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NGO Update

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NGO UPDATE

To foster communication among human rights organizations around the world, each issue of the Human Rights Brief features an “NGO Update.” This space was created to aid non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by informing others about their programs, successes, and challenges. The views of the organizations below do not necessarily reflect those of the Human Rights Brief. For information on how to submit updates for your organization, please see the instructions provided at the end of the column.

CENTRAL ASIA INSTITUTE

<http://www.ikat.org/>

Author of the *New York Times* best-seller *Three Cups of Tea: One Man’s Mission to Promote Peace... One School at a Time* and co-founder of Central Asia Institute Greg Mortenson believes in fighting terrorism with words and not with bombs. Mortenson has been quoted as saying, “We’ve spent billions of dollars building a wall around America with homeland security, but we also need to reach out to build bridges... If we truly want a legacy of peace for our children, we need to understand that this is a war that will ultimately be won with books, not with bombs.” To further this goal, in 1996 Mortenson and Dr. Jean Hoerni established the Central Asia Institute (CAI). CAI provides community-based education and literacy programs, focusing on girls in remote mountainous regions of Central Asia. By directly providing education for girls, CAI projects work to improve health indices and alleviate poverty.

CAI’s projects are located in mountain villages of northern Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia. Its projects seek to reinforce the importance of community participation. Guided by a committee of elders, each project ensures the participation of locals in the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages. Each community with a CAI-initiated project matches project funds with local resources and labor. This characteristic not only empowers local participants, but also promotes the viability and long term

success of projects by ensuring community investment.

Village donations of land, labor and materials furthermore allow CAI to carry out projects at a fraction of the normal cost. CAI has made significant achievements in education and public health care. CAI fully or partially supports over 58 schools and 520 teachers. Over 24,000 students are currently enrolled, 14,300 of whom are girls. CAI has also assisted communities to set up 14 women’s vocational centers and 24 potable water projects, as well as other trainings, women’s groups and scholarship initiatives. CAI also started the Pennies for Peace program (www.penniesforpeace.org), which promotes philanthropy and cross-cultural education, emphasizing the importance of diverse cultures in American schools.

Through the combined efforts of its educational initiatives at home and abroad, CAI has demonstrated the importance of education as a peaceful means of enacting change. In Mortenson’s view, education and literacy are the most important investments a country can make.

STICHTING RUSSIAN JUSTICE INITIATIVE

<http://www.srji.org/>

The Stichting Russian Justice Initiative (SRJI) is one of the leading legal representation and litigation projects in Russia. SRJI provides free legal counsel to victims of grave human rights violations and their families in Chechnya and the North Caucasus. By investigating serious human rights violations and bringing these incidents before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), SRJI seeks to pressure the Russian government to more adequately investigate and prosecute human rights violations, and ultimately to force the implementation of judicial and law enforcement reforms in Russia.

SRJI emerged from a series of lawsuits that supported Chechen citizens. In response to the lack of judicial remedies available to victims of human rights violations, in 2000 the Chechnya Justice Project

consolidated its ad hoc litigation services that put victims in contact with lawyers at the Human Rights Watch office in Moscow. These lawyers then prepared applications to the ECHR on the clients’ behalf. As a result of increased demand, a group of human rights activists in the Netherlands founded the SRJI, incorporating the Moscow activities of the Chechnya Justice Initiative and the Ingushetia-based *Pravovaia Initsiativa* (Legal or Justice Initiative).

Despite the unsettling number of cases in Chechnya involving torture, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and extrajudicial execution, the Russian government has shown little commitment to effectively investigating and prosecuting these cases. Since the inception of the second armed conflict in Chechnya in 1999, the situation in Chechnya has left almost no opportunity for victims or their families to seek redress through local judicial systems.

By presenting cases to the ECHR, SJRI helps victims of human rights abuses achieve moral and financial redress. Furthermore, the organization seeks to encourage more effective and thorough investigations at the domestic level by increasing accountability for human rights violators. Consequently, these ECHR judgments form the basis for ongoing efforts to tackle some of the systematic shortcomings of Russian law enforcement.

