

IOI Plateforme IOI Droits de l'Homme



Photo ©LaBAP/@William Dupuy

COVID-19 and Human Rights

Impacts and consequences of the pandemic



Table of contents

PURPOSE OF THIS BRIEF	4
INTRODUCTION	5
WHISTLEBLOWERS AND RESPECT FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AS A SHIELD AGAINST THE CRISIS AND AS A BASIS FOR DEMOCRACY	6
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS.....	7
A QUESTIONING OF THE PLACE OF NGOs BEFORE INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL BODIES FOR THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.....	8
WORSENING VULNERABILITIES AND ACCESS TO RIGHTS	10
PRISON AND COVID-19	11
DEATH PENALTY.....	13
GEOGRAPHICAL DISPARITIES AND IMPACT ON PARTNERS.....	14
STRUCTURAL IMPACT ON NGOs	15
FINANCIAL IMPACT.....	16
CONCLUSION	17
CONTACTS.....	18

PURPOSE OF THIS BRIEF

Concerned about Covid-19 outbreak and its impacts, especially on human rights, the PDH (Plateforme Droits de l'Homme), a collective of French NGOs working internationally to promote and defend human rights, mobilized its members and partners in order to provide an initial overview of the subject.

This first insight intends to highlight key elements presented by our members and network to share it with human rights defenders, sponsors, civil society and with public authorities.

This document is built on the experiences of PDH's members, its network and partners in the field, in the context of a survey on Covid-19 impacts on their activities, data sharing and testimonials. This brief aims to facilitate exchanges of experience on this matter.

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic showed how far we are from providing equal access to healthcare system. This health crisis accentuates inequalities that already existed regarding access to healthcare and treatment. In addition, it threatens fundamental rights by disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable.

As declared in a public statement on April 23, 2020¹, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Gueterres highlighted its effects on human rights *"We have seen how the virus does not discriminate, but its impacts do — exposing deep weaknesses in the delivery of public services and structural inequalities that impede access to them. We must make sure they are properly addressed in the response."*

For a few weeks now, we have been witnessing particularly worrying situations, in which governments take advantage of the health crisis to limit fundamental rights and to undermine the rule of law.

Everywhere, in France and in Europe, the vigilance of human rights NGOs is essential as a reminder that the measures adopted by States must achieve a legitimate public health objective and that the least intrusive approach must prevail in order to achieve this result .

The health crisis has been aggravated by a flagrant lack of information sharing and cooperation between countries, but also, by the withholding of essential information on the reality of the threat and the management of the crisis. The whistleblowers in this crisis are doctors, journalists, soldiers, human rights defenders, trade unionists and lawyers. They have had the courage to reveal angry truths about the virus, its spread and how the authorities are dealing with it.

Some governments have not hesitated to instrumentalize the pandemic and see it as a real opportunity to strengthen their grip on power through ever greater restrictions on civil liberties. This was the case in particular for the first countries affected by Covid-19, namely Iran and of course China. In Europe, Hungarian Parliament, thanks to a law passed on mars 30th, gave Viktor Orban, Hungary's Prime Minister, the possibility of governing by simple decrees and indefinitely.

However, International Human Rights Law recognizes that, in the case of "**public emergency** which threatens the physical integrity of the population", restrictions on the exercise of certain rights may be justified, but they must have a legal basis and meet certain conditions: they

¹<https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/we-are-all-together-human-rights-and-covid-19-response-and>

must be necessary, strictly proportionate - that is, the intensity of the infringement of freedoms is a function of the seriousness of the threat - and their application must not be arbitrary or discriminatory. Moreover, such restrictions must be limited in time, which means that they must be regularly reassessed.

The PDH does not, of course, dispute the drastic measures that have been taken to curb this pandemic, but it calls for the utmost vigilance with regard to the respect of international instruments for the promotion and protection of human rights and the principle that any restrictions must be open to challenge in court, and be subject to an effective remedy in the event of abusive application. NGOs play a major role in the promotion, defence and monitoring of human rights' imperatives. In the face of this crisis of unprecedented proportions, which has shaken our lifestyles, concerns continue to grow.

