

Kurdish Human Rights Project

Human Rights Advocacy & Awareness Raising Project (2006-2009)

Supported by the Big Lottery Fund



Kurdish Human Rights Project

- Founded in 1992, KHRP is the only independent non-political NGO working to promote & protect the human rights of all people throughout the Kurdish regions
- We are based in London to enable flexibility of response, & avoid censorship & intimidation, but maintain close links to partner organisations
- The founder's aim: use international human rights mechanisms to bring perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice & set precedents protecting rights
- KHRP pioneered the use of individual petition & strategic international human rights litigation at the ECtHR & the UN
- Independence commands public trust, enabling KHRP to offer an alternative way of engaging in debates on public policy & democratic development in the regions
- Dedicated to representing the diversity of the Kurdish regions, strengthening minority voices & widening perspectives of research

Kurdish Human Rights Project

Vision

- For a future based on justice, equality, & the rule of law

Mission

- To pioneer in upholding the human rights of all people in the Kurdish regions & beyond

Goals/Aims

Combine its extensive expertise of international human rights law with local knowledge to:

- Raise awareness of the human rights situation in the Kurdish regions of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey & the Caucasus
- Bring an end to the violation of the rights of everybody who lives in the Kurdish regions
- Promote the protection of the rights of the Kurdish people wherever they may live
- Eradicate torture both in the Kurdish regions & across the globe

Who are the Kurds?

- The Kurds number between 24 & 30 million people, & are thought to be the world's largest stateless nation & the 4th largest ethnic group in the Middle East
- The Kurds are as diverse as any population of this size, however Kurds share a strong sense of overarching identity
- The majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslims, however there are significant Alevi, Shi'a, Jewish & Christian minorities
- There are many dialects of Kurdish, the most common are Kurmanji & Sorani
- Kurdish culture stems back to remote antiquity, descending from the migration of Indo-European tribes to the Zagros mountains some 4,000 years ago, now the heart of the Kurdish region bordering Iraq, Iran, Syria & Turkey

Where do Kurds live?

- The largest concentration of Kurds is in Turkey, where there are approximately 15-20 million Kurds (23% population)
- There are 4 million Kurds in Iraq (20% population)
- Syria has 1 million Kurds (9% population)
- There are 7-9 million Kurds in Iran (15% population)
- There are 75,000 Kurds in Armenia (1.8% population)
- There are 200,000 Kurds in Azerbaijan (2.8% population)
- Significant Diaspora communities now live in UK, USA, Canada, Australia, & across Europe.
- Within Kurdish regions also minority communities of Chaldeans, Turcomans, Assyrians & Armenians



Background to the regions & common problems Kurds face

- Geopolitical importance of the region combined with significant oil & water resources
- Since 1920s Kurds in most regions have faced suspicion of separatist sympathies & ethnic cleansing programs
- Particularly over the last 20 years the Kurdish region has experienced torture, extra-judicial killings, mass displacement & censorship, along with other abuses of international law
- Totalitarian & militarised regimes which inhibit democratic participation or cultural expression
- Suppression of fundamental freedoms, ranging from right to life & right to live free of discrimination



Poverty & Discrimination: A rights based approach

- Lack of investment in south-east Turkey
- Denial of mother-tongue education
- Denial of basic public services based on economic means & ethnic/cultural origin
- Village Destruction & IDPs

What difference has KHRP through BIG's support made?

- Nearly 550 victims of human rights violations including torture/ ill treatment, rape, arbitrary arrest/ imprisonment, forced displacement & censorship have been helped over the life of the grant; over 387 are women
- In 2009 alone, 21 new submissions to ECtHR on behalf of 98 individuals
- 19 positive judgements
- 11 positive admissibility rulings (only 3 inadmissibility decisions) dealing with torture, fair trial & freedom of association
- Over 200 people trained in mechanisms for advancing their human rights
- 21 publications & 11 briefing papers in English, Kurdish, Russian, Turkish & Armenian
- Unquantifiable impact- (awareness of rights, strengthened civil society, decrease in torture, women involved in decision-making)



Enabling Access to Justice

- Making people, especially women, aware of their rights
- Strategic litigation at the Court paves the way for other applicants
- Training not only bar associations but also civil society groups, NGOs & community groups on how to use international mechanisms
- Making submissions to international bodies with & on behalf of people in the regions
- Publishing & translating materials into local languages, such as the KHRP *Legal Review*

Promoting Participation

- Ongoing dialogue & information exchange with local CSOs & NGOs
- Cross-border trainings
- Roundtable meetings with representatives from all stakeholders including strategies & tactics to combat violence against women with 20 women & 10 men activists
- Conferences
- Networks

Sharing Expertise: Building Local Capacity

- Getting the most out of each mission
- Maintaining communication throughout the year
- Non-regional trainings such as with the Oslo Bar Association & Liberation
- Developing manuals & specific materials for each training
- Working through organisations not individuals

Redress for Victims of Human Rights Abuse & Prevention

- 92 % of KHRP cases received a favourable ruling by the Court
- Some key cases
 - Meltex
 - Gasparyan
 - Cross Border
- Anti-terror trial against a children's choir
- Ilisu Dam Campaign

Protecting Human Rights Defenders

- Harassment of KHRP partners in Azerbaijan- monitoring of the situation
- Began collaboration with Protection Online to follow up on investigation of situation of HRDs in Turkey
- Trial Observations
- UN Submissions
- Contact with regional & international governments

Alliances, Collaboration & Networking

- KHRP has worked with over 30 partners & affiliated in the region, as well as international NGOs & human rights organisations
- Joint submission with the Forum Law Centre for the UN Universal Periodic Review
- Environmental work with local & international organisations for the Illisu Dam & the Baku-Tiblisi-Ceyhan Pipeline
- Joint Mission on Freedom of Expression with Index on Censorship & Article 19 (or say other orgs dealing with freedom of expression)
- Support of Halabja Playground Project; use of KHRP network & advice
- Bringing Diaspora representatives to KHRP offices for Roundtable discussion

Influencing Opinion & Public Awareness

- Annual submissions to the OSCE
- Writing shadow reports
- Submissions to UN & other international bodies
- European Parliament Report on Increased Rate in Suicide Amongst Kurdish Women
- Alternative Water Forum in Istanbul & Water Expo in Zaragoza
- Speech at European Parliament on 'The Turkish Accession & the Need for Change'
- Seminars on subjects such as minority languages, the role of women in peace, how to do an effective trial observation
- Chief Executive invited to speak on freedom of expression at the International Pen conference



Challenges

- Reaching those most in need
- Resources to increase trainings & missions
- Lack of implementation for European Court Judgments
- Translation
- Regional stability
- Harassment of partners
- Global Financial instability
- Reliable primary information, particularly statistics

