



# ACTIVITY REPORT 2015-2016

THE SWEDISH FOUNDATION  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

# ABOUT THE SWEDISH FOUNDATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The Swedish Foundation for Human Rights (SFHR) is a non-profit foundation founded in 1991, with the objective to promote human rights through human rights education, advocacy, and international development cooperation. In order to achieve this, the SFHR focuses on two specific areas of human rights: promoting economic, social and cultural rights and the right to redress. Within these two focus areas the SFHR has gained extensive expertise of issues related to civil society and transitional justice, women's rights and regional human rights' systems. Since 2008, the SFHR is part of the Swedish popular education network Sensus, while maintaining its status as an independent foundation with its own board.

The main target group for the work in Sweden is decision makers in governmental agencies, Parliament, civil society organisations and media. Internationally the target group is the partner human rights organisations and their particular target groups, as well as key persons and decision makers at the global and regional human rights mechanisms.

Internationally the SFHR specifically focuses on strengthening civil society and its potential to promote human rights. This is primarily done through financial and technical support to local initiatives which lead to a tangible advancement of human rights and simultaneously contribute to a positive development of the competence of local civil society. The SFHR has a broad contact network of human rights organisations in Africa, Latin America and Asia that work before the regional human rights mechanisms.

## Our thematic working areas

We target two specific main areas of human rights; economic, social and cultural rights (ESC-rights) and the right to redress. Within these two areas we have gained extensive expertise of issues related to civil society and transitional justice, women's rights and regional human rights' systems.

# THE TEAM OF SFHR

**JENNY JANSSON PEARCE** is Secretary General since 2011. She holds an MA in political science from Stockholm University and has studied Human Rights at Uppsala University. Previous professional experience include management positions at Swedish CSO:s working with social development and international leadership programs. Jenny has also worked with democracy and human rights at the Ministry of Justice.

**ULRIKA STRAND** is Head of the International Programme. She holds an MA in International Relations from University of Kent at Canterbury's London Centre and a BA in Politics and Hispanic Studies from London University. Previous professional experiences include the UNHCR in Colombia and Panos Institute in the UK.

**YLVA L. HARTMANN** is Program Manager and Expert of International Law. She holds an LL.M. in Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law from University Paris 2 Panthéon-Assas. Previous professional experiences include the International Committee of the Red Cross in Colombia, UNESCO in Paris and various authorities, NGOs and Universities in Sweden.

**CLAUDIA POLO** is the coordinator for the Swedish Platform for Colombia and Project Manager for Colombia's program. She holds a Master in Public Administration from the School of Public Administration in Colombia (ESAP) and has studied in Governance and Development from Spain's National Institute of Public Administration (INAP) as well as Public administration training for foreign graduates from the University of Stockholm. Previous professional experiences include CSO:s working with local and social development in Colombia as being an analyst and project manager in Sweden.

## Board members

Peter Weiderud (Chairperson)

Inger Harlevi

Peter K. Sjögren

Marika Fahlén

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Eduardo Villanueva-Contreras

# THE SECRETARY GENERAL'S COMMENTS

The work of putting together the annual report gives an opportunity to summarise and reflect on the year gone past. Not only on the work done by the SFHR and our partner organisations but also on events and developments in the world. The past year has seen some very negative developments on the human rights area internationally as well as in Sweden. Conflicts have continued to force people to flee their countries while their possibilities to seek and get asylum in other countries often has been restricted. This has been the case also in Sweden where the government introduced temporary laws aimed at reducing the number of refugees. Laws that worsen the situation for people seeking safety and that run the risk of becoming permanent laws. We have also seen that the rise of nationalist and racist parties continues, in Sweden as in many other countries. The space for civil society to carry out its important work, not least to safeguard human rights, have in many countries continued to become more and more narrow.

Jan Eliasson, former Deputy Secretary-General at the UN often said:

'There is no peace without development, and there is no development without peace, and none of the above without respect for human rights.'

This summarises why working for human rights continues to be so important. And human rights organisations and human rights defenders all over the world continue to work tirelessly to protect and claim these rights. This is why after more than 25 years of work the SFHR continues to support human rights organisations across the world. It is why we are convinced that there is a continued need to monitor and raise awareness about the human right situation in Sweden.

During 2016 we have continued to develop our work in line with the new strategy that was developed in 2015. The strategy emphasises our focus on two thematic areas: economic, social and cultural rights and the right to redress. These focus areas continue to guide our work and has received increased focus in several of our programs and activities. Something that you can read more about in the following pages where we give you some highlights of the work carried out during the past year.