Noting the deterioration of their working conditions, our members and partners have put in place contingency plans, linked to the prevention of the virus, and new activities adapted to this new reality, mainly aimed at reorienting advocacy actions and reallocating costs.

WHISTLEBLOWERS AND RESPECT FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AS A SHIELD AGAINST THE CRISIS AND AS A BASIS FOR DEMOCRACY

The political use of the crisis by many leaders has led to a series of attacks on the media. Under the pretext of not creating an atmosphere of panic and fear, these states have deployed means of coercion against the press and freedom of opinion and expression, inciting the rise of hate speech and disinformation. Doctor Ai Fen, head of the emergency department at the Central Hospital in Wuhan, China, is the first real warning about the danger of the coronavirus. Doctor Li Wenliang, ophthalmologist at Wuhan Central Hospital, shares on a chat with former medical students a picture of the report sent by Doctor Ai Fen. Two days later, in the middle of night, Dr Li Wenliang was arrested along with seven other doctors for "spreading rumours" and « seriously disrupting social order". China's National Television station CCTV and the Daily Global Times announced his death, before withdrawing this information from social networks following denials from Wuhan Central Hospital. A few hours later, the hospital confirmed his death. Sergueï Satsouk, editor of the online daily Ejednevnikest was arrested and charged with "corruption", a crime punishable by up to ten years of in prison, after an editorial questioning the official statistics on the Covid-19. The article also criticised President Loukachenko's order to "take care" of the media covering the epidemic.

These various attempts to stifle freedom of expression and impede human rights are all factors that can only diminish citizens' confidence in their governments.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

With the advent of Covid-19, governments around the world implemented extensive restrictions on freedom of movement and freedom of assembly. The draconian restrictions necessary to contain a particularly contagious virus have also allowed authoritarian regimes to tighten the grip on human rights defenders. Hong Kong authorities, presumably under pressure from Beijing, have used the Covid-19 pandemic as an opportunity to undermine the human rights of Hong Kong residents. For example, on April 18th, 2020, Hong Kong's police arrested 15 prominent pro-democracy leaders for "organizing and participating in illegal rallies" during the 2019 mass protests.

In Algeria, it would also appear that similar excesses are being observed against Hirak, the most sustained protest movement that the country has seen in three decades, and which succeeded in getting President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to resign. His successor, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, when he took office, had proposed dialogue with Hirak. With the establishment of the confinement in the country and the cessation of all public gatherings, it would seem that the spirit of openness that has prevailed until then is no longer appropriate. Prominent members of the movement, Karim Tabbou and Abdelouahab Farsaoui were sentenced respectively on March 24th and April 6th to one year in prison, on vague charges such as "undermining national unity". Journalist and activist Khaled Drareni, who had been covering the protests from the start, was jailed on March 27th on similar charges.

Human rights defenders, who were already at risk because of their work, were particularly affected by the general restrictions. Those who are imprisoned or prosecuted on baseless charges are denied access to a proper defence. The use of isolation is very high, and access to a lawyer is made particularly difficult. Hearings are suspended or held behind closed doors

The International Observatory of Endangered Lawyers (OIAD) notes:

"With the measures of health restrictions, we have had to suspend all our monitoring missions in support of the lawyers being prosecuted. This is very regrettable because we know that the presence of journalists, observers and foreign diplomats is likely to contribute to a fairer judicial process. The risks of arbitrary imprisonment and unfair trials have never been higher than in this period of health crisis".

The exclusion of political prisoners in any organised release in connection with the pandemic is a serious pitfall that can be seen in various countries. In Turkey, for example, on April 14th, the Turkish Parliament adopted a law allowing the release of 90 000 prisoners. It excludes from its scope a large number of journalists, human rights defenders, lawyers and others who are serving sentences handed down following unfair trials under antiterrorism laws that are too broad in their scope. In Algeria, imprisoned Hirak people were excluded from the pardon that was granted on April 1st to several thousand prisoners in an effort to reduce prison overcrowding due to Covid-19.

