of the opposition and the arrest of thousands of people, detained without charges or sentences. In April 1995, the security forces arrested Cheik al-Jamri as well as 18 members of his family. He was held in secret until his release in September 1995. In January 1996, he was arrested again along with hundred of other Bahrainis. The majority of them were detained in secret and risk being tortured.

Mansur Kikhiya, if he is still alive, will be around sixty-years-old. The former Minister for Foreign Affairs represented Libya at the UN until 1980 when he resigned to protest against the execution of political opponents by the Libyan authorities. He then lived in exile in France and was very active in the opposition. He “disappeared” on 10 December 1993 (international human rights day) in Cairo when he was taking part in a conference of the Arab Human Rights Organisation, of which he was one of the founder members. He is thought to have been taken away by Libyan government agents and returned to his country. The enquiry into the disappearance opened by the Egyptian authorities does not appear to have been conducted in an impartial and exhaustive manner. Mansur Kikhiya suffers from diabetes and regularly needs insulin injections.

The organisation team

The Summit Conference Association wanted to draw upon specific skills to assume the organisational tasks in order to guarantee that the international meeting runs flawlessly.

Similarly, the team has already obtained very strong support from several partners:

- the artist **Raymond Moretti** has offered us his talent to create the logo for the Summit Conference
- **the Théâtre National de Chaillot**, its actors, technicians and administrative staff have agreed to omit a week's programme for this event and other partners are currently making their final decisions.

General commissioner – organisation and scenography-:

L'Escale – Francis Morane, Pascale de Sarnez

who has joined the collaboration of

Gad Weil – WM – for the administration of the production

and of Michel Daviaud – Laurus International – for the reception logistics

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