The recently decided case *Chitayev and Chitayev v. Russia* demonstrates the effectiveness of legal aid provided by the SRJI. On January 18, 2007, the ECHR condemned Russia in the first torture case emerging from Chechnya in the court’s history. In *Chitayev*, the court found that Russian authorities tortured two brothers while they were held in unlawful detention for several months. The court further held that the government failed to adequately investigate the brothers’ allegations of torture. The ECHR ultimately awarded each of the brothers 35,000 euros (EUR) in damages.

More recently, on October 4, 2007, the ECHR condemned Russia in three cases related to mass killing of civilians in the Staropromyslovsky district of Grozny, Chechnya. SRJI assisted the applicant in *Goygova v. Russia*, while the applicants in two other cases were assisted by the European Human Rights Advocacy Center and the Human Rights Centre *Memorial*. In three unanimous judgments, the ECHR held that the applicants' right to life had been violated under Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The court also held that Russian authorities had not conducted sufficient investigations into the mass-killings, again violating Article 2. Finally, the ECHR held that applicants did not have access to sufficient local judicial remedies before Russian authorities, violating Article 13.

In the words of Arbi Chitayev, "I didn't believe that there was justice possible for me anywhere in the world. Not in Russia, not in Europe, not anywhere. When they [SRJI] told me that we had won our case, I felt happy. I was able to believe again that justice is possible." Despite a continuing climate of impunity in Chechnya and the surrounding areas, by presenting cases to the ECHR, SRJI aspires to compel the Russian government to increase its investigative efforts and accountability, and uphold the human rights of Chechen citizens.

KURDISH HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT

<http://www.khrp.org/>

The Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) is an independent, non-partisan human rights organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria and the Caucasus. KHRP holds that all people are entitled to human rights pro-

tection, irrespective of race, religion, sex, or political affiliation. Founded in London in 1992, KHRP has amassed support from Kurds and non-Kurds. It works to uphold justice, equality, and the rule of law, while simultaneously pursuing remedies for victims of human rights violations.

As a part of its litigation and advocacy programs, KHRP has presented numerous cases to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). It also submits communications to the United Nations. Its cases have established precedents at the ECHR and other judicial mechanisms on issues including the death penalty, detentions without trial, extrajudicial killings, censorship, and rape perpetrated by state actors. As a result, the litigation activities of KHRP have been extremely successful in influencing international law, creating a culture of compliance among authorities, increasing awareness within Kurdish communities of human rights under international law, and campaigning against human rights violations in Kurdish regions internationally.

KHRP's training and advocacy programs combine extensive expertise in international human rights law with local knowledge. Through collaboration with regional organizations, KHRP permits local human rights defenders and victims to enact change themselves rather than relying solely on international intervention. Recently, KHRP conducted successful cross-border training that focused on internally displaced persons, the effects of anti-terror legislation, and the protection of human rights defenders. Past trainings have also focused on bringing cases to the ECHR, the domestic application of the European Convention of Human Rights, and gender equality and women's rights. KHRP has published two training manuals

for human rights defenders currently taking cases to the ECHR.

KHRP tackled issues of development and the environment in the Ilisu Dam debate. KHRP believes in a rights-based approach to human development that links poverty eradication to human rights. As a result, the organization played an instrumental role in voicing social and environmental concerns surrounding the Ilisu Dam and other dam projects in the predominantly Kurdish southeast region of Turkey. The Ilisu Dam is part of a hydroelectric power project and will be situated 65 km upstream from the Turkish border with Syria and Iraq. According to KHRP, when completed the Ilisu Dam will flood the ancient city of Hasankeyf, a cultural heritage site for Kurds. In addition, the dam will destroy between 50 and 68 villages, affecting around 25,000 people. Fifty-seven additional villages will suffer partial flooding. It has also been reported that 19 of these villages were evacuated at gunpoint. KHRP has called for transparency and accountability in the development sector in its campaigns to raise public awareness about the project.

The KHRP was honored in 2005 with the Sigrid Rausing Trust Award for Outstanding Leadership in International Human Rights. It continues to receive praise for its approach to engaging the international community and raising awareness of human rights and development in Kurdish regions. **HRB**

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