In recent weeks, we have also seen the development of a whole range of technologies whose use pursues the laudable goal of fighting the virus, but which are more or less intrusive from a privacy point of view and sometimes infringe on other human rights. Tracing is a particularly dangerous weapon in the hands of authoritarian governments, allowing them to further strengthen repression and surveillance. Unprecedented level of surveillance and data exploitation are currently being tested, often without real safeguards. These practices, which were usually reserved for counter-terrorism and justified by the protection of national security, are now being implemented in the service of health protection. The PDH fears that the tracking practices that are currently being tested will become a surveillance tool that continues well beyond the pandemic, increasing surveillance and pressure on human rights defenders.

A QUESTIONING OF THE PLACE OF NGOs BEFORE INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL BODIES FOR THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Covid-19 pandemic has strongly impacted the work of human rights NGOs in representing human rights in international and regional organisations for the promotion and protection of human rights. Regarding their cooperation with the office of the **United Nations High commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**, NGOs have been impacted at different levels. First of all, several sessions of treaty bodies have been suspended or postponed. The High Commissioner Office finally announced that no physical meetings of the treaty bodies will take place until the end of august 2020. While some treaty bodies have officially postponed their sessions beyond that date, or decided not to hold any review of periodic reports of State parties at these virtual sessions, not all treaty bodies have yet taken a public position on this issue.

The consideration of periodic reports through virtual meetings would seriously undermine the contribution of NGOs to this process, as they would not be able to meet with Committee experts, in order to relay their concerns and exchange views with them. In addition, even if possibilities for remote interventions were to be introduced, they would not be accessible to all, particularly to NGOs in the field which often

face problems with Internet connection. This would also pose a number of challenges in terms of digital security, as these discussions between civil society and treaty body experts must be confidential.

NGOs participation in **Human Rights Council** sessions has also been impacted. As a matter of fact, the 43rd session had to be suspended and could only be resumed on June 15th. In order to comply with the health requirements and recommendations of the Swiss authorities, several security measures were implemented for the end of the 43rd session and will also be adopted for the 44rd session of the Human Rights Council, (scheduled from June 29 to July 17 2020). Thus, an NGO can only have one representative physically present at each meeting and civil society representatives are encouraged to follow the meetings via webcast, which again poses a problem of accessibility for civil society actors in the field.

For NGOs unable to travel to Geneva, or to physically attend meetings, the possibility of making pre-recorded video statements has been introduced. However, this requires access to certain technologies and a good Internet connection to send the video. Moreover, this possibility has been restricted to certain very specific cases and is therefore not open to all NGOs which would normally be able to make an oral statement.

Finally, opportunities for civil society advocacy have been severely restricted as it will not be possible to organise side events during these two sessions and interaction between NGO representatives and representatives of the permanent missions will be extremely limited as each person will be invited to leave the Palais des Nations as soon as the meeting they are due to attend ends.

With regard to the **Council of Europe**, the summer session of the Conference of INGOs has been cancelled. To alleviate the difficulties, the Conference is organising a special short Session in June with four thematic webinars chosen after consultation with its members. Although it cannot replace a complete session of the Conference, those webinars will still allow for monitoring and exchange on human rights' situation across Council of Europe member states by civil society. However, as with the previous mechanisms mentioned, issues of accessibility to the technology required for these webinars and digital security arise.

Concerning the Africa Union's Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the 66rd ordinary session which was to be held in Banjul (Gambia) on May 2020 has been postponed *sine die*. No one knows when it will take place, or when the periodic reports of Niger, Malawi, Cameroon and Mauritius will be examined.

"FIACAT's advocacy activities have been strongly affected by the pandemic because many meetings have been postponed or even cancelled. This has had an impact on the monitoring carried out by human rights promotion and protection organisations on the human rights situation throughout the world and even though this pandemic and the measures adopted by States to fight it often represent a threat to human rights".

