

## Notes from the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy 13 March 2012

The Summit is sponsored by UN Watch. Speakers varied between human rights professionals and victims of human rights abuses. Some of the speakers focused on various municipal laws which were designed to protect dictatorial regimes, give a sheen of legitimacy and cover of repression under color of law, and to act as weapons of violent repression of human rights and freedom of civilian populations. The following is a summary of the presentations.

**Dr. Yang Jianli**, a former political prisoner spoke on the numerous abuses committed by the regime in China and its efforts to suppress basic freedoms and minorities. Dr. Jianli emphasized the need for the international community to speak up and challenge the regime and protest abuses.

**Zoya Phan** claimed that the so-called “reforms” implemented recently by the Burma regime were mostly cosmetic. The regime prevents through various methods the free association and formation of political parties, thereby preventing democracy. She urged increasing sanctions and praised the tough American sanctions but criticized the very weak European sanctions. She claimed that under EU laws, any sanction imposed must be unanimously approved and while the Czech Republic, UK and Ireland propose serious sanctions, Germany, Spain and Austria veto such sanctions because of economic interests between those countries and Burma – so that EU sanctions are very watered-down and ineffective.

**Michel Tran Duc** made an interesting presentation showing in detail how the Vietnamese constitution and penal code laid the basis for horrible repression and human rights abuses. While Vietnam has enacted some laws which appear to be similar to western-style guarantees of rights for citizens, Article 1 of the constitution mandates that the purpose of all laws is to protect the constitutional government (“Communist party”). Other statutes provide that only members of the CP can rule – so what would be the purpose of any non-member of the communist party running for office if they would not be permitted to govern even if elected. All judges are required to enforce laws in order to protect the government. Almost all judges are CP members. Lawyers who represent dissidents are disbarred. If they persist to attempt to assist dissidents, they are sent to “re-education camps” for extended purposes. The names and pictures of 6 lawyers imprisoned or being re-educated were shown. M Duc urged everyone to break the wall of silence by writing letters to the dissidents and their families, petitioning the Vietnamese government about specific cases etc.

**Jestina Mukoko**, 2010 International Woman of the Year, described how she was abducted by Zimbabwe police and tortured. The government brought bogus charges against her for “trying to overthrow the constitutional government.” International protests helped bring her case before the Zimbabwe Supreme Court where she was acquitted. She urged all to protest the Zimbabwe government to immediately cease all torture and government sexual assaults against women. She gave examples of how democracy in Zimbabwe is not genuine. For example, all police, military and security personnel are required to vote under the scrutiny of their commanding officers. Other citizens are intimidated by security forces, especially in the villages.

**Ren Wanding** read long lists of Chinese activists who are imprisoned in China today and urged everyone to protest the policies of arresting political activists and demand that all political prisoners be freed.

**Joo-il Kim and Song Ju Kim** presented very detailed and heart-breaking descriptions of the torture they endured in North Korea. They described the plight of tens of thousands of North Korean refugees who have fled across the border to China where the Chinese regime hunts them and forces them back to North Korea – where assuredly they will be killed or tortured.

**Nestor Rodriguez Lobaina** described his imprisonment in Cuba for 6 years for political activism. He explained that the so-called “reforms” enacted by the regime since the replacement of Fidel with his brother Raul Castro, are not reforms at all in human rights by merely some economic changes which anyway are necessary to prevent the collapse of the economy. Since August 2010 there has been an incredible surge in regime violence against activists. The regime has formed new paramilitary thugs who are used to violently attack demonstrators and activists while police stand by. 3 activists have been recently killed and 100 activists have been deported to Spain. Mr. Lobaina called for a resolution that Cuba should be barred from the UN Human Rights Council. He ended his presentation with the words “there are 2 paths – either on the side of the oppressors or on the side of the victims.”