# THEMATIC AREAS

## Economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights

The failure to promote ESC rights have dire consequences. In Sweden it might mean that the Swedish Roma population are denied their right to health or that households on lower incomes such as single mothers are unable to provide for their children. Globally there is a growing trend of attacks against human rights defenders working on ESC rights. Research shows that women are proportionally more affected by a lack of ESC rights than by a lack of political rights - which in turn have consequences for their families' abilities to support themselves and prosper. Until these different sets of rights have equal standing the SFHR will therefore prioritise increasing the knowledge about the justiciability of ESC rights, making their content more known and contributing to their realisation.

Many years of advocacy by the SFHR and other CSOs for an independent national human rights institution (NHRI) in Sweden bore fruit in 2015 when the government announced its intention to establish a Swedish NHRI. This could be an important mechanism for the realisation of ESC rights and help visibilise them. Globally the increasing number of attacks on human rights defenders working to promote ESC rights is of great concern. During the year the SFHR increased efforts to raise this with decision makers and to support human rights defenders working in this field, for example through the project with the African Arterial Network.

During 2016 Sweden was reviewed by the UN committee for ESC rights. The SFHR coordinated the civil society's parallel report and the committee reinforced several of the issues brought up in the report in their recommendations to Sweden. The SFHR will monitor and continue to advocate for the implementation of these recommendations

## Redress for human rights violations - transitional justice

Within the field of redress, we want to provide recognition of the rights of victims, promote victims as stakeholders, ensure the access to truth and reparation and promote guarantees of non-recurrence. International experience has shown that redress is essential for fostering human rights and peace in a country. Transitional justice has therefore long been on our agenda. The concept encompasses an approach to achieving justice in times of transition from conflict and/or state repression. Measures include criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparations and various kinds of institutional reforms.

For us, transitional justice is the perfect toolbox to come to terms with gross human rights violations, both in Sweden and internationally. Nationally, our work has helped to put transitional justice on the agenda of Swedish international cooperation. Although Sweden is not a country in transition, tools as truth seeking, symbolic/collective reparations and institutional reform can be useful also in Sweden to ensure justice for human rights violations. SFHR therefore took the initiative to set up the Swedish Network for Transitional Justice comprising 14 civil society organisations and five academic researchers.

A central part of our mission within the field has been to increase knowledge and awareness on different perspectives of transitional justice. This has for example been done by highlighting the situation of vulnerable groups and the use of transitional justice as a possible tool for redress. To this effect we also launched two reports and one booklet. The first was a monitoring report of the human rights violations committed against the Roma population in Sweden, containing recommendations on how to bring justice for these violations. The second report focused on how to make sure that women's needs and rights are taken into account during conflict and post conflict settings. The most recent report is a booklet focusing on alternative truth seeking processes carried out by civil society actors which draws experiences from cases in Burma/Myanmar, Colombia and Sweden.

## The truth from below – alternative truth seeking, experiences from Sweden, Colombia and Burma

In the beginning of 2017, SFHR launched a booklet about alternative truth seeking processes with examples from three different countries – Sweden, Colombia and Burma/Myanmar. Each case has its own specific characteristics and illustrates both strengths and challenges that can come with a truth seeking project carried out by civil society organisations. The different cases show that alternative truth seeking is particularly good at placing the victims and affected communities at the heart of the process, which is indispensable if one wants to solve conflicts, obtain redress and promote a sustainable peace. However, it also shows that it is just one of several necessary components in the search for redress for injustice. To have a sustainable effect, alternative truth seeking has to be complemented by trials, reparation programs, memorialisation project and institutional reforms to avoid recurrence of violations.

# ACHIEVEMENTS

## UN review of Sweden's fulfillment of its ESC obligations

In order to strengthen individuals' access to justice and to prevent future human rights violations continuous monitoring of different duty bearers is needed. One way of carrying out this monitoring and systematically follow up how states apply recommendations and respond to critique is the review by the different treaty committees in the UN. In June 2016 Sweden was reviewed by the Committee for Economic Social and Cultural (ESC) Rights. The SFHR coordinated the Swedish civil society's parallel report, highlighting areas where further efforts are needed in order to comply with the obligations in the ESC Convention. 16 Swedish organisations co-signed the report. The SFHR attended the session where Sweden was reviewed to present the report and brief the Committee members. Many of the points raised in the parallel report were echoed in the recommendations from the Committee.

One of the recommendations was, yet again, that Sweden ratifies the optional protocol to the ESC-convention giving individuals the possibility to seek redress for violations to the convention. The committee also voiced its concern for the new laws introduced with the purpose of decreasing the number of refugees and the laws restricting the right to family reunification. Sweden was also reminded of the obligations that follow from the convention in the area of access to economic and social rights such as social security, housing and health care for vulnerable EU citizens, especially for Roma. During the coming year focus will be on following up how the Swedish state implements the recommendations.