WORSENING VULNERABILITIES AND ACCESS TO RIGHTS

With the health crisis, French human rights associations are witnessing increased vulnerabilities for those at risk such as refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, homeless people, informal workers, people with disabilities, the elderly and persons in prison or detention. The “gender impact” on women and girls is also very important. All these people should receive priority support. However, many of the actions aimed to assist the most vulnerable have been suspended, further reinforcing their isolation and fragility. Field actors found themselves in a difficult position, since compliance with health restrictions requires the abandonment of certain activities, which are particularly essential, and the introduction where possible of alternative measures.

Telephone hotlines and information available on the Internet have often been favoured in terms of access to rights, but it should not be forgotten that they remain very limited. Telephone lines are rapidly becoming saturated and Internet access is not possible for all. Even if Internet access were possible, it may be impossible for many people to search and find the information they need.

The situation of prisoners, refugees, and in particular victims of gender and LGBTI based violence were identified as new needs on assistance matters as a result of the authorities' response to the crisis. This pandemic has highlighted the already significant aspects of access to rights on which AADH (Alliance des Avocats pour les Droits de l'Homme) has been working for 11 years. This has been a major difficulty for the associative sector, which has had to face an avalanche of new regulations.

Whether it is a question of employment, or contract law for example, the involvement of many law firms in this support and advice work has been a saving grace.

Through practical fact sheets, FAQs or interactive distance learning, AADH has worked to quickly answer all these questions and provide the legal security necessary for associations to pursue their activities.

"Once again, we (AADH) have witnessed the absolute necessity to network, to make ourselves available to support the action of our partners and to share skills between actors. If this pandemic has highlighted the interest of this common work between actors from different worlds, this interest does not cease with the lockdown. The pooling effort must be continued for large and small associations alike, for international law firms and the large companies, and the 12 small and very small companies. This is the case for all spheres of competences and for us, in terms of access to rights, it is an evidence".

Furthermore, the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable populations, particularly refugees and asylum seekers, has been very significant. While some initiatives have been taken by public authorities, the closure of administrations has led to the almost total abandonment of many individuals, particularly unaccompanied minors. There have been frequent alerts throughout the country, particularly in Calais, Marseille, Grande-Synthe and Paris. The organizations have worked on the emergency: shelter, food, protection in order to compensate the deficiencies of the public authorities, who have only very rarely proposed viable solutions.

Access to healthcare, which is extremely limited for the most precarious people, was provided by organisations whenever possible, even in Paris. In Calais, volunteers were fined for failure to comply to quarantine measures, while they were organising food distributions. Administrative and legal procedures have been frozen, preventing the registration of asylum applications and greatly restricting access to the court for minors. The result was an inadequate, or at least an out-dated system, that did not need such a crisis to show its limitations.

In short, the lockdown resulted in a major reduction to the access to rights for all. While large associations were able to find resources to obtain the necessary assistance, the most precarious and vulnerable people, who should have been a priority, have often been hit hard by isolation and the lack of public assistance.

PRISON AND COVID-19

Highly involved in prison issues, the members of the PDH are closely following the evolution of the situation with its partners as well as the measures adopted with the possible consequences of the pandemic on prisons conditions. From this initial insight, our members propose a first briefing on this subject.

This first overview brings positive observations of important releases in many countries in order to clear more space, but also several concerns. Insanitary conditions and food shortages have worsened with the cessation of activities, as well as with the lockdown measures, in particular with the halt to furloughs, products shortages as well as the suspension of visiting rights, which, in some countries, allow prisoners access to sufficient food.

On the other hand, we are seeing the development of sentencing adjustments and other forms of flexibilities, such as anticipated releases and the provision for telephone time and access to video calls. More specifically, the decline in prison population is also a consequence of the suspension of judicial activities. There are fears of a sharp increase in the prison population in the second half of 2020, which would cancel out the results seen in recent months.

The prison situation as a whole has been the subject of much media coverage, notably with regard to health safety and the adoption of barrier measures in these particularly constrained conditions. Despite this media exposure, the subject has not been addressed in all its dimensions, particularly not from a human rights perspective.