*NOTE – PERSONAL COMMENT – THE GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL, AS FAR AS I KNOW, DOES NOT ENFORCE ANY MEANINGFUL SANCTIONS AGAINST CUBA. CUBA IS A POPULAR VACATION DESTINATION FOR YOUNG ISRAELIS PRIMARILY BECAUSE IT IS CHEAP (AS IT IS BASED ON SLAVE LABOR) AND A CHEAP SEX TOURISM SUPPORTED BY THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT. I WOULD LIKE THE IAJLJ TO PERHAPS INVESTIGATE THIS ISSUE AND SEE IF WE SHOULD PUBLISH A POSITION. BESIDES THE MASSIVE REPRESSION WITHIN CUBA, THE CUBA REGIME IS AN ACTIVE AND BITTER ENEMY OF ISRAEL AND A CLOSE ALLY OF IRAN.*

THE AFTERNOON SESSION OPENED WITH A DISCUSSION OF BLASPHEMY LAWS AND HONOR CRIMES. Honor killings increasing also in Europe – need to end – 15 million women have been killed for honor

**ANNE-ISABELLE TOLLET** a brave French journalist gave a riveting presentation about her experiences in Pakistan and her attempts to save the life of a Christian Pakistani young mother who is in jail, on death row. *Asia Bibi* has been locked up for 3 years on death row because she drank water from a well in Pakistan. She goes to pick berries with some other women – she is only Christian – takes a drink of water from the well – other women claim that she has tainted the water and no one else can now drink for the well – she responds that I don’t think the prophet Mohamed would share your view – now she insulted the prophet and refused to convert to Islam – so women went to village mullah – who filed a complaint – and she will either be killed by government or by the people – her death sentence came after one year but the date has not yet been set, so every moment she knows that she could be executed immediately. Her lawyer fled Pakistan for fear for his life. She is held in solitary confinement and is not permitted to leave her cell even for exercise. She has no toilet so is forced to relieve herself on the floor of her very tiny cell (she can touch all walls simultaneously while standing in the center of her cell) She eats only the food her husband brings every week for fear of being poisoned. 456 “Amedees” (?) have been accused of blaspheme since 1996 although the law affects Muslims as well as believers of other religions. The law was initially inscribed in the Pakistani constitution by the British! Subsequent Pakistani government removed the law in order to allow Pakistan to be a secular state, but the law was reinstated in the constitution in 1996. This is the worst instrument of oppression that exists. Theoretically Pakistan is secular state – but in practice – Islamists have taken much power and control. 2 activists have been killed after raising case of Asia Bibi and claiming that the blasphemy law does not serve Islam. Oscar Wile said that “where might is not right it is evil.” Asia Bibi

wrote a book about blasphemy – without malice – she is illiterate. I transcribed her words to try to save the lives of hundreds of lives. I asked to visit her imprisonment but the government denied my request so each week, after her husband visited her, she would relate to me her words and I recorded them. The book was published because Philippe Robinet wanted to publish it. Before publishing though he asked if publishing it would make her position worse. We thought nothing could be worse so we decided to go forward. She has become a symbol – without asking to be one – her children cannot attend school anymore and they have to change residence from time-to-time in order to protect themselves. There are 5 countries that sentence people to death for blasphemy. Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Sudan. It is important to show that the international community will not tolerate this – we must get Asia Bibi free to prove the international community's seriousness so that Egypt does not go this way with sharia law.

**JACQUELINE THIBAUT** President of NGO SURGIR. Surgir was formed to protect women from violence, forced marriages, being killed because dowry is too low in India. In Europe – honor killings have started. Our organization brings refugees from Egypt and Pakistan whose lives are endangered and where it is not possible for them to remain in their home countries. Honor killings are non-religious, patriarchal traditions, the male family members have duty to avenge family or tribes honor. The practice is most prevalent in the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa, Europe and in Latin America – Brazil. The UN estimates 5000 killings but must multiply by 3 or more as many states do not properly account for honor killings and even in states that do, we do not know how many deaths classified as suicides or falling down wells are really honor killings. In Turkey honor killing has dropped significantly but suicides seen an unbelievable increase. So bottom line in Turkey is that parents now get off the hook due to new definition of honor killings in Turkey. In the EU, the UK has been working on the problem the longest and has the most developed approach for prevention. There are 12-17 honor killings in the UK per year. The UK is a rare country in addressing this problem and has developed detailed procedures to report and prevent crimes. They can tell the difference between honor killing and ordinary crime because of their training and experience, they have a special police unit under jointly the Home Office and Foreign Office. In the UK when young immigrant girl is sent abroad for a long time, she is registered with the police, and if she does not return to England within 2 weeks the British government contacts their Embassy abroad to locate the girl and make sure she is in good health. Sweden has now opened many shelters for women – 2 cases have been registered as honor killings but we know there are many more. In Jordan, forensic examines of the bodies of women who were killed for not being virgins reveals that 80% are still virgins – the killers do not even check – it is reason enough to kill a girl based on a rumor which sets off the village and pushes family to defend the honor. Sweden has developed a 56-step program to protect women from honor killing. Improve protection, educate social workers etc. and improve judicial standards and awareness. Every country must have action plans which include prevention. Protection needs to be provided in all countries. Belgium – only 1 crime registered but we believe there are 17 already. Belgium has asked Dutch assistance as the Dutch have more experience. Prevention: 1- tell all immigrants that no vigilante actions are tolerated. 2 – Develop and implement a policy and prevention system which is necessary. Sometimes underage girls are threatened and we cannot step in immediately. Our counselors have learned how to speak with families, as we cannot first talk about threat to daughter – first build trust – sometimes they are willing to take daughter back in and will not harm her. We need to build shelters and train staff and police about honor crimes. Shelters need to be secured and in secret places throughout the country. We need to give victims new identities. The family will be searching for the girl actively as the perceived harm to their honor does not