### The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights

The committee consists of 18 independent experts that monitor the implementation and adherence to the convention on economic, social and cultural rights. The convention is one of the United Nations nine core conventions on human rights. The committee bases its review on reports from the government, from civil society organisations as well as other reports.

## The Swedish Platform for Colombia

In 2015, SFHR continued to be the principal for Colombiagruppen - The Swedish Platform for Colombia (CG) - a network including eleven Swedish organisations that raise awareness of the human rights situation in Colombia. For example, CG has, through the project "Colombia: securing peace in the country ravaged by the world's longest conflict" contributed to increase knowledge among the Swedish public for a better understanding of the major challenges related to conflict dynamics in Colombia, regardless of the development of the peace talks as well as examples of good practices and constructive solutions available.

In 2016, CG continued its work to highlight the importance of supporting Colombian civil society organisations, working to achieve the changes that the country needs. The Colombian women's role in the peace negotiation and peace-building, human security and transitional justice have been in focus, especially due to the Colombian peace-agreement process during 2016 and the issues of its future implementation.

Even though a peace-agreement has now been signed, human rights defenders continue to be killed. Estimated by the United Nations' high commissioner on human rights, 127 persons were killed during 2016. Approximately 59 of them because of their fight for their rights and redress for human rights violations. This is just one reason why CG will continue spreading information about the human rights situation in the country and draw attention to the issues prioritised on the basis of the civil society's perspectives in Colombia, regarding conditions for a sustainable peace.

## Human rights in Colombia - CCAJAR

Since 2016, the SFHR work together with the Jose Alvear Restrepo Lawyers Collective Corporation (CCAJAR) in Colombia, to seek effective implementation of comprehensive reparation measures for victims of socio-political violations in the north of Colombia. The project supports two chapters of the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes, MOVICE, in Bolivar and Sucre, and the communities of the Wiwa indigenous communities of La Laguna and Caracoli in Guajira. CCAJAR has over 36 years of experience in legal representation of victims of serious human rights violations and crimes against humanity in domestic and international tribunals.

The project's objective is to ensure the victims' rights to truth, justice and reparation, and guarantee that crimes will not be repeated. Litigation activities are

complemented by domestic and international advocacy work, as well as training and organizational strengthening activities with victims so that they can become empowered to defend and enforce their own rights.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights granted the Wiwa people, an indigenous community living in the northern part of Colombia, precautionary measures in 2005. This was in response to serious and repeated human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law committed against its members. Although a series of measures designed to provide attention for victims and restore their rights was instituted in Colombia, these have several legal loop holes. A number of obstacles continue to prevent their implementation.

CCAJAR has had positive experiences working in coalition with victims as well as their leaders and organizations, to defend human rights on regional and national levels. Working with CCAJAR, SFHR has learned that building relationships in the international community and resulting support networks, can help create effective mechanisms to apply pressure on the Colombian government to uphold their human rights obligations. But it also helps protect those human rights defenders involved in the project as they are at high risk of being harassed or attacked for doing this work.

So far, SFHR's work has resulted in higher levels of knowledge and understanding regarding the importance of ensuring victims' rights to integral reparation as a key element in building a stable and lasting peace among regional and national judicial authorities and society as a whole. However, much more remains to be done regarding the victims' rights to comprehensive reparation in Colombia. Therefore, SFHR's cooperation with CCAJAR will carry on focusing on the promotion of the situation of those most affected by the conflict. In light of the recently signed peace agreement in Colombia, inevitably, SFHR must also pay great attention to the implementation of the peace agreement and monitor the situation of human rights defenders in the country.

## Artwatch

Arterial Network is a pan-African civil society network comprising artists, activists, organisations and institutions engaged in the African creative and cultural sectors. Operating across 90% of Africa, Arterial Network is actively engaged in strengthening the creative sectors and utilising arts and culture to contribute towards development, democracy, human rights and the eradication of poverty on the continent.



Photo: Artwatch, Human rights training

In 2012 Arterial Network undertook a mapping of the right to creative expression and freedom of expression which included 70% of the countries in Africa. The study showed that cultural practitioners to a large extent were exposed to harassments including arrests, boycotts, social exclusion, physical attacks, kidnappings and murder. The main actors responsible for these actions were governments, religious groups, intelligence services and the police. As a result of this mapping Arterial Network started working on monitoring and alerting on violations of Artistic Rights as part of a project named Artwatch. In the process of developing the project a need was identified to work more with capacity building and to identify a suitable partner organisation that had expertise in this area. Through the Norwegian foundation Mimeta contact was made with the SFHR whose experience in capacity building, undertaking trainings and designing training materials on human rights was used to develop the project.