PDH's members and other organisations active in prisons, and in particular those working on issues of access to rights for prisoners, saw their prison monitoring activities totally suspended during this same period. Thus, FIACAT members, who regularly visit prisons to provide legal assistance and prevent the risk of torture and ill-treatments, have had no access to detainees since March. There is therefore a risk of more frequent recourse to ill-treatment in the absence of outside scrutiny. However, one of FIACAT's members, ACAT Ivory Coast, implemented an emergency program to respond to the crisis in the country's prisons as a result of the pandemic, as its president, Wenceslas Assouhou, testifies:

"ACAT IC has seen its programmes impacted by Covid-19 and national restrictions, such as the impossibility to visit those in detention. However, we have been able to set up an emergency programme backed by the delegation of the European Union, which basically consists in offering hygiene kits, gloves, masks and thermometers to 34 prisons and to three Observation Centres for minors, while at the same time carrying out awareness-raising campaigns to assist detainees who cannot be visited and to protect them from Covid-19, training by doctors or officers and medical staff on barrier measures, production of posters to be displayed in prison yards, offices and cells. "

The members of the Human Rights Platform (PDH) note that detainees sometimes live in promiscuity and insalubrity, sharing a cell of a few square meters or a collective dormitory. They present a poorer state of health than the general population. In the context of the pandemic, the barrier measures to be adopted are hampered by material conditions and unequal access to care. This combination of factors makes prisoners more vulnerable to coronavirus. But coronavirus does not stop at the prison gates. Prison Insider has, since March 18th, been carrying an overview on measures taken or not in prison. This newsfeed, which has been picked up by many international media (El País, Le Temps), is built up from information shared by many partners, provides a first reading on the subject. A double movement of opening and closing can thus be highlighted.

"With regard to openness, in the face of precarious material conditions and with great concern, many countries have carried out early releases and pardons. The aim has been to restrict the degree of occupation in detention facilities in order to curb any possible spread. Additional means of communication have been introduced to maintain family ties (video calls and phone call credits) and continued consultations with lawyers.

The cessation of activities, work and visits has led to boredom, increasing isolation of prisoners and shortage of food and hygiene products, in countries that rely on parcels brought from outside. Generally, the sometimes brutal management of the pandemic resulted in tensions (misinformation and lack of pedagogy) and incidents (mutiny, escape and attacks). " - Prison Insider.

The epidemic, currently contained in some countries, is peaking in others. In the heat of the moment and without the necessary insight, an initial assessment consists in questioning the capacity of certain countries to rapidly reduce their prison population. Numerous advocacy actions and condemnations by international bodies have not been enough until now.

How can a reading from the perspective of respect for the rights and dignity of prisoners be fully associated with logistical and health measures? In other terms, how can this decrease of 2% of the world's prison population, achieved in record time, demonstrate that the way is now paved to ensure respect for human rights?

DEATH PENALTY



Against the backdrop of a global crisis, with hundreds of thousands of lives lost, many countries have continued relentlessly to condemn to death and to execute prisoners. In Nigeria, Olakelan Hammed was sentenced to death via the popular video conferencing app Zoom, despite legal considerations and the right of defence. This was also the case in Singapore on May 20. Condemnations In Iran, convictions, although less frequent, did not cease from the first days of the crisis. In 19 jurisdictions in the United States, because of coronavirus, prisoners sentenced to death are not allowed visits. In the 33 others, they can only see their lawyer. Missouri even carried out the first execution, with social distancing. And while, one could have imagined that, given the context, the states would at least stop executing, if not sentencing to death this is not the case: one execution in Taiwan on April 1st, champion in the fight against coronavirus, one in Bangladesh, 3 in Botswana, and in two months, 12 in Egypte, at least 87 in Iran, probably 8 in North Korea, at least 12 in Saudi Arabia, 8 in Somalia, 5 in the USA² where 29 executions are scheduled until in 2022³. In Iran, 2 minors (at the time of the crime) Hayan Saeedpour and Majid Esmailzadeh were executed, respectively, on April 18th and 21st.