pass until the kill the daughter. We cannot simply send girl to another canton and think they can muddle thru themselves. The young women are traumatized and experience psychological difficulty in separation from their family even though they know their family wants to kill them. If the family knows the girl is receiving help, person providing the help can become a target. It is quite easy for a family to send the girl to their home country for a visit and family/tribe there will kill her.

**MAIKEL NABIL** – tortured and imprisoned in Egypt. He was a major blogger in Egypt. In introducing the speaker he was quoted as saying “Egypt could learn much from the democratic practices of neighboring Israel.” He joined pro-democracy and HR movements in 2006 and has been active since then. He started in the movement against compulsory service as he was against war and pro peace. He refused military service and attended small rallies. Many other protests usually attended by small numbers. Then in 2011 thousands joined in protests – the idea was not to get rid of a dictator only to get another one. Egyptian authorities are trying to silence everyone who is criticizing it and the international human rights activists and organizations – by speaking out will make a big difference and thanks to all for helping free me with much pressure – what happens in Egypt affects everywhere else – and while Egypt is supported by USA and the west it is an anti-democratic and anti-human rights regime. According to governmental statistics over 100 activists have been killed and under Mubarak 1000 activists killed and no one has been accused yet of any crime and I and my friends have been denied freedom, rights, we have been beaten in the streets – we are still committed to our cause to free our country – we are worried about the future of our country. I do not believe that there will be any free election in the future – the elections are completely “unfree” [sic] and unfair. Islamic terrorists are free now and peace activists are imprisoned. Those in power are risking peace in the Mideast – using the Islamists to keep their power. Every day we are getting more supporters – in the end I believe we will become a democracy but we will have to pay more sacrifices – we will lose more friends and risk lives for our causes. We must prove that you cannot silence human rights and if you arrest someone others will speak for his voice – we cannot compromise our ideals – we cannot let a dictatorship take power again. I believe that no democratic country will choose war – none will kill its citizens for nothing – democracies will seek development – The reason young people are not participating in the election is that all democratic activists were excluded from being allowed to run and the only candidates are either ex-Islamists or ex-military/prior regime. There is no room for young people and activists to participate. The US is giving aid to the Egyptian army and support and yet American NGOs are threatened and American citizens are endangered – America must know that its support is costing it support and even Israel – which supported the military government in the last year – is causing people to turn against it. We are not inventing democracy – We cannot have a law against insulting religions in a democracy which is then used against minorities and activists but not against Islamists hate language – we cannot have terrorists run for president and writers are in prisons. Democracy means free and open elections and equal opportunity. This is not the situation in Egypt today.

**EBRAHIM MEHTARI** – The number of internet users was so great in Iran that it was possible to distribute worldwide human rights abuses. Iran was the first revolution of electronic age – and it was repressed with incredible ferocity – the movement is in ashes and waiting for a flame. The Iranian government, instead of learning lessons from Arab spring, has turned to repression – even Syrian uprising is labeled in Iran as western intervention. The truth is that the Islamic government has a black record in human rights. The number of executions and executions of minors has increased this past year – arresting reporters has increased – the arrest of other people of other religions has increased, as has the repression of

women's rights groups, and prohibition NGOs. Iran has one of the youngest populations trying to communicate with the world – the numbers of users of internet and social networks are increasing daily – the government has been trying for years to restrict internet usage with filtering – the founders of Iranian internet social networks have been tortured and killed – the government has set up an office to filter the internet – hundreds of sites are restricted and blocked – a special council was established for oversight of internet. The government also closed VPN – under a new law – speeds are limited to 128KB/sec. Foreign companies sold equipment to repress the opposition - Nokia and Siemens provided equipment for spying on cell phones – the world has paid too much attention to the nuclear program and not on supporting civil society and the NGOs – of course it is important to prevent Iran from getting the nuclear bomb but pressure is not the right way – perhaps it could just slow down the program –the only way to stop Iran from WMD and supporting terrorism is to support human rights in Iran – we must insist on implementation of human rights in the country – the world community will have greater support from the people of Iran and get to the results they are striving for quicker by supporting human rights instead of pressuring Iran on the nuclear weapons.