As part of Artwatch several hundred human rights defenders within the culture sector as well as human rights and media from more than 25 African countries have received trainings on human rights. Events focusing on various human rights issues have been held all over the region using culture as a way to reach out broadly. As part of the project a toolkit and other training materials have been produced in order to undertake the trainings and lessons learnt throughout the project available to others.

During 2017 a new exciting phase of the project starts as work on capacity-strengthening the legal/judicial sector on how to protect and work with culture actors

whose human rights have been violated will be initiated.

## Burma/Myanmar

The SFHR has been working with partner organisations in Burma/Myanmar since the early 90s. Since 2010 focus has been on the human rights of Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) persons through the work of Colors Rainbow umbrella organisation, our partner organisation. Colors Rainbow began as a specific LGBT project of the NGO Equality Myanmar located on the Thai-Burma border. With the gradual opening of the civil society space in Myanmar and the strengthening of the LGBT network developed through the project, Colors Rainbow transitioned inside Myanmar in 2013. The organisation is now an umbrella organisation with 25 member organisation with offices in Yangon and Dawei.

While many discriminatory laws remain in force, the legal sanctioning of homophobia is indicative of the vulnerability of LGBT people in Myanmar, who are subject to severe human rights violations with very limited access to legal remedy or protection.

Despite having held the first democratic elections since 1990 and signing a partial Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, systems of oppression and the legacy of impunity act as a barrier for future development. By denying the truth about the past, the government continues to disrespect victims and runs the risk of jeopardising a possible transition to a democratic, peaceful and just society. The coming years present a window of opportunity to strengthen the work on reparations and redress for victims of human right violations that the project seeks to use. During 2017-2018 the SFHR will cooperate with a new partner, ND-Burma, whose aim is to establish a program to ensure reparation, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of human rights violations caused by both armed conflict, political struggle and the oppression of basic civil liberties. The project will include trainings on transitional justice, human rights documentation, capacity strengthening of ND-Burma and its extensive network of members and partners as well as expert exchanges to achieve its goals.

## GQUAL – A Campaign for Gender Parity in International Representation

Through the GQUAL campaign, SFHR contributes to shattering the glass ceiling preventing women's access to leading international posts. Women are underrepresented in virtually all international tribunals and monitoring bodies that play

key roles in developing international law and human rights. GQUAL is a global campaign that seeks to change this through:

- 👁️ sharing the statistics on female underrepresentation
- 👁️ advocacy
- 👁️ networking

The campaign has gathered support from more than 1000 lawyers, judges, politicians and human rights defenders from over 80 countries. One of them is Ms. Navi Pillay, judge and former United Nations' High Commissioner for Human



Photo: SFHR, Navi Pillay at the Swedish Forum for Human Rights

Rights, who commented GQUAL during a seminar organised at the Swedish Human Rights Days. She said: “[T]he exclusion of women actually amounts to unfair justice. For us to have fair justice we need fair representation of the population. We cannot have the exclusion of 50% of the population.”

The Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström has also signed the campaign. Underrepresentation is an issue also in Sweden. During the launch at the United Nations in New York the SFHR representative, Ylva L. Hartman, stated that: “a lot of people in Sweden were surprised when seeing the statistics of the campaign and got upset about the situation. Even in Sweden, a relatively equal country, gender

parity in international organs is a problem. There is a lack of transparency in the nominating and voting processes.”The SFHR is responsible for the Swedish Chapter of the campaign, working with colleagues around the world to provide information and to change the situation.

## The Swedish Forum for Human Rights



The Swedish Foundation continues to be one of the organisers of The Swedish Forum for Human Rights (The Forum) – Scandinavian’s biggest venue for human rights discussions and networking. The Forum is a unique arena, focusing on the most current human rights challenges in Sweden and globally. The forum is a great opportunity for human rights organisations, state actors and students to get together, debate and exchange experiences from the human rights field, from different perspectives and contexts. It is also an opportunity to set the next human rights agenda, with a common vision of the future.

## THANKS TO!

- The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)
- Folke Bernadotte Academy – Swedish agency for peace, security and development (FBA)
- Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF)
- The Swedish Institute (SI)
- Forum Syd
- SFHR’s national and international cooperation partners
- and our invaluable interns





FONDEN FÖR  
MÄNSKLIGA RÄTTIGHETER

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