²<https://dpw.pointjupiter.co/country-search-post.cfm?147-9chk=on>

³<https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/executions/upcoming-executions#year2020>

It should be noted, however, that some countries have made adjustments to the sentences of those sentenced to death, such as Cameroon by presidential decree, on April 15, and Chad abolished the death penalty for acts of terrorism on April 28th. This was the last crime punishable by death in the country. The situation on death row has generally deteriorated as those on death row are the most isolated prisoners, so the slightest restriction has a major impact on their living conditions.

Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort (ECPM/Together Against Death Penalty) alongside with its partners Culture pour la paix et la justice (CPJ) and the president of the Congolese network of Parliamentarians against the death penalty (DRC), and the honorable Christelle Vuanga, organised a distribution of survival kits (basic food and first necessity items) to those sentenced to death in Makala and Ndolo prisons, in order to assist them during the Covid-19 outbreak. Mrs Christelle Vuanga then took the initiative to set up an ad hoc parliamentary commission on the monitoring of the management of Covid-19 for those sentenced to death as the last links in the judicial chain. A press conference was organised to publicise this alarming situation.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISPARITIES AND IMPACT ON PARTNERS

These disparities, which are further accentuated in the context of the pandemic, are important factors for analysing and comparing the management of the crisis and the spread of the virus throughout the world, as well as its social and economic impacts.

The Covid-19 pandemic amplifies the other existing crisis and this observation is at the heart of AEDH (Agir Ensemble pour les Droits de l'Homme) concerns, for the management of the pandemic as a project manager testifies

"The announcement of the lockdown was a shock to AEDH. We admit that we were not prepared for a crisis of such magnitude. Our first question was: how to keep in touch with team members and the partners in the field? We had to think quickly about mechanisms to maintain this link if necessary to continue to carry out our projects and defend the rights of the most vulnerable ones. After the first shock of the news, a second challenge emerged, that of our concern for our partners in the field. We were wondering how to continue to support their actions without exposing them further to the risks associated with Covid-19. The international alert had been activated and many voices had been raised to express the major risks at a health, social, economic and political crisis in Central Africa, where the majority of our partners are located. By the end of March, at the General Hospital in Brazzaville (Democratic Republic of Congo), a mismanagement of a Covid-19 patient created a panic among the other patients. The spectre of Ebola and other pandemics that have hit the continent occupied our minds. We were in weekly contacts with our partners.



In Africa, as elsewhere, the social and economic impact of the pandemic is likely to be strong. As part of our technical and financial support to local human rights organisations, we gave our partners the opportunity to review their modes and means of actions in order to adapt to the context of the health crisis. Many of them chose to equip themselves with protective equipment such as gloves, hand sanitizer and cleaning materials. In this more than difficult work environment, our partners have shown remarkable adaptability. With the necessary precautions taken, ACAT-DRC, based in the Democratic Republic of Congo, maintained its action of monitoring prisons despite the known risks of contamination in detention.

This pandemic is putting us (Agir Ensemble and our partners) to a severe test. International non-governmental organisations (INGO) and civil society organisations must demonstrate resilience and adaptability in the face of this complex situation. Those efforts could not succeed, however, without the support and flexibility of our technical and financial partners”.

STRUCTURAL IMPACT ON NGOS

In terms of structure and social management aspects, the members had to take steps to adapt to this new context. Regarding administrative and human resources procedures, the members were able to place the vast majority of employees working from home, without putting a financial burden on social security, i.e. by not forcing them to take childcare leave or resorting to furlough. In order to avoid the indirect social impacts of the pandemic, all employees and partners have been paid, despite the cancellation of field activities.

However, due to the suspension of some programmes, as a result of the impossibility to travel to meet the beneficiaries, the costs related to the management of human resources during this period of crisis, have been mostly allocated from the equity of the members of the PDH putting some NGOs in financial jeopardy.