## **MASSACRE IN SYRIA: VICTIM TESTIMONIES**

SABA FARZAN – thanks to Hillel from UN Watch for organizing this conference.

**JACQUES BERES** French surgeon, founder of doctors without borders. I had 6 interviews today and I'm disappointed to have missed all of the other speakers. I only carried out my humanitarian mission to do surgery in Homs in 2012. AAVS – organization providing aid to victims in Syria – assisted me in illegally crossing the border from Lebanon. The problem for large NGOs is that because of their policy of zero risk for the activists they cannot send any expats illegally – I was one of the founders of Doctors Without Borders and we used to do it but not now. I could not set up clinic in bab amr because it was under constant mortar attack – so we set up in a close neighborhood and received wounded there. Doctors in Syria authorized me to work with them in a private home turned into a hospital – our biggest problems were logistic problems –not lack of medical but the lack of electricity – problem for anesthetic machines – for lighting – could not target the light – hygiene was terrible – I operated on 89 wounded in 12 days – 9 died on the table and a few afterwards – these deaths could have been avoided in normal situations – having an European expat could save some lives but it's a drop in the bucket. Mortars killed more people than we could save – the families thanked us, even when the operations were unsuccessful – so it's more than the aid – it was the solidarity. It's truly hell – it's mass murder – it's totally unfair – I must say this – all they want is their freedom – they have the right to it as all peoples have – even more as they are fighting so hard for it. The inner core of resistance does not appreciate the position of the West in not intervening militarily and this could have future ramifications.

**HADEEL KOUKI** – Syrian activist arrested twice for activism and providing medical assistance to demonstrators – she's one of the most prominent cyber activists. She was tortured in prison and even attacked by Syrian thugs in her apartment in Cairo where she fled. The killing is constant – hundreds or thousands of detained people – about 100 every day – last year we began with peaceful demonstrations – as a Syrian girl I was dreaming of a peaceful Syria – the police arrested me and kept me 40 days in horrible circumstances – women and men in the same cells – then I continued protesting and they arrested me twice more – they tortured me with electricity and abused me in horrible ways – they tortured me

more because I am a Christian and do not want to show other protestors, non-salafi Islamists, who are the revolutionaries. They released me but would not allow me to go back to university. They came to arrest me again for providing medical assistance to protesters – so I went into hiding – I lost everything – school, family, freedom and country. I escaped to Turkey and settled in Egypt. I was attacked in my home and thugs sprayed acid in my face to stop my activities. I want a free Syria in peace with all of its neighbors – including Israel. Iran and Russia are still supporting Assad with weapons – Hizballah terrorists are in Syria killing demonstrators. America and European allies have not decided yet to support us – it is not a Syrian issue now – it is a humanitarian issue – we need the international support now. Future – unknown for the Syrian people. The regime is terrorist regime. Every day the government is hurting Syrian people more and more. Our revolution started peacefully – but now some of the guys have decided to have weapons – unfortunately, but they have to have it – if we have good support from the world we can continue in a peaceful way – anyway in the future Syria will be a peaceful country. What kind of support – some people want military intervention to destroy Assad's weapons – for me I started in peaceful way and I do not want a military intervention – if we could have a large amount of green hats to protect the demonstrators I'm sure that millions of Syrians will march peacefully even to the house of Assad. The opposition is not united because no one could ever speak about policy before – we have no experience in this so it's a normal.

Question - Egypt, Tunis and Libya have gone Islamist. How can we prevent Syria from going Islamist? Answer – KOUKI since the majority is Islam than its OK for elections to elect Muslims – we Christians have no problems with the Muslims. Dr. Jacques – I was in Homs and I did not see any Islamists – of course they prayed but that was normal – I did not see any Islamists.

KOUKI - In Aleppo and Ilipal – my friends insist they met with Iranian terrorists killing people. I did not meet any Iranians but I met Lebanese terrorists from Hizballah – that's true.