In terms of logistics and equipment, in order to allow staff, partners and volunteers to work from home, non-scheduled purchases of specific equipment (computers, printers, internet access, and subscription to video call services) were covered by the NGOs' own funds. Due to the substantial decrease in project budgets, and the lower level of co-financing, some projects will be reallocated to the members' own funds. This is particularly worrying for the viability of human rights NGOs that do not have significant equity capital.

The psycho-social risks - Isolation, burnout, overwork - are very present and may weaken the structure in the coming months. Psychologically, the termination of some programmes has been very difficult to manage for some employees. They had the impression that they were simply abandoning the beneficiaries of the projects. The psycho-social risk is greater as NGOs are generally made up of small work teams.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Due to the emergence of new needs related to Covid-19, a change of direction was essential at the beginning of the health crisis. In order to face this new reality, all the members, in general, testify to having set-up contingency plans and carried out new activities related to the prevention of the virus.

As a result, the reallocation of resource costs and the postponement of many planned events throughout the year are raising concerns for projects that will be completed in the coming months. Based on the information provided by members, in the context of this brief, we can assume that some are appealing for private donations, which are falling sharply as are membership fees. Others are having difficulties finding co-founding partners.

Some donors have already announced to PDH that the Covid-19 crisis would have an impact on their ability to support their partners in 2021. According to their testimony, "The International Observatory of Endangered Lawyers (OIAD) operates on the dues from its members, who are Bar Associations, the amount of which depends on the size of the bar association. We had to rely on the arrival of a large Bar Association among our members in the next months, which finally gave up because of the budgetary restrictions imposed and the tightening of its activities".

The potential delay in our projects for the period 2021, the possible alteration of donors' flexibility, and a reduction in the budgets devoted to the promotion and protection of human rights could completely compromise the scenario. More than ever, we need a reaffirmed policy of support for human rights that allows us to renew our commitment and to fight against human rights abuses in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Similarly, in this worrying context for human rights, would it not be an opportunity to reach the target of 0.7% of ODA (Official Development Assistance in relation to the gross national product of the OECD countries)?

CONCLUSION

The Platform for Human Rights (PDH) calls on public authorities, governments, and international institutions to remain vigilant to ensure that health emergencies around the world do not persist or that they are not incorporated into legislation making them permanent.

We also warn of the growing dangers of the risk of restrictions on freedom and rights linked to a digital response to the global crisis, (liberticidal applications, use of drones, video cameras, etc).

We call on international actors, concerned about the respect of human rights, to support wherever necessary, in the North as well as in the South, the whistle-blowers (journalists, lawyers, environmentalists, trade unionists, human rights activists), defenders at risk, the rights of the most vulnerable (prisoners, death row prisoners, indigenous people, LGBT+, etc.) so that the rights-based approach is not an empty word.

Finally, human rights must not become the "poor relation" of the response to the crisis and the upcoming reconstruction, in a context of economic crisis due to the slowdown of the world economy. A strong and reaffirmed human rights policy is needed, both in terms of funding for NGOs and support for local actors in the field.

This health catastrophe must not turn into a "human rights catastrophe, whose harmful effects will long surpass the pandemic itself" as Michelle Bachelet, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, declared on April 27, 2020.



CONTACTS

Secrétariat Général (AEDH) : plateformedh@aedh.org

Président : rchenuil@ecpm.org

Vice-Présidente : asouleliac@avocatparis.org

LOI Plateforme LOI Droits de l'Homme



Photo ©LaBAP/@William Dupuy

La Plateforme Droits de l'Homme (PDH)

La Plateforme Droits de l'Homme « PDH » is a collective of NGOs working internationally to promote and defend human rights. The network was created because no such network existed in France and there was a need for a space for exchange and collaboration between French NGOs working at the international level. It allows members to increase their visibility, representation, contacts and mutual support.

A great number of activities take place within the Platform: internal work groups between members, institutional interaction with public authorities and private actors, publications and statements, workshops, events and common advocacy actions.